FRONT COVER

INSIDE FRONT COVER

MY WITNESSING LIFESTYLE JOURNAL

Live as a Witness!





Live As a Witness! Journal (2nd Edition)

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Unless otherwise indicated: the Bible version used throughout this book is the English Standard Version (ESV).

An EvangelismSHIFT resource
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



John North had been involved in full time evangelistic ministry for more than two decades when he sensed God challenging him that all of his evangelism was organised evangelism, but he was not living as a witness in his daily encounters with people. John embarked on a journey of learning to live as a witness for Jesus. Many of the lessons he learned are now a part of EvangelismSHIFT.

John discovered that the biggest factor in learning to live as a witness for Jesus in his everyday encounters was developing a ministry mindset, so that he would always be thinking as he encountered people, "What does God want to do in this person's life through me in this encounter?" John began approaching his time in God's word by looking for things that would develop this mindset in him. It was a surprise to John how long it took for this new mindset to become a way of life.

When he began helping others to activate their role as witnesses for Jesus, John knew they would need constant input from God's word as they learned this way of approaching people in their lives. Paul tells us that we are "transformed by the renewing of our minds" and that's exactly what John wants to help you do through this devotional book. Some of the devotions have also been written by others on the EvangelismSHIFT team.

Day by day this book will take you into the Scriptures for insight on living as a witness for Jesus as God does his work of renewing your mind and transforming your life.

Right now, stop for a moment and ask God to use these devotions over the coming year to develop in you a ministry mindset that recognises that you have been sent into each encounter with every person in every circumstance of every day of your life. Ask him to help you become an active witness for him.

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JANUARY

January 1

John 20:21

"As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

Every new year we try to make new resolutions in the hope that we will change. This year we propose that you adopt the following 10 resolutions so that you can really live your life as a witness!

Resolution #1: I will increase my sense of 'sentness'!

Jesus carried his sense of sentness with him everywhere he went. He knew that God had put him into this world for a purpose and he wanted to live every moment with that purpose. John the Baptist had that same sense of sentness. John 1:6 tells us, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John."

The Apostle Paul had this same way of looking at life. He writes to the Corinthians, "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

Take this year to grow in your awareness that every interaction with every person is an opportunity to represent Jesus to the people around us.

Make it personal

As you go through this day, with each encounter ask, "Lord, how do you want to speak to this person through me?"

January 2

Luke 15:1-2

"Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear [Jesus]. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

Resolution #2: I will build real friendships with non-churched people!

These verses represent one of the huge marks of Jesus' way of life. He was constantly spending relational time with those who didn't follow God and didn't attend the organised religious activities. That way of life really bothered the other religious people.

In their minds, he should wait until they got their lives right and then spend time with them. But that's not how Jesus thought. He knew that what motivates someone to move towards God is almost always a meaningful relationship with a believer.

If we wait for them to come to church, almost nobody will be saved. But if we go to them—if we will reach out in real friendship to the people who don't know God and get into their lives—then they will see our message in a different light.

If we really want to be followers of Jesus, we can't ignore this huge feature of his life. He wants to reach the people we know with his love and grace…and he wants to do that through you and me!

Make it personal

What are three things that might get in the way of you building real friendships with non-churched people? Will you be committed to this resolution despite these things?

January 3

Acts 26:24-29

"And as [Paul] was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind." But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe." And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" And Paul said, "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains."

Resolution #3: Help people take the next step on their journey towards Christ!

When Paul the prisoner was brought before King Agrippa, he knew some things about Agrippa and what he believed. So Paul started from there and worked to help Agrippa take the next step towards faith in Christ. Paul's approach of helping people take the next step towards Jesus needs to become our way of interacting with people too.

How will you know where a person is in their journey towards Christ? By asking them meaningful questions. That seems a little bit backwards for someone wanting to lead people to Christ. Isn't sharing Christ with people all about telling them our message of the gospel?

It has to include sharing the gospel, yes. But what will truly make your witness for Jesus effective is learning to ask questions and listen. Once you know what a person's next step towards Jesus would be, then you can help them take it!

Make it personal

What do you communicate to someone when you ask him or her a question and then listen to the answer with focus and interest? Write down 3 questions you can ask someone to help them in their journey towards Christ:

January 4

Romans 10:1-2

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

Resolution #4: Pray regularly by name for the people in my life who don't know Jesus!

Think about the people you know, who don't know the Lord. Do you think that you have what it takes to change their hearts? They don't think they need God.

If you're like me, your answer is 'no'. We know it would have to be God if our friends, neighbours, classmates and co-workers were to open their hearts to him and the gospel and put their faith in Christ. If that's the case, then why aren't we praying about their journey towards Jesus?

From beginning to end the Bible reveals that God answers prayer. The Apostle Paul had experienced so many answered prayers. No wonder he recognised that the most important thing he could do for the people in his life that didn't know Jesus was to pray for them. As someone has said, "It's more important to talk to God about people than it is to talk to people about God!"

Of course, when you talk with God about your friend's spiritual journey to faith in Christ, it usually also leads to great conversations with your friends about God.

Make it personal

Take time right now to write down the names of three people in your life who need to encounter Christ (even if you don't know them well yet). Then spend some time in prayer that God would open their hearts to him, and that God would open doors for your witness.

January 5

Exodus 3:10-12

"Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" He said, "But I will be with you.

Resolution #5: Accept my own inadequacy and trust Jesus to reach people through me!

The Bible doesn't present us with superhuman heroes, but with real people. When God called Moses, Moses didn't respond with confident assertiveness—he responded like we do. "Who am I? I can't do that!"

Pay attention to how God felt about Moses' sense of inadequacy. God didn't mind Moses' reaction, as long as it didn't lead to Moses rejecting his mission. God knew that Moses was right—he was inadequate for the task!

God accepted Moses' inadequacy, but then added this: "But I will be with you!" When God is involved, your adequacy is no longer the deciding factor. God is the deciding factor because he is totally adequate to make anything he calls you to successful. Nowhere is this principle more evident than in his call on your life to be a witness for him among your relationships.

In 2 Corinthians 5:20, the Apostle Paul declares that "we are ambassadors for Christ". That sounds daunting, doesn't it? but Paul's sentence continues: "…God making his appeal through us." You see, God is the one who will work through you to do what he calls you to do!

You might feel inadequate. In fact, you really should feel inadequate—you don't have what it takes to be an effective witness for Jesus. But when you see that the one working alongside you to draw people to faith in Christ is God—well, that changes things, doesn't it?

Make it personal

What practical steps can you take to accept your inadequacy and trust Jesus to reach people through you?

January 6

Acts 17:16,23

"Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you."

Resolution #6: Find connecting points between the gospel and the person I'm trying to reach!

In between the two verses above was a lot of hard work by the Apostle Paul as he searched for a connecting point between the people surrounding him and the gospel. Once he found the connecting point, the people were interested to hear him. Some even put their faith in Christ that day; others started moving towards Christ and of course others rejected both Jesus and Paul.

When you are looking for a good connecting point between a specific person and the gospel, you will usually find that connecting point in the areas of pain in their life. You need to ask questions that go a little deeper. Questions allow a person to open up as much as they feel comfortable with. If they aren't ready to open up yet, give it time. Be open yourself about your life.

If a person is lonely, ask them, "Have you ever experienced the love of God?" If they are bitter, "Have you ever experienced the forgiveness of God?" If they are struggling with legalism and guilt, "Have you ever experienced the freedom of Christ?" These questions will open up beautiful conversations about the grace of God.

Make it personal

What could you ask a person who is struggling with anxiety and depression?

January 7

John 13:35

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

Resolution #7: I will draw those I am trying to reach for Christ into real Christian community!

In this verse, Jesus tells us that the way people will know we are connected to him is that we love one another. We know that we should love lost people like Jesus loves them. But that's not what Jesus is talking about here. He's talking about how our love for one another as believers shouts a message into the minds of people who don't know him.

That message is, "There's something different here. I've never been in a group of people who relate to one another like this. I can't trust the people in my life, but these people really love and trust each other. There has to be something real in their relationship to Jesus if it makes them like this!"

But how will people who don't know Jesus see real Christian community happening? Where will they be exposed to Christians relating to each other in a deep way? It won't happen unless we get intentional about it.

They might not want to go to a church service, so we are going to have to think about relational contexts that we can invite them into where they can see Christian community at work—a BBQ, your home group, a men's/women's activity at church. Or maybe you will need to go into one of their relational contexts and take along some of your Christian friends.

Make it personal

How excited are you about this resolution? Is this something you see yourself easily doing or something you might have a tough time doing? Will you do it anyway?

January 8

Romans 1:16-17

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

Resolution #8: I will clearly communicate the gospel message and invite people to put their trust in Christ!

How will a person be saved? By understanding the gospel message and putting their faith in Jesus and what God has done for them in the gospel. That means that the people around you—the people you live and work with—will not be saved unless they understand the gospel.

So as you talk to them about God and help them take steps towards Jesus, don't forget that at some point you must actually talk to them about the gospel. It may happen over several conversations. Even if you are able to talk through the whole gospel message in one conversation, they will need to hear it several times from different angles before it actually sinks in.

That means that when your conversations go deeper than the surface with people and then move into spiritual conversations about God, you should start thinking, "Okay, what could I say that could take this conversation to the gospel?" Or, "What question could I ask that may lead to a gospel conversation?" Eventually, you may just need to come right out with it and ask, "Has anyone ever explained to you how you can become a Christian/start a relationship with God/experience God's love/etc?"

Make it personal

You are heading into a new year. Will you make a commitment to look for opportunities to share the gospel with people and then invite them to put their trust in Christ and what he has done for them? Write down your commitment here:

January 9

1 Corinthians 9:19,23

"For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings."

Resolution #9: I will care more about how I minister to others than I do about how they treat me!

Earlier in this chapter, Paul says, "If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ." Paul has been writing all about our rights and freedoms in Christ. These rights and freedoms are beautiful. Yet Paul says that we must be willing to lay them aside for the sake of ministry to people around us.

At the end of teaching this principle, he says, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." Paul learned this way of life from Christ. As he found out more and more about how Jesus had lived on earth he realised that Jesus modelled this way of life. When people treated Jesus rudely he didn't respond with rudeness, but rather looked for how he could minister to them and help them think differently about God.

That way of life is not natural, is it? Acknowledging that we have rights, freedoms and preferences that are all good, and then choosing to set them aside for the sake of ministering to people who are not treating us nicely, or who are not easy to love, so that they can find the healing work of Christ—that takes the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

Make it personal

Hurting people hurt people. Instead of getting offended what can you do to learn more about someone's background?

January 10

Ecclesiastes 3:9-11

"What gain has the worker from his toil? I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end."

Resolution #10: I will speak out with the confidence that people's hearts long for God!

"He has put eternity into man's heart." Every person has an innate sense that they were made for more, that things are not right in this fallen world, that there is something missing in their lives. That something missing is God. As Augustine put it, God has made us for himself and we feel a deep restlessness until we come to rest in him.

Every person's heart longs for God! That doesn't mean that they realise it's God they are longing for. They just know that they need something that they don't have. In their desperation to fill that void they latch onto the various things this world offers, thinking that those things must be what they are missing.

When you think of a person you know who is so into his work achievements and not at all interested in God, his heart is actually longing for God. His achievements will never fill that void.

No matter how self-confident a person is, no matter how much fun they are having, no matter what they are consumed with, you know this fact for certain: their heart longs for God. Their own heart is one of your greatest allies as you introduce Christ to them.

Make it personal

Studies found that in order to make new year's resolutions stick we must share these resolutions with our close friends and family. Who will you share your new year's resolutions with? Will you ask these people to hold you accountable?

January 11

1 Peter 3:15

"But in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect."

Be ready to give an account for what you believe!

The Archbishop of Canterbury posted on his Facebook page why he is a Christian. Here's what he said:

"People often ask me why I'm a Christian. Here's what I tell them.

I'm a Christian because Jesus Christ found me and called me, around 40 years ago. I'm a Christian because it makes sense to me, because Jesus rose from the dead - he conquered death and sin and suffering. I'm a Christian because in Jesus I see the God who didn't say, "This is how you lot have got to behave, and I'm going to watch you and judge you." Instead he came alongside us and lived in the middle of the absolute foulest mess, and died unjustly young in great agony, and bore all that was wrong in this world on his shoulders. I'm a Christian because in my own experience I've run away and God has met me and yet not been angry with me. When I've failed he's picked me up and healed and strengthened me.

That's why I'm a Christian. And that's why, whatever happens, whatever stupid mistakes, I know that even at the end of it all, even if everything else fails, God doesn't — and he will not fail even to the end of my life."

The Bible tells us to be ready to give an account for what we believe. Just like the Archbishop of Canterbury you too must be ready to tell people why you are a Christian.

Make it personal

Take a few minutes to do what the Archbishop of Canterbury did. Write down 3 paragraphs explaining why you are a Christian. Feel free to share your response on social media.

January 12

2 Chronicles 2:5

"The house that I am to build will be great, for our God is greater than all gods."

Honour God by doing his work with excellence!

Solomon began to build the temple, the house of worship, in honour of God, with a plan to make it the best temple it could possibly be. Solomon knew that God was sovereign, that he was above all gods, and out of that knowledge came the desire to build the temple with a spirit of excellence.

Achieving excellence took a lot of materials, time and effort. It required extraordinary attention to detail. The smallest details had to be of the highest quality because they were used for God. This is why Solomon used so much gold when building the temple because gold represented the very best and God deserves the very best.

Today, remember that when you serve and worship God you must give him your very best. Colossians 3:23 says "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ".

Are you a worship leader in your church? Are you a teacher of the Word? Do you serve in kids ministry?

Whatever you do to serve God, make sure that you do it with a spirit of excellence. Make sure that you put in the time and effort to make that ministry an excellent one. Because that's what God deserves.

Imagine if everyone in your church served with a spirit of excellence? The next time a non-believer walks through the doors of your church, he/she will immediately sense a spirit of excellence that only magnifies an excellent God.

Make it personal

In what areas of your ministry do you want to grow in a spirit of excellence? How will you do that?

January 13

Daniel 6:3

"Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other presidents and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom."

In Daniel 6, we find that Daniel's old boss, King Belshazzar, is gone and a new boss named Darius is in charge. Daniel's new boss is a pagan who cares nothing for the religion of Daniel or his God. Darius the Mede is the second most powerful man in the world and not one who accepts inferior work, laziness or excuses.

Darius appoints 120 governors to help him rule the kingdom. He also appoints three commissioners to rule over the all the governors. Daniel is appointed to be one of these three commissioners and with time he gains Darius' respect so much that the Darius plans to put him in charge over the whole kingdom.

What did Daniel do to impress Darius? The Bible says that Daniel had a spirit of excellence. Daniel excelled in his work not because he was trying to impress Darius, but because he was trying to please God.

You might think "But you don't know how horrible my manager is! You don't know how rude my co-workers are! I hate my job!" Think about Daniel's work environment. He was a slave. He lived in a foreign land, under the authority of a pagan king who had absolute power over his life. Also, his co-workers were evil schemers who wanted him dead. Daniel didn't have perfect work conditions. However, he chose to do his job extraordinarily well.

Make it personal

Reflect on this quote by John W. Gardner and how you could apply it in your workplace: "Excellence is doing ordinary things extraordinarily well."

January 14

Philippians 3:7-9

"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith."

As CS Lewis said, "There are better things ahead than any we leave behind!"

The joy of the Christian experience is the dominant theme running through the book of Philippians. The words "joy" and "rejoice" are used 16 times in this letter.

Most likely, Paul drafted Philippians during his two years of house arrest in Rome. Although he had faced real hardships, poverty, beatings, illness, and even his current imprisonment, in every circumstance Paul had learned to be content.

What made Paul so content with life, when his life looked like a mess? I mean, think about it! He was

away from loved ones, he was in prison, he was probably not well fed, his life was in danger, he was wrongly accused, and the list goes on!

In Philippians, Paul conveys a powerful message about the secret of contentment. The source of his joyous contentment was rooted in knowing Jesus Christ! That's how he was able to praise God in prison. That's how he was able to write to the Philippians about joy and not complain about how his life was so full of trials.

Make it personal

What would make you more content? More money? A new house? A promotion? Or knowing Jesus Christ more? Be honest with yourself and write down what you think brings you most joy:

January 15

Ecclesiastes 3:1

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven."

Learn to trust God and wait for his timing in your life!

Time tests commitment. Time tests faith. Time tests hope. Caleb was 40 when he went with the 12 spies and returned with Joshua proclaiming that the Israelites could take the land. In spite of his faithfulness he had to spend 40 years in the wilderness because of Israel's rebellion. He was 80 when they finally crossed the Jordan River. It took 5 years for him to go to Joshua and ask him for leave to go fight for his mountain. It took Caleb 45 years to see a promise become reality.

Most of us don't like to wait. We often get frustrated waiting for fast food or waiting for a funny cat video to load on YouTube. This mindset often carries over into our spiritual lives with us rushing to the next big thing. But while most of us are in a hurry, it seems God is usually not in a hurry.

God is reminding you today that he doesn't move within your timeframe. You shouldn't be discouraged because you have been praying and waiting for that friend or family member to turn to Christ for years now and you can't see anything happening yet. He is not uncaring or mad at you. God always has good reasons for making us wait.

In your waiting, keep developing your character, keep trusting God, keep believing God's promises for your life.

Make it personal

Write down your reflections on how well you handle seasons of waiting and ask the Holy Spirit to help you in your waiting:

January 16

Acts 9:36

"Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity."

Kindness is remarkable!

I love the fact that Luke pauses here in the book of Acts to give us these details about Tabitha. "She was full of good works and acts of charity." It seems as though Tabitha's mission was to show kindness wherever she went.

Do you know who else was busy with acts of kindness? Jesus! Wherever he went, whatever he did, he showed kindness. The little children, the blind man, the prostitute, the tax collector, his disciples, they all felt Jesus' kindness and their lives were transformed as a result of it.

Mark Twain once said, "Kindness is a language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see."

Kindness makes people feel loved, cherished and cared for. If you want to let another person know that you are on their side, show them kindness. It's a language everyone understands.

What does kindness look like? Acts of kindness can range from giving money to the poor to giving your sick friend a lift to the doctor. It could be taking some treats to your workmates, or helping your neighbour move something heavy. It could be texting your boss telling her you hope that her meeting goes well. And it doesn't stop there. The great thing about kindness is that it comes in all shapes and forms.

Make it personal

Choose two people (one who doesn't know you and one who does) and show them kindness today. Buy them a coffee, or lunch, or simply say a nice word to then. Write down how you plan to show them kindness:

January 17

1 Corinthians 9:24-25

"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable."

Speak people's language so that they will understand you!

This passage in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 is written by Paul, who had the Isthmian Games in mind.

The Isthmian Games was a festival of athletic and musical competitions in honour of the sea god Poseidon, held at his sanctuary right there on the Isthmus of Corinth. Those reading this letter in Corinth would have been really familiar with the Isthmian Games. They probably grew up attending the games and knew everything there was to know about them.

Paul uses language the Corinthians were used to in order to communicate significant spiritual truths. In the Isthmian Games, those who won the competition were awarded a celery crown for the prize. Paul describes it as a "perishable crown", yet focuses the believer's attention on an "imperishable crown".

Jesus practiced this same principle of communicating with people in their own way of talking. He invited Peter, James, John and Andrew to follow him and learn to evangelise effectively. Since they were fishermen he put it this way, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." No more explanation was needed. He didn't use that terminology when he called his other disciples.

Follow the example of Jesus and Paul when you are trying to introduce God to the people in your life. Get to know those people. Know what resonates with them, what they are passionate about, what they have experience in. Use word-pictures from their everyday life that are familiar to them.

Make it personal

Imagine that you are sharing the gospel with a teenager who is passionate about art. How would you talk to her in a way that she would understand it the best?

January 18

1 Corinthians 9:24

"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it."

Live the Christian life with all your energy, leaving nothing behind!

Paul's aim and ambition in life was to serve God and worship him to the best of his ability. He wanted to give it everything he had. From the outset, Paul was focusing his eyes on Jesus and going for gold. He wasn't satisfied with sloppy living, he was staying alert and in top condition.

As Christians, we are not called to do short runs. We are not called to run for a little bit and then walk and then run some more. If you walk when you should be running, you run the danger of finding yourself in the place described in Psalm 1—walking in the counsel of the wicked, standing in the way of sinners and finally sitting in the seat of scoffers.

Walking allows you to get distracted by what is happening around you. Running does the opposite. Running is challenging. It takes physical effort and mental concentration to be able to run and keep running even when you feel like you can't do it. It takes discipline and hard work.

You are not called to walk. You are called to run and not to run leisurely! Run to the best of your ability, focused on Jesus so that when you end up at the finish line you can hear God say to you: "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

Make it personal

On a scale from 1 to 10, how well do you think you are running the race? What can you do to help you run the race better?

January 19

Luke 9:32

"Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him."

Stay alert to what God is doing!

Christ's transfiguration takes place, Moses and Elijah show up to spend time with Jesus, and what are the disciples doing? They are napping! Peter, James and John had drifted off while true greatness was manifested.

We don't know why the disciples were asleep. All we know is that because they weren't awake they lost an opportunity to see how Jesus was transfigured! These three were asleep when Christ was in his glory and they were also asleep when Christ was in his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane.

This story emphasises the importance of staying alert for God's activity. Be the kind of person who lives fully awake. Keep your eyes open so you don't miss God's glory manifested in this world, and so that you don't miss the things that break his heart.

When we live fully awake we are aware of the great things that God is doing in our lives, our communities, our churches, our cities and our nation. When we live fully awake we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, never taking them off him. When we live fully awake, we are aware of the hurt and injustice in this world and we are moved to action. When we live fully awake we identify opportunities in conversations to share the good news of salvation.

Make it personal

How aware are you of what God is doing in your life?

January 20

Philippians 2:3-4

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."

Live your life asking "What can I do for them?"

From the moment babies are born they are dependent on their parents. Young infants need their parents to change them, feed them, look after them, keep them warm and keep them safe. At this stage in their life, it's all about what they can get from their parents. This attitude is perfectly fine at this stage. Jesus came into the world as a baby and needed his parents to look after him.

However, Jesus grew up and his focus shifted. He knew that he was the good shepherd and he knew that he came into our world to lay his life down for his sheep. He wasn't interested in what his parents could do for him, but what he could do for his parents and the whole world. Jesus was not self-focused—he lived his life in a way that was always about others.

As Christians, we are called to do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than ourselves. We are called not to look only to our own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Make it personal

What does God want you to do for the people in your world? If you know, write it down to remind yourself of your purpose. If you don't know ask God to reveal his purposes for you down below:

January 21

Romans 12:1

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

To present your body as a living sacrifice means to choose to believe that his mercies are new every day!

"…and he shall take up the ashes to which the fire has reduced the burnt offering on the altar and put them beside the altar" (Leviticus 6:10b).

So often we think about the past… Oh, do you remember yesterday's fire? Do you remember how good it was when God showed up yesterday and spoke to us? Do you remember how happy we were a year ago? Do you remember how God blessed us financially when we first started our business?

In Leviticus, we see God asking the priests to remove yesterday's ashes so that it wouldn't hinder today's fire.

God doesn't want you to live in the past. He doesn't want you to eat the manna of yesterday. Stop thinking about the past blessings so much that you miss the blessings he has for you today. Be brave, focus on the present and choose to believe that his mercies are new every day!

Sometimes this can be easier said than done. Yesterday's blessings may look better than today's blessings. Today might be raining and the fire might not be very strong. Times like these stretch your faith.

Choose to believe today that the God who blessed you yesterday will bless you today. The God who spoke to you yesterday will speak to you today. The God who healed you yesterday will heal you today!

Make it personal

Write down 10 things you are grateful for today! Text two people in your life (a Christian friend and a non-believer) and tell them that you feel blessed to know them and have them in your life.

January 22

Romans 12:1

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

To present your body as a living sacrifice means to be available to God at all times!

This Bible verse gets mentioned a lot. It's used as a reminder to live life for God in a manner that is holy and acceptable to him.

What does it actually mean to present our bodies as a living sacrifice? In Leviticus 6 we find some great insights on what is means to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. The first instruction the priests get from God regarding the burnt offering is this "The burnt offering shall be on the hearth on the altar all night until the morning, and the fire of the altar shall be kept burning on it."

The first thing you should do to ensure that you present your body as a living sacrifice is to keep yourself on the altar, available to God at all times. Even if the world is trying to take you off the altar, to lure you with its fleeting promises, you must stay on the altar, giving yourself as a sacrifice to God, saying: "Lord, here I am. Use me. What do you want me to do for you today Lord? Who do you want me to help? Speak to me and I will obey you."

God is reminding you today that he wants your availability. He wants you to know that in order for you to present your body as a living sacrifice, you have to make yourself available to walk with God, listen to his voice, obey his word and carry out his plans.

Make it personal

Ask yourself: Am I really willing to be on the altar? Day and night? Available to take the good news of the gospel to the people in my world? Write down 3 things that hinder your availability:

January 23

Romans 12:1

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

To present your body as a living sacrifice means to choose purity everyday!

"And the priest shall put on his linen garment and put his linen undergarment on his body, and he shall take up the ashes to which the fire has reduced the burnt offering on the altar and put them beside the altar" (Leviticus 6:10).

God is detail-oriented isn't he? He tells the priests what to wear for a specific task. Why did it have to be linen? Why couldn't it have been wool? Linen was known to be a more proper emblem of purity than wool, as it is more easily cleansed, and washed whiter than wool.

Notice that God asked the priests to clothe themselves in a material that represented purity. In order to present our bodies as living sacrifices, we must always be available to do God's work, we must be passionate and zealous about God's work day after day after day and we must also clothe ourselves with purity.

Clothing ourselves with purity means choosing purity in our thoughts, in our words, in our actions, in our motives. We must choose to be like Jesus above all else. Above the temptation to lie, to be comfortable, to compromise, to fit in with the world.

Something interesting to notice here is that the linen clothing was only seen by the priests and God. The linen clothing of purity is a matter of the heart and mind. Most of the time your purity can only be seen by God and by you!

Make it personal

Is there anything in your life that encourages impurity in your heart and mind? Do you plan to do something about it?

January 24

1 Kings 12:13-14

"And the king answered the people harshly, and forsaking the counsel that the old men had given him, he spoke to them according to the counsel of the young men, saying, 'My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.'"

Who you allow to speak into your life decides if you move forward or end up shipwrecked in the process!

Rehoboam was chosen to be king and reign in Solomon's place. Before his coronation, the people of Israel came to him and asked to have their burdens lightened. Rehoboam sought the counsel of the old men and they told him that he should lighten people's yoke. Rehoboam also sought his young friends' counsel. They advised him to do the opposite and make people's yoke heavier than ever before.

Sadly, Rehoboam listened to his friends who were lacking wisdom and the results of that decision were catastrophic. It caused division in Israel and eventually led to Rehoboam's death.

Be wise about the people you seek counsel from. Choose carefully who you allow to speak into your life. Look for one or two people who walk closely with God and have life experience. Trust their counsel.

To be an effective witness, it's important that you surround yourself with people of great wisdom, people who are friends of your destiny, people who are filled with the Holy Spirit. The last thing you need is to allow the wrong people to speak into your life because their influence might be deadly.

Make it personal

Think about the people you allow to speak in your life. Do they influence you positively or negatively? Do they encourage you to get closer to God or do they tend to lead you astray?

January 25

2 Timothy 2: 15

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth."

A well read Bible is a sign of a well-fed soul!

There are so many reasons why you should prioritise studying your Bible. You should read and study the Bible because there is so much false teaching going around. The Bible will give you the measuring stick by which you can distinguish truth from error. You should study the Bible because it will equip you to serve God. You should read the Bible because it will help you see sin in your life and it will give you clear instructions on how to get rid of it. You should read your Bible because it reveals who God really is, what his character really is like and what his will for this world is.

Reading the Bible won't benefit just you but it will benefit the people around you. By reading the Word you will be able to answer the hard questions people will have for you and you will be able to tell them how to be saved from sin and its ultimate consequence. You will be able to break the lies of Satan that they have been believing, by proclaiming the truth over their lives and you will be able to nourish them, by encouraging them with scripture.

And lastly, the Bible is like a deodorant. It only works if you apply it. It's not only important that you read it, it is also important that you apply it.

Make it personal

What can you do to rightly handle the word of truth? Do you need to start reading the Bible in a different translation? Do you buy some books about the Bible and find out more about the context it was written in? What is your next step?

January 26

Ecclesiastes 4:9-11

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work. If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?"

Think of people's loneliness as an invitation from God to reach out to them!

Recent surveys portray an alarming picture of an increasingly lonely generation. The Times recently posted an article about loneliness in our society. The opening paragraph was: "Loneliness Kills". Research shows that people have a very large number of 'friends' on social media but an increasing sense of loneliness.

What is loneliness? Loneliness is a state of mind that causes people to feel abandoned, empty, alone and unwanted. A person doesn't necessarily have to be alone to feel lonely. Instead, it is the perception of being alone and isolated that matters most. For example, a teenage student might feel lonely despite being surrounded by his classmates.

There's nothing wrong with having friends on social media, but it is no substitute for real, face-to-face human interactions and friendships. We were created for friendship with God and with one another.

Start seeing people's loneliness as a spiritual invitation to share about Jesus, the greatest friend anyone could have. Start seeing people's loneliness as an opportunity for you to pray! Start seeing people's loneliness as an opportunity for you to be a great friend!

Make it personal

How are you going to reach out to someone who is lonely this week?

January 27

Galatians 5: 25

"If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit."

Give out of what you have been given!

Margaret, a friend of mine, refuses to go to anyone's house without taking something with her. It doesn't matter whether she is going to her friends' house for dinner or she is on a pastoral visit she makes sure that she picks something up because she feels it's rude to turn up to someone's house without a gift.

Did you know that you have gifts to give?

There is a tendency to believe that the fruit of the Holy Spirit are for us to enjoy and keep for ourselves. However, the fruit of the Holy Spirit, just like the gifts of the Holy Spirit aren't for us. They are for the people around us.

Our verse for today says that if we live by the Spirit we should also keep in step with the Spirit. That implies that the Holy Spirit isn't stagnant—he's moving! The Spirit always wants you to move and minister to people, so get going! Move! Go! Be with the people in your world who need Jesus! And when you go, never turn up empty handed. Even if you can't buy them chocolate, you have divine fruit to give - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

When you meet up with a friend, or when you go to someone's house, take a moment to ask God: What fruit does this person need to eat the most? What fruit has this person been deprived of?

Make it personal:

Ask God to reveal to you which fruit of the Holy Spirit you need to bear more of:

January 28

1 Thessalonians 5:17

"Pray without ceasing."

If Jesus needed to pray then we need to pray too!

"Pray without ceasing." This command does not require the incessant recitation of prayers. Paul wasn't asking the Thessalonians to stop living, and to be locked in their rooms 24/7 and pray, pray, pray! Rather, Paul is calling the Thessalonians to a prayerful way of living: "continuing steadfastly in prayer" (Romans 12:12).

Praying without ceasing refers to an attitude of the heart. To pray without ceasing is to have your thoughts, your emotions, your worries, your life, humbly dependent upon the Lord, while consistently addressing actual prayers to the Lord.

Jesus prayed without ceasing. He depended on prayer, and when he was praying it was not only because he wanted to set an example for his followers, but because the Son of God needed to be connected through prayer to God the Father.

If Jesus needed to be connected through prayer to God, how much more do we need to pray?

As you pray, expect God's response. As Andrew Murray challenges us, "Each time, before you intercede, be quiet first, and worship God in His glory. Think of what He can do, and how He delights to hear the prayers of His redeemed people. Think of your place and privilege in Christ, and expect great things!"

Make it personal:

Write down 3 things you are expecting and believing God to do in your life this month:

January 29

Acts 8:29-31

"And the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over and join this chariot.' So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' And he said, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him."

We are given divine moments to change people's lives!

Philip was experiencing a great move of the Spirit when the angel of the Lord called him to leave and go into the desert. In immediate obedience, with little information but complete trust in God, Philip set out. God had a divine moment prepared for Philip. The Holy Spirit knew that there was an important Ethiopian man in a chariot, who was hungry for God and needed someone to tell him the good news of salvation.

While he was travelling, the man was reading from the scriptures. Philip went to this man and asked: "Do you understand what you are reading?" The man replied, "How can I unless someone guides me?" So Philip was invited up into the chariot and Philip preaches the kingdom of God and teaches the Ethiopian man about the Jesus. This results in the conversion and baptism of the Ethiopian man, which symbolises the beginning of the African involvement in the new faith that spread throughout the world.

Next time you have the opportunity to talk to someone about Christ, recognise that it is a divine moment and it has the potential to change someone's life forever.

Make it personal

Are you like Philip willing to be guided by the Holy Spirit? Even when he asks you to step outside of your comfort zone and talk to people about Jesus? Be honest with yourself when answering this question.

January 30

1 Kings 10-1

"Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to test him with hard questions"

You know someone greater than Solomon. God is challenging you to go deeper!

We don't know a lot about the queen of Sheba. We don't know her age, her background, or her religion. We do know that Sheba was where modern day Yemen is today. We know from geography that this was a wealthy kingdom, with much gold, spices, and precious woods. History also tells us that they were known to have queens as well as kings.

The trip from Sheba to Jerusalem would have been over 2000 kilometres. There is no doubt that the queen of Sheba was highly motivated to see Solomon and his kingdom. But why?

Solomon's wisdom was known to have been out of this world and that's why his fame spread internationally. However, the Bible says that the queen of Sheba had to see with her own eyes! She wasn't happy with just the rumours, she had to experience Solomon's wisdom for herself.

Jesus used the queen of Sheba as an example: "The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here". (Matthew 12:42)

You know someone greater than Solomon. God is challenging you to go deeper. There is still so much more that he wants you to experience, to discover, to know!

Make it personal

Smith Wigglesworth said, "Spiritual hunger is when nothing in the world fascinates me as much a being near to God." Write down 5 things that truly fascinate you. Is God on that list?

January 31

Galatians 3:26-28

For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Even the person you dislike the most has as much access to the grace of God as you do!

Paul's been talking about the distance between Jews and Greeks and how Jews had in the past had access to God that wasn't available to others. But now that Christ has come there is no distinction.

Those Gentiles were difficult for the Jewish Christians to accept. It was hard to reach out to them. Even Peter, who had spent all those years with Jesus, God had to work on for awhile to prepare him to go into the house of Gentile Cornelius with the gospel (Acts 10).

Who have you been ruling out, that God might want to reach through you? Do you have a workmate or classmate that you don't like at all? Is one of your neighbours especially difficult to get along with? Is there someone from another religion that you avoid talking with about God?

Even the person you dislike the most has as much access to the grace of God as you do!

Make it personal

Name the person in your life you dislike the most. Be honest and write 5 reasons why you dislike them. Now write 5 reasons why God wants you to reach out to them with the Gospel. Are you willing to put aside your pride in order to show that person the love of Jesus?

FEBRUARY

February 1

1 John 4:16

"So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him"

Once we "believe the love that God has for us", we have a reason to take his message of love to other people!

In order to convince other people of God's love, there are 4 things that we need to do. We need to understand God's love, experience God's love, believe God's love and respond to God's love.

Understand God's Love

"In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

God loves you. He sent his son to die for you. You belong to him; there is no condemnation for you. He isn't angry with you. He wants a relationship. He is close to you. He wants to talk to you. He hears you. He feels your pain. He understands your suffering.

Experience God's Love

"…to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:19).

God wants you to experience his love for yourself—to know it for yourself, to taste and see that he is good. Only when you have experienced that overwhelming love can you testify with passion of his great love to the non-believers in your world.

Make it personal

If you lack the conviction or the passion to share God's love, then perhaps you need to experience God's love in such a fresh, new way so that you will feel compelled to share it. Ask God to begin to show his love to you deep down in your heart.

February 2

1 John 4:16

"So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."

Believe God's love!

Did you know that up to about four months, babies don't have the capacity to believe something exists if they can't see it? If you hide their bottle of milk it no longer exists as far as they are concerned. As they grow up babies reach a stage where if you hide something from them, they will keep on looking for it. They realise that objects do exist even when you don't see them.

Today be reminded that God wants you to believe in his love even when you don't see it or feel it. He wants you to remember his love. As you believe in the wind even when you don't feel it, so you can continue to believe in God's love even in times of darkness when you struggle to feel it.

When tough times come in your life and people ask you "Where is your God?", choose to believe that your God is with you, that he loves you! And proclaim his love to the non-believers in your life. That's an opportunity for you to be a strong witness!

Respond to God's love.

God wants you to respond to his love by loving him back and loving other people. 1 John 4:19 says that "we love because he first loved us". The more you love him and demonstrate that reality by loving other people—the better you can witness to people. God is asking you to develop a culture of love—to give love and to receive love. Take his example today and love people unconditionally, wholeheartedly and continually.

Make it personal

Do you struggle to believe or to respond to god's love? Why?/Why not?

February 3

1 John 4:16

"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love."

We sometimes hold back from telling people about Jesus because we believe the lies that the enemy is telling us!

Here are some lies we tend to believe:

Lie #1: People aren't open to hearing about our faith.

You know what catches people's attention time and time again? ENTHUSIASM! If you show enthusiasm about your faith and your God, people are most likely going to be curious about what it is that sets your heart on fire. Some people might be more open to hear about your faith than others. Keep sharing your faith with the people who are open to it and let your enthusiasm be what opens the door for you to share your faith with those who aren't open to hearing the good news of salvation.

Lie #2: Sharing God's love is reserved for extroverts and for great evangelists.

You have been sent into your workplace, into your family and into your neighbourhood to proclaim the good news of salvation. Jesus calls you to be his witness; he has given you the Holy Spirit to help you! You know what made Billy Graham a great evangelist? The Holy Spirit! Billy Graham has the Holy Spirit and you have him too! You can do all things through Christ who gives you strength!

Lie #3: He or she will never come to Christ.

God deeply and passionately loves everyone you know. So don't give up! Remember the Apostle Paul. Before he came to know and serve Christ, he was one of biggest persecutors of the Christian church and the most unlikely of candidates to serve God.

Make it personal

Which lie stops you from sharing the good news of salvation with the people in your world?

February 4

Read Psalm 119:73-80

"Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice, because I have hoped in your word.

Let those who fear you turn to me, that they may know your testimonies. May my heart be blameless in your statues, that I may not be put to shame!" (vs 74,79-80)

God wants you to live a life that brings joy to others who also love and serve him!

You know the kind of person I mean. Even when you see them coming, you know that your spiritual life will be stronger when you have been with them. And your time with them won't only be serious time. There will be joy and laughter and prayer and Scripture all mixed together! Your heart is glad to see them. When you need prayer or encouragement or advice, you turn to them.

You can be that kind of person to others. You might not be that kind of spiritual person right now, but you can be. Not through an overnight decision, but through a lifestyle of walking with God and speaking with him throughout the day and thinking as you encounter each person, "How can I encourage this person in their spiritual life? What could I share with them from the Bible? Can I stop and pray with them briefly?"

Make It personal

Describe the kind of spiritual person you would love to be:

February 5

Philippians 4:6-7

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Make his presence your refuge and your fortress, your dwelling place today!

Have you ever noticed that the first thing that God did when our sin was paid for was to rip the veil in the temple—the veil that separated people from the holy presence of God? This is significant because it reveals God's determination to make a way for us to come into his presence so that we could have a relationship with him.

Jesus is a perfect example of how to seek God's presence and how to have a relationship with God. In his Father's presence, Jesus found boldness, found revelation, found answers, found comfort, found love, found fullness, found joy and so much more.

You need God's presence in your life.

In his presence, you will find a sense of identity, a sense of purpose, an unshakable confidence. In his presence, you realise that if God is for you, nothing can stand against you. In his presence, you get the boldness you need to speak to people about Christ. In his presence, you find new dreams you find healing. In his presence, he places vision and calling on your life. In his presence, you get answers to your questions. In his presence the raging storms inside you are calmed and you find peace.

Make it personal

Take whatever is going on in your life and bring it to God. Ask him to give you peace that transcends all understanding.

February 6

Philippians 3:13-14

"Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Forget what lies behind!

Everyone has done things in their life that they regret. All you have to do is open the Bible to see that even the heroes of faith, like David, Abraham, Moses did things they probably wouldn't want on their resume.

An important point to remember is this: in spite of their frailties, these men had great faith in God, they chose to leave their mistakes behind and they aimed to do God's will most of the time. They didn't let their guilt define their lives and who they were. Instead, they asked for forgiveness and they chose to receive God's forgiveness, forget what was behind, move on and keep doing what God called them to do. It doesn't mean that there weren't consequences, it means that they didn't let regret paralyse them and stop them from fulfilling God's will for their lives.

Remember, you don't have to live with guilt, regret, or shame anymore. Don't let memories from the past make you think that you can't do what God called you to do. God doesn't want you to carry that heavy baggage throughout your life. He wants you to be free.

Romans 8:1: "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." You belong to Christ Jesus now. God doesn't condemn you—he has forgiven you! Choose today to forgive yourself and stop living with regret.

Make it personal

How do you think your life would change if you accepted God's grace and forgiveness and let go of your regret?

February 7

2 Peter 3:9

"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."

God cares about the future of unbelievers. He doesn't want anyone to perish!

The team at Hillsong wrote a song that expresses a beautiful prayer:

"Heal my heart and make it clean/ Open up my eyes to the things unseen/ Show me how to love like you have loved me/ Break my heart for what breaks yours/ Everything I am for your Kingdom's cause"

Does your heart break for the things that break God's heart? Do you care about the future of unbelievers like he cares? Are you passionate to see people being saved so none would perish but all have eternal life?

Because that's God' heartbeat! He doesn't just care about the people who have committed their lives to following him, he cares about the people who don't know him too! More than ever we need to see into the eternal as we go about our day-to-day lives. We need to get God's perspective. We need to notice those around us who are broken and lonely and lost, and extend grace and love to them in the same way that God extends grace and love to us.

More than ever we need to not settle for the status quo that we have come to value, but to live in such a way that God's Kingdom is really first in our lives. God's heart is breaking for the people in our neighbourhoods and cities, for the people in our schools and places of employment.

Make it personal

Can you honestly ask God to break your heart for what breaks his?

February 8

Acts 21:39-40

"Paul replied, '…I beg you, permit me to speak to the people.' And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew language, saying…"

Seize the moment and tell them about Jesus!

Once again, Paul was in trouble. The crowd had been stirred up. People had made false assumptions about him. Now they were trying to kill him. How did he respond? Paul responded as he always did—he seized the opportunity and started to tell his oppressors about Jesus. He told his testimony, sharing what Jesus had done in his life.

Paul is a good example of the ministry mindset of a witness for Jesus. Give your testimony whenever the opportunity arises. If you have an opportunity to tell your story, what should you say?

1. Tell them about your life before Christ. Even if you were born in a Christian family, tell them about that.

If you were not born in a Christian family, tell them of your life before Christ. Try to start your testimony with elements of your story that they can relate to.

2. Tell them what happened. Tell them of how you came to the conclusion that you wanted to become a Christian. Tell them of your life-changing encounter with Christ.
3. Tell them about your life with Jesus. Tell them of the difference Jesus has made in your life.

Make it personal

Do you feel like you testimony isn't dramatic enough? Choose to believe that the Holy Spirit can use your testimony to touch someone else's life. Write down your testimony so that when you have to share it you will know what to say:

February 9

Acts 17:11

"Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so."

Examine the Scriptures daily to find the answers to your questions!

The Jews in Berea grew up learning, reading and hearing about the Messiah that was to come. They were imagining Messiah to be a great king who would fight the Roman Empire and establish Israel as a nation once and for all. Yet, here come Paul and Silas, telling them that the Messiah they were expecting has already come, was crucified by the Roman Empire and has already delivered them from their enemies and brought salvation into the world.

The Messiah Paul and Silas were talking about was completely different than the Messiah these Jews had in mind. However, they didn't dismiss what Paul and Silas told them and they didn't believe them immediately either. They went to the Scriptures to examine everything.

God is challenging you to go to the Bible and to find the answers when you have questions or have doubts. God isn't asking you to do this only for yourself but for the people in your world. Your friends and family who are not believers yet have questions! God has given you his word to help you answer their questions.

Make it personal

Is there life after death? How do I get to heaven? Why is the world full of evil? Why do I struggle to do good? Do you know how the Bible answers these questions? Pick one and answer it below with the help of the Bible:

February 10

Romans 12:1

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

To present your body as a living sacrifice means to have impassioned desire to please and serve God!

Leviticus 6:9 says, "And the fire of the altar shall be kept burning on it." In Leviticus God was telling the priests to make sure that the fire on the altar is kept burning at all times. Why would God ask them that?

Throughout the Bible, we see that God doesn't appreciate a cold offering. God doesn't want us to do things for him with no passion, joy, enthusiasm and commitment.

As well as being available to do his work, God wants us to do his work with passion and we have to intentionally work at this. As William Booth said, "Tend the fire, because it is the nature of fire to go out."

God's Word tells us, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might!" (Ecclesiastes 9:10). Romans 12:11 tells us, "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord!"

As part of presenting our bodies as living sacrifices, God expects his children to be whole-hearted, willing workers who are filled with a desire to please and serve him!

God's Kingdom needs on-fire, enthusiastic followers who love him more than anything or anyone else on this Earth! God wants sons and daughters who are determined and committed to follow Jesus all the way because they know they have found the TRUTH! Jesus wants disciples who are passionate about seeing people saved and taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

Make it personal

What do you believe God is saying to you today?

February 11

1 Samuel 17-37

"And David said: 'The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.' And Saul said to David, 'Go, and the Lord be with you!'"

You need God-confidence, not self-confidence!

David was a teenage boy when he defeated Goliath, the giant all grown-up men in Israel were too scared to face. Where did David get the confidence to do the unthinkable—to go into the Valley of Elah and accept Goliath's fight-to-death, winner-takes-all challenge? At first, it seems that David had a lot of self-confidence.

1 Samuel 17-36 "But David said to Saul, 'Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God.'"

David seems to mention himself a lot in this verse. "I did this and I did that!" But he doesn't stop there. Listen to his next words: "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the Lord be with you!"

David knew he didn't kill the lion or the bear all alone! He knew that it was God's strength in him that helped him in times of trouble. It's so obvious that his life experiences made David God-confident, not self-confident.

Make It personal

Does talking about your faith with people scare you? Do you think that you can't do it? Today choose to have God-confidence, not self-confidence.

February 12

Exodus 33:18

"Moses said, 'Please show me your glory.'"

Wherever you turn your attention, you will have a desire for more of that same thing in your life!

Moses asked God "Please show me Your glory." I have read this passage many times and I always thought, "Oh, that's nice! Moses just wanted to be in God's presence." However, recently I realised that Moses had already been in God's presence for forty days! Yet he asked for more of God's presence!

"Please show me your glory" reveals Moses' heart for God. It reveals his deep-seated hunger for more of God.

David's life was ablaze with this same unquenchable desire for God. He reveals his tremendous passion for God in verses such as, "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water" (Psalm 63:1).

What would it be like to experience even your rebellious flesh longing for God? What a thought!

Both Moses' and David's stories reveal the truth that wherever you turn your attention, you will have a desire for more of that same thing in your life. Think about your favourite TV series. When you start watching a series, the more episodes you watch the more episodes you want to watch.

The same goes for your relationship with God. The more you experience God, the more of God you want!

Make it personal

Spiritual hunger is an indicator of the Holy Spirit at work in you. Write down one season in which you were really hungry for God. What were some good things you were doing in that season? Have you stopped doing?

February 13

Matthew 25:23

"His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'"

Just like in the parable of the talents, in our lives, God has given us everything.

Whether it be financially, emotionally, in our relationships, or anything else. God expects us to take what he has given us no matter what our situation is and use it for him. We are not supposed to "hide it in the ground" (v25).

Is your life going well? Is your job going smoothly and your family happy? What is God calling you to do with your life right now? What relationships is he asking you to invest into? Who is he calling on you to witness to? How can you invest what he has given you to bring glory to him?

Is your life hard at the moment? Is there sickness in your family? Are you out of a job? How is God calling you to be faithful in your situation? How can you invest the experiences and lessons he is teaching you to bring glory to him? 1 Corinthians 10:31 says "…whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." How can you bring glory to God in your current circumstances?

Make it personal

What does "well done good and faithful servant" look like in your situation? When you reach the end of this season of your life, will God say that to you? And what is the awesome result of that faithfulness?

February 14

2 Corinthians 4:18

"We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."

Put your values in the right order!

This verse is part of a passage where Paul is talking about the things that motivate him to keep on sharing the gospel with people. He says that what keeps him going in the life of a witness for Jesus is this reordering of his priorities.

If all you notice are the things that are seen (physical realities that are temporary—deadlines, bills, people's faces, things you own or want to own), then there will be no motivation at all to live as a witness for Jesus. That priority will be rapidly crowded out by the urgent busyness of life.

But when you change your focus—when you realise that these things that are seen are not the most important things in your life, because they are temporary—when you focus in on the things that do really matter, the eternal things (the inner lives and hearts of people—their brokenness and need for God, God's desire to pour his love out on them through you), then you start looking past the surface in your conversations with people. You become more aware of where they are in their journey towards God, and you get involved in helping them take the next step on that journey.

Make it personal

How would today be different than usual if you had your focus on these eternal, unseen issues of life?

February 15

2 Corinthians 5:9-11

"So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him [the Lord]. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others."

The fact that one day you will be accountable to Jesus for how you live your Christian life makes living as a witness for him much more important to you!

Although Jesus is your dearest friend, you must never forget that he is not simply a buddy who is your equal. He is the Lord of all.

Will Christians be accountable to Jesus for how they live the new life he has given them? Yes, they will. In today's passage Paul says, "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." The word "we" means that Paul includes himself, and "we all" means that he includes you and me as well. This is not a judgment for salvation. That judgment has already been passed on Jesus, who stood in our place.

Nevertheless, the New Testament makes it clear that there will be accountability for our Christian lives.

Paul is saying, "I love Christ so much and want to please him. And on top of that, I know I will stand before him one day and he will want to know that the price he paid for my salvation was worth it. The reality of that day of accountability leads me to persuade the people in my life to consider Christ."

Make it personal

The Bible teaches us that our responsibility as believers is to work uncompromisingly as the Lord has gifted us and leads us in this life. Are you working hard to build your kingdom or God's Kingdom?

February 16

2 Corinthians 5:11-12

"Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart."

Don't trade authenticity for approval!

It's natural to care what people think about us, but that so easily leads us into a fake, surface way of interacting with people. We want them to think well of us, so we perform for them the way we think they want to see us.

This is true when we are trying to be a witness for Jesus. We think that being a witness means our lives have to look perfect so that the people we are trying to share with will want to have Jesus in their lives too. But that way of presenting yourself is neither effective nor real. The message of Christianity is not that if you trust Christ your life will become easy or perfect or problem free. Christ in your life does not mean you don't have stresses or inner struggles.

The point is that Christ becomes part of your real life with all its struggles and joys. You aren't going through life in this fallen world on your own. You have an inner friend, guide, and helper who knows the pains of life, has experienced temptation and can help you in all those situations.

Make it personal

Do you often try to look like you have it all together? If so why do you think that is? How can you change?

February 17

2 Corinthians 5:17-19

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation."

Jesus has passed his ministry and his message on to you. Represent him well!

These verses start with such a beautiful description of what Christ has done for us. He's changed us at the deepest level. You are not the same person you used to be. "The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

Take a moment to think about how open your relationship with God is now, how you can come to him with anything. Jesus lived on earth to bring people into a healthy relationship with God (reconciliation). Now he wants your life to carry that same purpose.

He's given you the message of reconciliation—that simple gospel message that Jesus died in our place, taking our judgment, to make a way for us to be forgiven and have a good relationship with God. And he's given you the ministry of reconciliation—loving people, pointing them to God, and sharing the message of reconciliation with them.

MAKE IT PERSONAL

Picture in your mind Jesus himself giving you the ministry of reconciliation and entrusting you with the message of the gospel. Write out your response to him.

February 18

2 Corinthians 5:20-21

"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

When you talk with people about the gospel, you aren't inviting them to trust Christ just on your own behalf—you represent Christ himself, who is speaking to them through you!

Ambassadors don't represent themselves, but the one who sent them. As Jesus sends you out into the world, don't think that you have to come up with your own message—just share the simple truths of the gospel with people. Don't think that you need to be super convincing—God will be "making his appeal through us". Don't let it get to you if there are some who think your beliefs are ridiculous and look down on you. You are not representing yourself—you are speaking "on behalf of Christ".

What a relief! Even when I stumble around and don't put my words together very well, when I walk away from a gospel conversation thinking I must have sounded like an idiot, or when I feel like I did well—in either case what matters is not how well I did. What matters is that even through my weaknesses, God was making his appeal through me.

Make it personal

Stop and take a few minutes for prayer. Ask God to open a door for you to speak with someone about him today. When the door opens, open your mouth and start talking with the confidence that God is speaking to that person's heart through you.

February 19

Romans 8:10-11

"But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."

Since God the Father gave Jesus life after death, you know that he is able to also give you life after death! What a marvellous message of hope we have!

"If Christ is in you" — that is, if you are born again, your spirit has been redeemed; it has eternal life, even though you still live in your fallen body. When your body dies, your spirit will go to be with the Lord. But one day "him who raised Jesus from the dead" will also redeem your body. You will be raised physically from the dead with an unfallen resurrection body when Christ returns to this earth to bring this fallen age to an end.

This redemption of your spirit and your body were purchased for you by Christ at the cross. You already experience the joy of your spirit's redemption. Your body's redemption is waiting for that final day (Romans 8:23). Until then we still get sick and die. But God is reminding you today not to fear death because it is not the end. After death comes the joy of unending, complete redemption.

Make it personal

What fears have you identified in your life? List them down below and ask God to help you overcome these fears with the help of the Holy Spirit.

February 20

1 Thessalonians 1:5

"…because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake."

Don't try to share the gospel with people in your own strength!

Recognise that you can't change a person's heart. Call on God to work with power through you and the gospel as you share Christ with people!

Sharing the gospel is not only about giving people the words of the gospel. It's also about the power of God at work through those words to break down barriers, open people's hearts, and stir up saving faith in them.

In Romans 1, Paul says that the gospel "is the power of God for salvation to all who believe." In Acts 1:8 Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit came upon us he would bring us the power to be effective witnesses for him in the world. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the time when he shared the gospel with them, he said, "My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."

When you really understand that your words are just words without the power of God at work, you make prayer a much more important part of your life.

Make it personal

As you head into this day, stop and pray. Make sure you ask God to give you boldness to talk with people about him today, and call on him to fill those conversations with his power. Write your prayer down below:

February 21

Philippians 1:12-14

"I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear."

Share your experiences as a witness for Jesus- it will encourage others to live as witnesses too!

Do you see how Paul describes his imprisonment? It's not about how heavy the chains are or how there are sores on his ankles from the manacles. He tells us nothing about the smell or how bad the food is, or how he misses the blue sky and the sunshine. Without a doubt, all those things are real and he feels them.

But the grid through which Paul interprets his experiences is the grid of his "sentness" by Jesus to live as a witness. So the things Paul wants to tell us about his imprisonment al have to do with that- how his imprisonment is actually advancing the gospel throughout the imperial guard, and how the experience of sentness is encouraging the other believers to live lives of sentness too!

As your grid of sentness gradually develops and you find yourself approaching situations and encounters with people with a ministry mindset, share those experiences with other believers.

You will find that they will catch your sense of sentness as they hear of God at work in and through you.

Make it personal

Think of how God is re-shaping your life around your sentness. What could you share with another believer this week, about a recent experience, that will exalt God, not you, and encourage them towards this lifestyle as well?

February 22

1 Thessalonians 1:5

"…because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake."

To be an effective witness, you yourself must believe the gospel with all your being!

Paul says, "Our gospel came to you…with full conviction." This absolute conviction about the truth of the gospel is one of the most powerful parts of your witness about Jesus. You may be tentative about speaking out and you may be nervous about sharing the gospel, but even in your nervousness, you must have the absolute conviction that the message itself, what you are sharing, is the truth.

You may have trusted in Christ as a child in a Christian home and not experienced a major transformation. If you do not have that confidence that whatever other fears you may have, the message of the gospel itself is true, then make this your first step on the journey to living as a witness for Jesus.

Read through the Gospels again in your Bible, and the book of Acts. Think about how God changed lives. Make it a question you ask the Christians in your life: "Tell me how you came to faith in Jesus and how did that change your life?" Read some of the Christian biographies that focus on people's conversion or on what God did through the gospel through missionaries.

It won't take long for you to be absolutely convinced that God transforms lives through the gospel. When you speak with that conviction it has an impact on the hearer.

Make it personal

What will you do this week to grow in your conviction regarding the transforming truth of the gospel?

February 23

1 Samuel 16:18

One of the young men answered, "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skilful in playing, a man of valour, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the Lord is with him."

Be careful of how you live your life behind closed doors.

Reading today's verse, you would say that David's résumé is pretty impressive. Not bad for a teenager. Not bad for a country boy. Not bad for a shepherd. Saul asks for someone who is skilful in playing. There are no doubt plenty of people who play the harp well in Israel, who would love to play for the king and would drop everything in seconds to be given such an opportunity. The question is: How come David's name pops up first?

I want you to notice something here. David was being watched. Someone was listening to his music. He may have thought he was alone, but no, somebody was watching. So often we think nobody is watching us but that isn't true. People are paying attention, even when we don't realise it.

In Philippians 2:14-15, Paul challenges the church to be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation. Why is it important to live a blameless and innocent life? Because people are watching our lives and 100% of the time, actions speak louder than words.

Make it personal

Write down 3 things you are doing well to ensure that you live a life of integrity and 3 things that hinder you from living a life of integrity.

February 24

2 Corinthians 6:1-2

"Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain."

For he says, "In a favourable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you."

Behold, now is the favourable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

Leading people to faith in Jesus is something you and God do together!

Look at the first phrase of this passage: "working together with him [God]". Think about what that phrase expresses.

There is a "working together" that is necessary. The beginning and end of it is God, but somewhere in the mix is us responding to God, getting involved in people's lives and calling them to receive his love, grace and forgiveness.

God prompts us to share about him with someone in our lives. We respond by starting a spiritual conversation with them. God then opens the door in that conversation for us to share the gospel. At the same time, he is working in their hearts to help them see that he is reaching out to them through us. This may happen a number of times in the relationship as the person moves towards God over time. When they put their faith in God, he sends his Holy Spirit into their lives and begins his work of transforming them from the inside out to be like Jesus.

God starts it all and finishes it all and is the one at work through us as we speak out for him. But we are still part of the process.

Make it personal

Let God know that you want to partner with him and that you are available for the part you need to play in his work of rescuing people from the darkness and brokenness of this world. Write down your prayer:

February 25

Romans 12:9

"Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good."

You are called to overcome evil with good!

When we read, watch or listen to the news it is really easy to get depressed. The tragic events that are happening all around us could leave us fearful. It seems as if evil is triumphing over good. The plans of the wicked seem to succeed, and the innocent are subject to terrorism, slavery and abuse.

In this struggle between good and evil, God wants you to know that you can make a difference by holding fast to what is good.

When you are experiencing injustice, he wants you to repay no one evil for evil but to hold fast to what is good and honourable. Throughout the Bible, God shows us that there's a right and wrong way to respond to the injustice in our lives. We can get angry and get back at the person who hurt us or we can trust God to be the judge of all things while we bless our enemies and do good.

It's not easy to love our enemies and bless the people who have hurt us. It's certainly not easy to turn the other cheek. It's not easy to trust that God sees all things and he is in charge of all things, especially when there is so much injustice in the world.

However, you have the Holy Spirit as your helper, your comforter and your guide. Ask him to give you strength and help you to hold fast to what is good. This is a way you can shine your light in the dark and be an example to your family and friends who don't know the Lord yet.

Make it personal

Is there a person who has mistreated you recently? Choose forgiveness today, hold fast to what is good and show them an act of kindness. Write down below why it's important for you to forgive that person:

February 26

Ephesians 6:13-18

"Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication."

Knowing the gospel thoroughly makes you ready for any opportunity!

In the middle of Paul's description of the full armour of God is this: "as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace". Readiness—what a great word describing the ministry mindset of a witness for Jesus!

A person like that doesn't freak out when a door opens for a spiritual conversation because they are ready. They aren't thrown off balance when the person they are talking to says something that is different than they expected. When you know the gospel thoroughly you can come at it from any angle and interact with it without fear.

Is the person super religious? Great, I'll start with Nicodemus. Do they feel that the things they have done are unforgivable? I'll take them to Jesus on the cross saying "It is finished!" and then go to Romans 5:6-8.

Do they feel unloved and unlovable? I'll start with my testimony, then head to John 3:16 and then the end of Romans 8.

When you really know the gospel it lets you relax into your role as a witness.

Make it personal

Think through the kinds of situations and people you are likely to encounter and the best way into the gospel with each one. Jot them down below.

February 27

John 1:6-8

"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light."

You too have been sent from God to bear witness about the light (Jesus)!

God's purpose for John the Baptist was to fulfil prophecy as the major announcer of the arrival of Jesus the Messiah. His whole life was about pointing people to Jesus. When he spoke about Jesus to his disciples, John said, "He must increase, and I must decrease." When John's disciples got upset that more people were following Jesus than were following John, John replied that this brought him great joy.

The way God works out his purpose through you will be different than it was through John. You may not be fulfilling major Old Testament prophecies and announcing the incarnation of Jesus. Nevertheless, you carry the same purpose as John.

Today God is reminding you that you don't just exist as a Christian in your circumstances. No, you have been sent into your circumstances to represent Jesus! Think through the day before you. Whose life is God sending you into? How can you bear witness about the Light?

Make it personal

Prayerfully personalise today's Scripture as your commitment to respond to God's purpose for your life. There was a man/woman sent from God, whose name was _____. He/she was sent as a witness, to bear witness about the Light—Jesus.

February 28

Job 42:10

"And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends."

How closely tied together are God's grace towards us and our grace towards others?

Job's friends had wronged him badly — emotionally, judgmentally, spiritually. Yet he prayed for their forgiveness. (See what Jesus says about freely forgiving others in Matthew 6:12-15 and 18:21-35.)

Could that have been the final victory for God in this contest with Satan over the heart of Job? (see chapters 1-2). The final proof that Job's heart was still pure after all that Satan had done to him was his ability to forgive and even offer grace to these men who had wronged him so badly.

That was when God's grace overflowed to Job, when Job did not assert his position over those men. "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6)

Are you at the end of your rope, desperately needing God's help? Learn to be a giver of grace to others, and you will find God not only meeting your need for him but overflowing your life so that you become a blessing in the lives of everyone around you as well!

It is not only what God wants to do for you, but what he wants to do through you in the lives of others that matters. It may start with forgiving someone who has hurt you. Are you willing?

Make it personal

Write the initials of the person you are willing to forgive, so you can be restored and be a blessing to everyone around you:

February 29

2 Timothy 2:24-26

"And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will."

People are held captive by the snare of the devil!

When I was a young boy I used to set bird traps out in the scrub with my father to catch small finches. On occasions, we would be successful and bring these wild birds back to our home aviary to enjoy them as pets.

While the birds had some freedom in the aviary to forage for food, build their nests and breed with a mate, they never lived very long in captivity and would inevitably die.

Likewise, people who don't know Jesus are held captive in the devil's snare. They believe his lies and set about foraging for their fortunes, becoming lovers of themselves and their achievements. The devil has them believing that they are in control of their future and keeps them distracted from the truth.

Today God wants to use you in every circumstance and encounter to show his loving kindness so that others may experience the truth and come to their senses and escape from the snare of the enemy.

Make it personal

Who will you encounter today? What questions can you ask them to start an intentional conversation that may lead to the gospel?

MARCH

March 1

1 Peter 5:8-10

"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you."

Never accept spiritual defeat in your life!

It is in the spiritual battle that you have an opportunity to take major steps forward in your spiritual life. The devil will attack you, yes. "But resist him!" As you do battle with him, look what God will do for you. He will "perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you".

Martin Luther once said, "Wherever the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved".

Whenever you sense that you are being attacked spiritually, remember that it is part of a much bigger spiritual battle that is being fought throughout the world for the glory of God. Do not accept defeat as inevitable, no matter how many times you have lost that battle before.

The Lord is assuring you today that he will enter into that battle as you make godly choices. No battle is so big that your God is not bigger.

Make it personal

Why do you think God is allowing you to struggle through a hard time? Write down your current spiritual battle. Ask God to turn that struggle into a time of spiritual growth.

March 2

Proverbs 3:6

"In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."

So often in our Christian walk, there is a big difference to how we walk with God when life is smooth and going well, compared to when we are facing trials and problems.

We can find ourselves using God as a repairman. We ask him to come and fix our lives when things aren't going well, but when everything is running smoothly, we don't need him. We all know this—we hear it time and again—but we keep finding ourselves doing it!

Do you think that when things are going well, we need less "straight" paths? Does walking the path that God has planned for us become less important? Or easier?

Think about the parable of the talents in Matthew 25. When much is given much is expected. When your life seems to be going smoothly, God expects you to be witnessing for him and leaning on him and glorifying him just as much as when you are going through trials and tribulations.

The verse doesn't leave much 'wriggle room'. There are no ifs, buts or whens. "In ALL your ways acknowledge him." When life is going well, acknowledge him. When you are going through tough times, acknowledge him. In all seasons, bring glory to God and be a witness for him.

Make it personal

Take some time now to think about your life. Is it good? Is it bad? Write down some things that you can thank God for. No matter what you are going through, there will be some of those. Spend some time thanking him for those things and handing them back to him.

March 3

John 15:15

"No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you."

What a difference there is between Christianity and other religions!

In most religions, God is considered to be remote and domineering. But the exciting thing for us as Christians is that God did not want to be remote from us! God entered our fallen world and established deep relationships of friendship with those who left their old lives behind and followed him.

Because of Jesus' life on earth, he knows what life is like for us and that makes it easy for us to relate to him – to get close to him relationally. Today, God wants that kind of relationship with you! God doesn't want you to feel like his servant; he wants you to feel like his friend. He wants you to know and love him. He wants to speak with you and hear you speaking with him.

Because of who he is, God should call us servants, yet he calls us his friends. Because he is Lord, we owe him our unqualified obedience; yet he asks us to obey him, not because we have to, but because we love him and he loves us.

Make it personal

List 10 things that Jesus did on earth that prove he is not distant.

March 4

John 4:5-8

"So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.' (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.)"

Missional encounters happen in the course of everyday life!

Today's reading begins a series of devotionals looking at Jesus' life-changing encounter with the woman at the well, who had her life transformed when she put her faith in Jesus and led many in her town to faith as well.

Don't miss the massive missional lesson here in these verses that introduce the story. Jesus is not on his way to Samaria on an evangelistic mission. He hasn't been planning this as a ministry event. The disciples aren't even present to observe and learn from Jesus' encounter with the woman. This is no carefully designed gospel encounter.

Jesus is there because he's tired. He didn't go to the well to 'do evangelism'. The conversation just came up. Does "Give me a drink" sound like a planned gospel intro to you? Of course not! It sounds like a thirsty man asking for a drink.

If you want to begin living a missional lifestyle, then like Jesus you must keep your missional antennae up! Anytime, anywhere, a conversation could become missional. Evangelism is not just something you organise; it's a way of life!

Make it personal:

Make it a point today to strike up a conversation with the person 'giving you a drink' — your barista making you a coffee, a waiter at a café, perhaps the person behind the counter at your local servo. Ask God to help you with your conversational skills today:

March 5

John 4:7-9

"A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.' (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?' (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans)"

When developing a missional lifestyle, you must learn to take the first relational step to open up conversations with people!

Jesus was certainly thirsty, but in asking for a drink, both he and the woman knew that he was expressing much more than thirst. He was expressing an open-hearted attitude toward the woman, where she expected the opposite.

Jews despised Samaritans as compromisers and half-breeds. John, writing this story, tells us why Jesus' request surprised the woman—"Jews have no dealings with Samaritans." That's why Jesus' simple request for a drink meant so much to her. It told her that Jesus didn't want to keep his distance. He didn't want to look down on her. He was stepping outside of the norm. She wasn't used to a Jew treating her with respect and openness. His attitude opened her heart to him.

Jesus is challenging you today that if you want to live his lifestyle of sentness, you must have an open-hearted, warm attitude toward people (even people you would not normally get along with). It doesn't mean you have to change your personality, but you may need to change your attitude!

Make it personal

Write down the name of someone that God is bringing to your mind right now: _____ _____. How will you reflect Jesus' open-hearted, warm attitude to him/her today?

March 6

John 4:9-10

"The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?' (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.'"

Engage people in interesting spiritual conversations rather than quoting a memorised gospel presentation to them!

Jesus makes a statement that is just begging the woman to ask a further question. Three questions would have popped into the woman's mind as Jesus spoke. "If you knew the gift of God"—immediately she must have wondered, "What does he mean by 'the gift of God'?"

"And if you knew…who it is that is saying to you 'Give me a drink'"—she must have wondered, "Who is he? Am I talking to a very important person?"

"If you knew…you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."—"I know he's thirsty for some of this well water, but he's suggesting that I'm thirsty for a different kind of water, and that he can give me that 'living water'. Where do you get it?"

When you first begin to live with a sense of sentness, you may not be very good at talking this way. But the more you introduce God-conversations into your relationships with people, the more you will grow in your ability to say things that 'beg the question' and draw people into conversations about these things that matter so much.

Make it personal

Practise today. Try to say something in a conversation that will draw a question from the person you are talking to. Trust God to work through you.

March 7

John 4:10-12

'Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink', you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.'"

You must learn to let gospel conversations develop naturally!

Jesus doesn't begin with the big truth this woman needs to embrace in order to be right with God. He makes a statement that could take the conversation in a meaningful direction and then sees where his Father takes it.

As you read this account, the conversation doesn't seem at all artificial or contrived. It just grows out of the current topic. Jesus says something about thirst and water that will cause the woman to engage more deeply.

What Jesus is modelling for us is a lifestyle that trusts God to work through us. You don't need to launch into a scripted gospel presentation that you have memorised. Rather, start conversations moving in a spiritual direction and trust God to take them where he wants them to go, in his time.

If the person doesn't want to go in a meaningful direction, you can trust God with that too. Remember that God, not you, is the one drawing that person to himself. Trust him and start talking!

Make it personal

What 'current topic' in the news can you use to start a conversation with someone you meet today? _____. How could you take that conversation in a spiritual direction?

March 8

John 4:11-14

"The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.' Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'"

A true conversation is directed by both people!

Sometimes our witnessing to people about Jesus is more like a mini-sermon. We launch into our four points of the gospel, we talk through our memorised verses and we desperately hope the other person doesn't ask a question, because we won't have memorised what to say about their issue!

What Jesus models for us is so different from that approach. His conversation with the woman at the well is more like a dance than a performance. In a performance, one person does everything while the other watches. But in a dance, both partners determine the outcome.

When you read this conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well carefully, you realise that the woman determined the direction of the conversation just as much as Jesus. Jesus is not talking at the woman. Rather, they are interacting! Jesus is the one with the answers, but he is not pushing them on the woman.

Always hold in your mind the truths of the gospel that people must understand, but draw people into a conversation about these things, don't give them a mini-sermon.

Make it personal:

Try to spend a today focusing on listening rather than talking. What difference do you think this will make?

March 9

John 4:13-15

"Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.'"

Don't hold back from talking to people about the ultimate spiritual truths!

You can be so focused on a person's journey towards Christ that you never talk about the destination. You can get so caught up with building the relationship that you never talk about the message of the gospel.

Once you are at the place in your relationship with someone where both of you are open to talking about life issues and discussing spiritual things, it's time to head towards the gospel. Jesus brings up two huge spiritual truths with the woman: First, he tells her that no matter how she searches for what will satisfy her longings, she will never find what satisfies until she comes to him for it. Secondly, he tells her that he can give her eternal life. What he finds is that this woman's heart has been prepared by the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit for this conversation. She's ready to respond.

Jesus is challenging you today not to hold back from sharing the gospel with people in your life. When you sense that there is openness in your relationship with them, trust that God has sent you into their lives to introduce himself to them through you.

Make it personal

Write down what has been 'holding you back': _____. Take time now to ask Jesus to help you overcome that, and trust that he is actively at work to help you introduce others to him.

March 10

John 4:15-18

"The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.' Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come here.' The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.'"

Don't avoid the sin problem!

Jesus has been talking about living water and eternal life. The woman is ready to respond. She says, "Sir, give me this water." But Jesus knows that turning to God not only means accepting certain things as true, it also involves a sin problem that person has—which keeps them from God.

How does Jesus respond to this woman's request for living water? "Go call your husband," he says, knowing that she's living in an immoral relationship. This woman needs to turn from her old way of life to God. That old way of life can never quench her inner thirst, but God's living water can.

As you share Christ with people, help them see, not only the One they need to turn towards, but also the way of life they need to turn from. Help them see that the way of life they have been pursuing will never satisfy their inner thirst.

Make it personal

Write down what you have pursued in life to try and satisfy your inner thirst apart from Christ: _____. How can you share your 'turnaround' story in a way that makes someone 'thirsty' for Christ to do the same in their life?

March 11

John 4:19-24

"The woman said to him, 'Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.'"

Help people understand what it really means to know Jesus personally!

Those you speak with will have no idea what it really means to be a Christian. Many of them, like the woman Jesus is speaking with, will think it just has to do with religious practices. They will think it means being a part of the 'Christian club' called "church", or doing the Christian habits of giving, praying, etc.

Jesus introduces this woman to a whole new way of thinking about God. He tells her that what God wants from her is not greater religiosity, but rather reality. God wants her to worship 'in spirit and truth'. God wants her to really connect with him personally, on the spiritual level. He wants it to be real.

As you talk about Christ with people, help them see past their preconceptions about Christianity to the

real, living Jesus who wants to know them on the personal level and get involved in their lives.

MAKE IT PERSONAL:

Write down 3 preconceptions unsaved people around you may have about being a Christian, and how you could help them see past that to the truth:

March 12

John 4:28-34

"So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, 'Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?' They went out of the town and were coming to him. Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, 'Rabbi, eat.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' So the disciples said to one another, 'Has anyone brought him something to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.'"

Learn to recognise that you have been sent into your encounters with people!

When the disciples left to get food, Jesus was tired and hungry. Now he is refreshed and energised from his conversation with the woman at the well. How does he explain this to the disciples? "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work."

Jesus saw his encounter with the woman through the grid of his sentness. He recognised that he didn't just happen to run into that woman at the well. Rather, he knew that the Father had sent him into that conversation. As you read the gospels, it seems like every time Jesus encounters someone he has a sense of purpose from the Father.

Make it personal

What changes about you and your perspective when you start to see other people through God's eyes?

March 13

John 4:28-35

"So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, 'Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?' They went out of the town and were coming to him. Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, 'Rabbi, eat.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' So the disciples said to one another, 'Has anyone brought him something to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest?' Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest.'"

Pay attention and start noticing all the moments of 'sentness' in your life!

Often we approach evangelism like the disciples. We think that the harvest only comes every now and then in certain specialised circumstances—at special meetings, or on a mission trip, or at an outreach event, or maybe during a conversation we have carefully orchestrated after preparing and praying for months.

Jesus wants the disciples (and us) to learn from his encounter with the woman. "Lift up your eyes", he says. As the disciples looked up they would have seen the people of the town coming out to meet Jesus in response to the woman's testimony. "You don't have to wait for some special 'harvest' circumstances," Jesus is saying. "The fields are white for harvest."

When you start noticing the moments of 'sentness' in your encounters with people, you will begin to see God working in people's lives through you wherever you go.

Make it personal

Look for a moment of sentness as you go through your day today…and then write here how you responded to it:

March 14

John 4:36-38

"Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour."

You are just one part of what God is doing to introduce the people around you to a new life in Jesus!

As Jesus thinks about the responsiveness of these Samaritans to him, he teaches the disciples and us an important lesson. He wants the disciples to see that these people's responsiveness is not because of his awesome words to the woman, not because he and the disciples are amazing.

No, his conversation with the woman simply reaped the fruit of seeds that were sown by John the Baptist's earlier ministry in this area. John's penetrating message that cut through religion and called people to real repentance before God had been doing its work in people's hearts and minds. Those people were ready to respond to Jesus.

Jesus wants you to learn that same lesson. As you consider those in your life that need to put their faith in Jesus, remember that God is the one reaching into their lives, changing their hearts. You fit into the process of what he is doing, but what he is doing goes far beyond you. The important thing is to be available to him. You don't want to miss the role he has for you in the process!

Make it personal:

List here the names of the people who sowed spiritual seeds in your life, before you turned to Christ:

And who are you sowing into?

March 15

John 4:39-40

"Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me all that I ever did.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days.

The gospel spreads through relationships!

You can imagine that Samaritan woman hurrying from the well back to her town, bursting with the awareness that she had just met the messiah. She could hardly contain herself as she started telling people about the conversation she had had with Jesus and her evidence for who he was.

It must have been evident to the people in town that something very transformative had happened to her because many of them believed in Jesus from her testimony. Because Jesus changed someone they knew, their hearts were open to him too.

More than half of Australian university students surveyed said that they do not know any Christians personally. If they knew someone who had been changed by Jesus, then, like the Samaritans, their hearts would be much more open to him.

Has God sent you into a workplace full of people who don't know Jesus? What about your neighbours? What about your club? Your evening courses? Why do you think God would send someone who has been changed by Jesus into personal relationships with people who don't know him? It's time to get your love for Jesus beyond the worship songs at church and into your relationships with people who need him. Let them see the difference he is making in your life!

Make it personal

Would people you work with/ interact with regularly call you a committed or casual Christian? Why?

March 16

John 4:40-42

"So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world.'"

Your testimony is not enough—people must encounter Jesus themselves for their faith to become complete!

These Samaritans began to believe through the woman's testimony of her encounter with Jesus. Their hearts were opened to him because of what she said. But notice the difference in their faith once they have encountered Jesus for themselves. They say, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world." Their faith developed from "we believe" to "we know"!

As people encounter you and other real Christians, they will notice that Christian relationships are very different from secular relationships. This, plus your testimony about how Jesus changes your reactions to the life circumstances they know you are facing, will open their hearts to Jesus. This is the beginning of faith!

But you must pray for them and ask God to reveal himself to them. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. It's when they recognise that God himself is reaching out to them, offering them love, grace, forgiveness, truth, that they will be ready to really trust in Jesus.

Make it personal

Who can you invite to your home for a barbeque, so that your unsaved friends can meet those Christian friends of yours who truly follow Jesus? Write their names and a proposed date here:

March 17

2 Corinthians 8:9

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."

GRACE = God's Riches At Christ's Expense!

A gift is free, but only to the one who receives it. The one who gives the gift pays the cost of it. God's grace is a free gift to us. Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

If eternal life is a gift from God to us, that means that we don't have to do all sorts of good works to earn it—it is free to the one who receives it. So who pays for this unbelievable gift? Read the verse at the top of the page again.

D. Martin Lloyd-Jones said, "The ultimate test of our spirituality is the measure of our amazement at the grace of God." Have you ever really come to grips in your heart with what it cost Jesus Christ to offer you forgiveness and new life?

Make it personal

What have you learned about God and his grace for you in the good times of your life? How will those truths help you get through the difficult seasons of your life?

March 18

John 6:44

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day."

Change your sense of inadequacy about sharing Christ with people to a sense of dependence on God as you share Christ with people!

As you think about the people in your life who don't know Jesus, you don't see how you could ever persuade them that he is the way, the truth and the life. You don't see how you could connect with them at the heart level and make them long for a relationship with God. They don't seem interested. How could you change that?

In a sense, your feelings of inadequacy are perceptive. It's true that you can't do any of those things. The problem is that you are not factoring God into the process! Rather than thinking about what you can (or can't) do focus on what God can do…through you.

This is why prayer is so important to your personal ministry with people. It's not what you do, but what God does through you that changes lives. Why do you think Jesus, living as a man, took so much time for prayer?

Make it personal

Are you disappointed that some of the people you have witnessed to haven't yet accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour? Write their names down and choose to believe that God is using the seed that you have planted and he will make it grow at the right time.

March 19

John 7:16

"So Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.'"

Remember that you are sharing someone else's message!

Sometimes when we are trying to be a witness we feel like we have to come up with some clever way of talking to people about spiritual things or about God. But the fact is, the message we have to share is already clear. When you don't know what to say to someone, just stick to the simple, clear message of the gospel.

God made us in a way that our lives will work as designed only when his life is flowing through us. But we are separated from God because we have offended him personally by going our own way in life and we have broken his laws by ignoring our consciences and doing what we know is wrong.

The result is brokenness in our lives right now, and God's eternal judgment when we die. There is nothing we can do to get ourselves out of this situation. That's why Jesus came. He did for us what we couldn't do. He took God's judgment for our sin when he died on the cross.

That means that we can experience God's forgiveness when we put our faith in Jesus. Because Jesus rose from the dead he is now able to change our lives on the inside and help us begin to live the life he designed for us.

This is the simple, clear message God has given us to share with people.

Make it personal

Write your gospel message out here simply, in 3 points:

1. Our need:

2. What God's done:

3. How we need to respond:

March 20

John 7:37-39

"On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified."

When you see destructive behaviour in people's lives, recognise that it is the expression of their thirst for God!

This is an important part of developing a ministry mindset in your encounters with people. Without this perspective, you will only be able to see their destructive behaviour. You'll think, "Seriously! Can't they see how this is impacting the people around them? Can't they see that they are only hurting themselves?" You might be angry with them or you might pity them.

But remember that God has made them for himself and so they are desperately trying to fill the inner place that only he can fill. This understanding lets you see that their behaviour is really a cry for God, whether they understand that or not. Moving out from this understanding you are able to interact with them with a ministry mindset, rather than simply reacting to them out of judgment or retaliation.

Make it personal

Write the name of someone you know whose behaviour is sometimes destructive:

How is it really an expression of their thirst for God?

March 21

Isaiah 2:5

"O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord." (Please read vs. 5-11)

Don't let anything distract you from focusing your life on the presence and person of God!

The people of Israel had been distracted. They were "full of things from the east" (v. 6); and "their land is filled with silver and gold" and "filled with horses and…chariots" (v. 7) and "filled with idols" (v. 8).

Some of their distractions were clearly ungodly—occultism from the east and idolatry. Other distractions were not wrong in themselves—wealth and power—but made them feel self-sufficient and removed their awareness that they needed God.

But both the things that were clearly ungodly and the things that were merely distractions all worked together to draw God's people away from their daily dependence on God himself. They lost their sense of his presence, his nearness.

Do you hear the Lord's invitation to you today through Isaiah? "let us walk in the light of the Lord." Have financial pressures or financial success distracted you from God? Is your social schedule squeezing God out? Are TV shows or the Internet using up the time you might spend with God?

At the end of life, when we truly see God as he is, we will know that nothing else in life was worth ignoring him. Spend some time walking in the light, with God today.

Make it personal

What could be distracting you from focusing your life on the presence and person of God? What will you do to regain your focus on him?

March 22

Romans 1:14

"I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish."

We do not have the right to be silent about what Jesus Christ has done for us!

Certainly, we have an obligation to God to share Christ with people (2 Corinthians 5:14-21), but why did Paul feel this obligation to people he didn't know? He was under obligation because he was a steward of the gospel and was responsible for passing it on to the people it was given for. God has entrusted the gospel to us, not to keep it to ourselves, but to share with everyone his message of grace.

Paul was under obligation because he had been in the same situation as those without Christ and God had reached out to him. If I have been saved from a terrible situation, and I have the power to rescue others in the same situation and I do nothing about it, I am not doing right.

There are some things about which we have to speak out. If my child is about to chase a ball onto the street when a car is coming and I don't shout out to stop him, I am not doing right.

Today God wants you to remember that sharing Christ with those around you is not just a nice idea — it is your responsibility before God.

Make it personal

Who do you know who needs to know Christ?

List 3 people here and commit to begin praying for their spiritual journey.

March 23

1 Timothy 1:13-15

"…though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost."

God has enough grace for you!

Look what John 1:16-17 says: "For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law

was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." Romans 5:20 tells us: "…but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more"

It's good to recognise that you've offended God in two ways: you've offended him personally, and you've offended his justice. Your words offended him when you've told lies, taken his name in vain or spoken harshly to someone. Your attitude offended him when you harboured anger, bitterness or hatred. Your thoughts offended him when you pursued sensuality or evil.

It's good and healthy to realise the weight of guilt that stands between me and God. But no matter how big the mountain of sin in my life is, the mountain of God's grace is bigger! His grace is "more than abundant" for you. Turn to him now and you'll find, not condemnation, but grace!

Make it personal

How have you seen God shower his love on you despite your shortcomings? Take some time to ask for forgiveness and thank him for his love and grace:

March 24

Romans 1:16

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

Never be ashamed of the message of the gospel!

The gospel message is a simple message: Jesus Christ died for us, in our place, for our sins, and he rose from the dead and is alive today for us to know him. It is a simple message, but that does not make it weak.

The message of the gospel is powerful because God has anointed that simple message with his power to change lives. When a person trusts in what God has done for them through Jesus Christ, God enters into their lives and they are never the same. This has happened time and time again, millions of times around the world.

Never be ashamed of the gospel! Don't worry that a person may not accept it or that they are intellectual and may have difficult questions. You may not have all the answers, but the gospel message will stand up to any scrutiny because it is God's truth.

Share it boldly with people! Talk about how God has used it in your own life. When you take the step of faith in God and share Christ with people, God will begin to use you to impact many people around you with his life-changing power.

Make it personal:

What are the ways you've allowed fear, shame or criticism to keep you from sharing the gospel?

March 25

Romans 1:16-17

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel…for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'"

Be bold to share the gospel with people because it is the only way for a person to be right with God!

God's righteousness is revealed in the gospel because Jesus' death on the cross would not have been necessary if his standard of righteousness was lower. If God could have remained true to his righteous nature and forgiven us, he would certainly have done that. But no person on earth has ever had a level of righteousness acceptable to God. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

God's righteousness is revealed in the gospel because Jesus' righteousness is given to us when we put our trust in what he did for us on the cross. Our guilt before God goes over to Jesus and his righteousness comes over to us. Jesus' pure nature tastes all the grossness of my sin and I stand pure before God in Jesus' righteousness. Only the love of God would reach that far.

And this transaction occurs "from faith to faith". As I share what Christ has done for me, my faith enters another person's heart as they turn in faith to God.

Make it personal

What is one thing that God did for you? Is it healing? Who in your life needs to hear that God can heal? Is it restoration? Who in your life needs to hear that God restores? Is it provision? Who in your life needs to hear that God provides?

March 26

Romans 8:30

"…and these whom He predestined, He also called"

Only God can draw a person to faith in Christ!

God designed people for relationship with him. Without a healthy, living spiritual relationship with God, the rest of our lives do not function like they should. Our relationships don't work well; we are unable to overcome persistent sin; we have no purpose greater than ourselves, nothing to live for beyond our own existence and pleasure.

Without a living relationship with God, the Bible describes us as spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1). Because of this, unless God reaches into a person's life and regenerates their spiritual ability to know him, that person will never recognise God's invitation nor respond to him in faith. God has to "call" a person; God has to "draw" them to himself (John 6:44).

When God puts it on your heart to share Christ with someone you know, and they have not shown any interest in the things of God yet, be sure that you set aside time to pray for God's work in their heart. Pray that God will "call" them to himself, that he will enable them to recognise his invitation in their hearts and respond to him.

That is what the Apostle Paul did. Romans 10:1 says, "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved." God wants you to do the same. He is calling you to help draw them to himself.

Make it personal

Write the three biggest factors that drew you to Christ:

March 27

1 Peter 3:15-16

"But in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame."

Your obedience to God gives power to the gospel in the lives of those who know you!

This week I shared Christ with someone on a plane. As I shared, she spoke with a warm heart about some other real Christians she knew. Their Christian lives had left her heart open for my witness. Other times I have shared Christ with people and they have antagonistically referred to "Christians" they knew who were pure hypocrites. Those Christians' lives had closed the door of these people's hearts to my witness.

Remember that your spiritual choices are always about a much bigger picture than your own relationship with God. Yes, your relationship with God is affected. But people around you will see the reality or the façade of your walk with God and that will affect their response to Christ one day.

God wants you to realise today that the impact of your spiritual choices is always much bigger than you are aware of at the time. The best way to live: simply obey God.

Make it personal

Write down below the three areas where your behaviour most needs to grow to be more Christ-like:

March 28

Luke 5:15-16

"But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray."

The busier we get in ministry, the more we need to get alone with God!

Jesus' ministry was growing. People with spiritual needs were gathering in large crowds to hear him. Many people were getting right with God. It was a spiritual revival. At the same time, many people with physical problems were coming to him for healing. If Jesus had approached his ministry from a natural perspective, he would have thought, "My ministry is growing! I have to capitalise on this moment. I have to be there for people. It doesn't matter what I have to sacrifice personally, the gospel has to go out!"

But what did Jesus do? He "would withdraw to desolate places and pray". Let me say it again, the busier we get in ministry, the more we need to get alone with God. Ministry is a waste of energy unless it is the overflow of my own walk with the Lord. Even ministry into the lives of people who desperately need it is not more important than maintaining my own prayer life and calling on God for his work in and through me. Take time to "withdraw" and recharge with God.

Make it personal

What priority does spiritual growth have in your life? How might your priorities need to change?

March 29

Romans 1:16,18 and Romans 2:5

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel...for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men…but because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgement will be revealed."

God's righteous judgment and wrath will be released on those who do not turn to him through the gospel of Jesus Christ!

Some of the most important truths of life are unpopular, and this is one of them. It is not popular in our day to speak about hell or to say that people we know will actually face God's judgment and wrath. But there is nothing more certain in Scripture than that truth. If you are a Christian and believe the Bible, you need to acknowledge there are people around you who will face God's eternal judgment.

It is unpleasant. But if you ignore it and do nothing about it, then those people may never hear of what God has done for them, at such great pain to himself, to make a way for them to experience His love and grace and mercy instead of his judgment. If they don't hear, then they will not find God's forgiveness and they will be lost forever.

God wants you to share his love with those around you.

Make it personal

What keeps you from seeing people with God's eyes? What keeps you from speaking to them about their eternal destination? It may be distractions such as pride, competition or busyness. How can you limit these distractions?

March 30

Isaiah 41:27-28

"I was the first to say to Zion, 'Behold, here they are!' and I give to Jerusalem a herald of good news. But when I look, there is no one; among these there is no counsellor who, when I ask, gives an answer."

God is looking for people who will speak for him!

When God decides that he will bring his good news to people, he looks for a messenger, someone who will speak to people on his behalf. He places that messenger with the people he wants to reach. When the messenger speaks the good news, God also speaks through that messenger, anointing what they have to say with his conviction so that the person listening has a sense in their hearts that this is God speaking to them through this person.

God wants you to know today that you are his messenger, sent into the lives of the people you will touch today, to share God with them. Don't worry about having some special message memorised to recite to people. Just share in everyday conversation what the Lord means to you and ask the Lord to take the conversation where he wants it to go.

Then, when God opens up that conversation so that you can share the good news of how to find forgiveness through Christ, don't be afraid. Take the leap, believing God will speak through you into that person's heart.

Make it personal

Do you believe that no one is outside Jesus' reach? If so, what are you willing to do about bringing "hopeless" people to Jesus?

March 31

Matthew 7:7-11

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Of if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

God wants to answer our prayers!

Any good father loves to give special gifts to his children, and God is a good Father. When he thinks about you his heart is full of warmth and the desire to bless you. He's waiting for you to start seeking for him and asking of him.

Ask the Holy Spirit what he wants you to ask for and then spend some time listening for the answer. He knows what's best for you. Then if you have never done it, I encourage you to keep a prayer journal for awhile and track your requests and God's answers. I think you will be blown away (as I was) at how much God has done in your life in direct response to your prayers.

Make it personal

When have you seen God come through when you thought he wouldn't? How does that situation give you hope that God will come through when you need him to?

APRIL

April 1

Matthew 5:10-12

"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Eternity changes our perspective on everything!

Without an eternal perspective, you would never say, "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me."

But with eternity in view, everything changes. "Your reward in heaven is great!" Temporary suffering for an eternal reward sounds like a pretty good deal to me. Jesus always lived with eternity in view and so his perspective on life was so different from everyone else around him.

The Lord wants you to learn to look at life like he does. He wants to change your whole value system, your whole life, by turning your eyes to the eternal implications of everything you do and every encounter you have.

If you share Christ with ten people and most of them insult you for it, but one finds eternal life in Jesus Christ, is it worth it? That depends on your perspective.

Make it personal

Ask God today: "Lift my perspective. Help me to see this earthly life through your heavenly eyes."

April 2

Ephesians 2:10

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

God has something specific for you to do!

Do you see it in the verse? There are "good works which God prepared beforehand" so that you would walk in them. God has prepared a job just for you. But don't let that make you nervous because he has also prepared you just for that job!

"We are his workmanship", it says. That word "workmanship" implies very meticulous, highly skilled labour. God has meticulously, painstakingly designed your life-experiences with great skill in order to bring you to a place of readiness for his call on your life.

We readily accept that missionaries have a "call" from God. But sometimes when we are tradespeople or business people or university students or raising children — then we don't see ourselves as having a calling. But actually, everyone of us has a calling from God, a specific way that he wants to use you, something he has designed you for.

Make it personal

Why is knowing your purpose in life important to you and God?

April 3

1 Timothy 1:15-16

"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life."

I received God's mercy as an example to others on the journey to faith!

Think about this statement. Your salvation can't be hidden. You are the salt of the earth, a light on a hill that cannot be hidden. How many times have you been speaking to someone and been uncomfortable about sharing your faith? You feel that they will think you're weird and so you keep your mouth shut or give them the watered-down version.

Your testimony can be an incredibly powerful tool for sharing the gospel. God has put you into people's lives for a specific reason. The example of your life and the way God has transformed you may be the reason that God has brought you into contact with certain people around you. There may be something in your testimony that specifically speaks into those people's lives.

Never think you are more deserving of grace than those around you. A Christian with a superior attitude is just like the Pharisees. Jesus called them a "brood of vipers" (Matt 23:33). Paul called himself the foremost of sinners. There is nothing that turns an unbeliever off quicker than a Christian who thinks he is perfect.

Make it personal

Do you have a superior attitude? Take some time and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you regarding this:

April 4

Psalm 19:14

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer."

Meditation is different from prayer!

Notice that the psalmist talks about two things: first there are "the words of my mouth", and then there is a second thing—"the meditation of my heart". Meditation is distinct from my words. Both prayer and meditation are crucial to our walk with God and our witness in the world. In spite of this, we pray little and meditate almost not at all.

Because of the nature of meditation, it's really important that we set aside a special time for it and a secluded place where the world won't intrude. And it's also important to get quiet. In this peaceful place, we come to God and ask him to guide our thoughts. You may have a particular Scripture or issue to meditate on, or you may meditate on your relationship with someone you want to lead to faith in Christ, or you may simply focus on God himself.

Biblical meditation is different from mystical meditation because it doesn't involve the emptying of the mind, but rather the filling of the mind with Scripture and the things of God, while inviting God to direct our thoughts about it.

Make it personal

As you meditate, it's really good to close your meditation time by jotting down in your journal the key thoughts that came out of it. Can you take some time right now for meditation?

April 5

Luke 15:1-2

"Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'"

You should be the kind of person that sinful people like to spend time with!

"Tax collectors" were the outcasts of society in those days. They were worse than "sinners". They were the people who had turned their backs on God's people and on God himself and were helping the oppressive Roman rulers gouge the people of Israel.

But the Lord wants you to notice that these obviously sinful people were drawn to Jesus. They wanted to listen to what he had to say. They knew that he spoke the truth and that some of it would be uncomfortable but they also knew that they didn't go away from their time with him feeling like dirt.

What they got from Jesus was not condemnation and rejection, but loving truth and warmth and hospitality. God wants people to get that from you too. He has purposely placed you in relationship with people who need him and he wants you to love them and care for them and show them hospitality and also to speak the truth in love.

Not condemning and rejecting, but loving and sharing.

Make it personal

Write below how you think the non-Christians in your life think about you:

April 6

2 Timothy 3:10-13

"You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived."

All over the world those who belong to Christ are tormented and treated unjustly because they choose to live godly in Christ Jesus.

In some nations, believers are being brutally murdered while dreadful deeds are being committed against those who remain for refusing to renounce their faith in Jesus. Some are expelled from their homelands while others experience the heartbreak of families cutting them off from their heritage as they choose only to worship Jesus.

While this is evil, Paul says that "evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." As you pursue living godly in Christ Jesus you should expect increasing opposition and persecution in your daily life.

But you have hope. As you choose to imitate Paul as he imitates Christ, he encourages you saying "yet from them all the Lord rescued me". Likewise, the Lord Jesus himself promises you he is "with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Your hope and strength can be found in Jesus, "for we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Corinthians 5:1).

Make It Personal

Choose a nation in which you know Christians face persecution. Write down a prayer for this nation:

April 7

Luke 15:8-10

"Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Search carefully so that people can be found in him!

In those days ten silver coins were strung together and worn around the head by an engaged woman. It was like an engagement ring. It's obvious, Jesus says, if a woman loses one of the coins on that precious headpiece, she searches very carefully until she finds it.

Remember that in verse 2 the Pharisees were grumbling at how much time Jesus was spending with sinful people. Jesus uses this story to say, "Isn't it obvious? I am searching carefully so that these people can be found!" He wasn't just blasting out the message of truth, he was speaking his message into a relational context. He was being careful about how to connect his message with the people he loved and was trying to reach.

God wants you to have the same approach. Think carefully about how to help the people in your life to see God, and what he has done for them, in the right way.

Make it personal

Write down the names of two people in your life who need Jesus. Then write down something specific that may help each one of them connect with the message about Jesus. Take time to think about it.

April 8

Daniel 3:17-18

"'If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.'"

Later, after God delivered them, King Nebuchadnezzar said, "'Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way.'"(v.29).

Are you in a desperate situation that you can't get yourself out of? God is able to deliver you if you will put him first in your life!

If you are in that situation because of ungodly choices you have made, God may allow you to experience consequences of your choices. But if you put God first in your life, you will come out of the darkness and into the light of God. God will walk with you and guide your life into a place of blessing.

It has been my experience that God always steps into a situation when I completely turn the situation and myself over to him. There is great comfort in turning that tough situation over to God. Jesus says, "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Put him first in your life, give that situation to him and let him worry about it. You no longer have to!

Make it personal

What are some of the problems in your life that you have questioned God about or wondered why they had to happen to you? Do you believe that he can help? Have you asked him for help?

April 9

Luke 15:7,10, 22-24, 32

"Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.… Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.… But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.… It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found'"

God's concern over people's "lostness" is equalled by his joy when they are "found"!

One of the highlights of being in heaven after we die will be experiencing the joy of heaven as people who are still alive on earth come to know Jesus and find God.

Here, Jesus reveals the "joy in heaven" and the "joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents". God wants you to join hands with him in this life as he reaches into the hearts and lives of people you know and introduces himself to them through you. Join him in this, and you'll experience the joy of heaven here on earth as you see people encounter God.

Make it personal

Write out your concerns for this week. It can be financial problems, health issues, relationships etc.

Ask God about his concerns for this week. Ask him what you can do to help:

April 10

John 17:4-5

"I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed."

What has God called me to do this past year?

It is an important question. God has placed you on this earth for a reason. God has a purpose for your life. That purpose gives your life meaning.

The great purpose of all of our lives is to know God, to glorify God and to share him with others. But there is a more specific purpose for your specific life. And this past year fits into that purpose.

How has God been working in your life? What lessons has he been teaching you? What has he been developing in your character? What have you learned about being a part of God's work in this world?

Can you say, as Jesus said, "I have accomplished the work which you gave me to do"? Think about your personal ministry into other people's lives throughout the day. What about your ministry in your church? How has God used you? Praise him for that, and ask him to increase his work through you next year.

Make it personal

Write a description of how God has been using you in people's lives and thank him for this. If you struggle with this, ask somebody who knows you how they see God using you.

April 11

Romans 10:1

"Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved."

If you love someone who doesn't know the Lord yet, pray for their salvation!

If you've shared Christ with someone, pray that God wouldn't let them forget what you have shared with them, that God would let them see that he's made them in such a way that they need him in their lives.

Know someone who's not interested in God? Pray that God would make them interested. Pray that God would disrupt their lives, if necessary, to get their attention.

If there's someone in your family who's not at all interested in your 'religion', don't keep banging your head against that wall. Rather, pray for them. Pray that God will bring about that moment of openness and that he'll make you sensitive to notice it, and bold to take the opportunity, and perceptive to give them time to become more open and to move towards Christ.

Who is it that saves a person—you, or God? Who is it that softens a person's heart—you, or God? Who is it that brings about 'divine appointments' for you to share Christ—you, or God? Who is it that convicts the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment—you, or God?

Then shouldn't you be depending on him a little bit more for the salvation of those whose lives you touch?

Make it personal

Write out a prayer for someone in your life who needs God:

April 12

Matthew 22:35-38

"And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?' And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.'"

According to Jesus, the chief end of your life is to love God with all that is in you!

You may have memorised at some point that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. And this is not in conflict with Jesus' words. But one is the result and the other is the cause. One is the root and the other is the fruit.

The root, from which all other right things in the Christian life flow, is your all-consuming love for Jesus Christ. If you get loving God right, all the other aspects of your life will become right too. If you love God you'll obey him and honour him and live to please him. If you love God you'll love his will for you. If you love God you'll keep trusting him in the hard times. If you love God, he'll fill your mind and your speech.

Why are you here? To love God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.

Make it personal

What are some practical ways that you can "keep your eyes on Jesus" and love him more?

April 13

Luke 12:15

"And he said to them, 'Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.'"

Stop and think about what's important to you!

I think you will agree that there is sometimes a difference between what is important to me and what is really important. I can get so caught up in something that its demands become urgent and begin to squeeze out the really important things in life.

"For one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions," Jesus said. He knew our tendency to lose sight of the important because of the urgent.

Satan wants to keep you focused on the urgent. He would like nothing better than for you to be always rushing to the next thing. Yet, nothing could be worse for your spiritual life than to be too busy to stop and think about your life.

When you take the time to evaluate what is really important in life and then take stock of your life against those values, you are able to put the first things first. What is more important than the eternal life of that friend? Or is getting home 2 minutes earlier more important that obeying God's leading to speak to that person who just served you at the checkout? God is reminding you today to balance your life—with his balance, not the world's crazed rush.

Make it personal

Consider today: where do you need to be "on your guard"?

April 14

John 12:42-43

Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

Does your fear of being a witness point to a deeper issue?

The people in these verses had believed in Jesus. They had received the blessing that comes with that. But God's design is that the blessing we receive in salvation will overflow from our lives into the lives of those around us. In fact, the best part of salvation is becoming a part of God's redemptive work in the lives of the people around us!

It's okay to feel nervous about talking with people about Jesus, but it's not okay to let that nervousness hold you back. Today God is challenging us not to let what other people think of us become more important than what he thinks of us. Behind every choice are your values that drive the choice. Make sure that you give God's opinion of your actions a higher value than people's opinions.

Step out and start spiritual conversations with people. You will feel your heavenly Father's pleasure and know that you made the right choice. And many times you will find that your fears were unfounded and that people around you are also glad to talk about these things.

Make it personal

Commit to start a spiritual conversation with someone this week. Who is someone you could do that with? Why did you choose this person?

April 15

Psalm 119:175

"Let my soul live and praise you, and let your rules help me." (v. 175)

If you were about to die and you cried out to God to give you more time on earth, what would be the reason you would give? Why do you need to live?

My wife and I lived for a few months with some good friends. Every evening around the dinner table we would pray together. When we finished the prayer time and the final "Amen" was said, the kids would all say in unison and with great enthusiasm, "The reason I'm alive is to please and praise the Lord!"

They had it right. The reason God made mankind, was to express and declare his own nature. He made us "in his own image" (Genesis 1:27). It is God's plan and desire for your life that your whole life is an expression of praise to him, showing people what he is like.

When you speak with people, when you react to life's circumstances, when you are with a group of people who are cutting someone else down, when you have an opportunity to share Christ with someone, in every circumstance of life, God is saying to you, "I want you to honour me."

Make it personal

How will your life contribute to the growth of God's Kingdom on Earth?

April 16

Lamentations 3:21-25

"But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him.' The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him."

God's loving kindness and compassion are new every morning!

If this were not true, we would live in depression most days of our lives. We would constantly wonder if God would strike us down today. We would hesitate to come to him in prayer, believing that he didn't really want to see us; we would cower away from him, covered in guilt; we would think of him only as a hard and angry judge whose laws had been offended.

But every morning when you get up, remember that God's loving kindness and compassion toward you are new and fresh today. God is ready to meet with you and renew you spiritually and cleanse you. You are his son or daughter. You may have offended him deeply, but you are still his child and he wants to renew the closeness of your walk with him.

God is reminding you today that whatever you wake up to, you can "hope in him". If you will once again "wait for him" and "seek him", you will once again experience his goodness.

Make it personal

Do you need hope today for a situation that seems hopeless? Ask God for help with that right now:

April 17

1 Corinthians 9:1-23

"Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? …Do we not have the right to eat and drink? Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? …Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.… For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.… I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings."

Living with the mindset that my life is about my sentness takes me, my rights, my freedoms out of the centre of the focus of my life and puts the gospel and its impact on those around me into the centre focus of my life!

Read the passage again and underline the times Paul talks about his rights and freedoms, then note his attitude towards these rights and freedoms now that he is living as a sent one. Paul will give up almost anything in order to lead someone into a saving relationship with Jesus.

Make it personal

What can you give up in order to make more time for the things that matter in life?

April 18

Read 1 John 1:5-10

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (v. 9)

It is foolish to try and deceive God about your spiritual life!

How easy it is to try to pretend to ourselves and others that things are great in our spiritual life, when they really aren't. But when we are dishonest with ourselves and with God about our spiritual lives, it leads to our hearts becoming hard.

This passage tells us that we can either walk in the darkness or in the light. It tells us that if we walk in the darkness, we have zero chance of really fellowshipping with God, but if we walk in the light—confessing our sins, being open with God, ourselves and each other, not hiding our struggles—then we will have fellowship with God and with one another, and we will find total forgiveness and cleansing.

Yes, even as Christians we need forgiveness. Not the forgiveness of God as the judge declaring us "not guilty" and giving us eternal life. That forgiveness has been granted once and for all when we put our faith in Jesus Christ. The kind of forgiveness we need today is the forgiveness a child needs when they have disobeyed their loving father. They need to bring their disobedience into the light and ask forgiveness and make the relationship joyful again.

Make it personal

Is your relationship with Jesus `joyful'? Is there something you need God to forgive you for today? Bring your confession and reflections before him:

April 19

Read Isaiah 6:1-8

"And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here I am! Send me.' And he said, 'Go…..'" (vv. 8-9)

If you read this whole passage you'll see that Isaiah had a very powerful spiritual encounter with God that revolutionised his life and ministry.

Isaiah had already been involved in ministry. He was already a prophet. He was already delivering messages of judgment on other people. But when he encountered God in all his glory and holiness, Isaiah forgot about the condition of other people. He could only see that his own spiritual condition fell so far short.

When God's angel came and touched Isaiah's lips and told him that his sins were atoned for and that God had cleansed him, Isaiah was suddenly very sensitive to the things of God. He could hear the desire being expressed within the Trinity as God the Father said to the Son and the Holy Spirit, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

Isaiah stepped forward and became one of the most used men of God in the Bible.

Are you involved in ministry to others? You need to focus on your own spiritual life, too. You need to encounter God, deal with any hidden sins and find cleansing for a new sense of God's call on your life.

Make it personal

Think of some of the good things that you've put first in your life. How have they distracted you from your relationship with God?

April 20

Acts 1:8

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

In everything you do, you have a choice. You can do it in your own power, or you can do it in the power of the Holy Spirit!

God has placed his Holy Spirit in your life to empower your life to be lived for his glory. The world we have grown up in teaches us to rely on our own abilities in life; it teaches us to believe in ourselves and be confident in ourselves. But God wants us to believe in him and be confident in him.

If you choose to live life in your own power, you will only accomplish normal things. But if you choose to live life in God's power, following his leading, then your life will be marked by the activity of God which cannot be explained by your own abilities.

It doesn't mean you will be well-known or famous, but your life will show people God's power.

God doesn't just want you to rely on him for the huge issues of life, but for your everyday life and interactions with others. Learn to put God first in your choices and depend on his power in everything you do.

Make it personal

Write a prayer and ask God how he wants you to expand and refine your goals so that they reflect your trust in his great vision for you and for the world.

April 21

2 Samuel 24: 24

"But the king said to Araunah, 'No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing.' So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver."

Cheap worship isn't for God!

David had to go to the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite and build an altar to the Lord to stop a plague. Araunah was ready to give David whatever he needed, for free. But David insisted that he himself should pay for it. He said, "I will not sacrifice burnt offerings that cost me nothing." David didn't want to offer God cheap worship.

These days we aren't requested to burn offerings on the altar. That's not how we worship God! Jesus himself said that God is looking for people to worship him in spirit and in truth.

But I wonder how much of our worship is cheap worship? Cheap worship exists when our worship costs us nothing. When we come to God, but do not intend to give ourselves to him. We listen to the songs, but we don't sing our praise to God. When we listen to prayers, but we don't bring him our own intercession.

We hesitantly lay a dollar when the offering comes by because we have to, not because we want to. We leave the church building and we are more concerned with meeting our own needs than helping others. We don't share the good news of salvation with others because we don't want to risk embarrassment or can't be bothered.

That's what cheap worship looks like! Learn from David and choose to offer God something that costs you. Give God your time, your life, your dreams, your songs, your prayers…. Choose to sacrifice everything for him and his Kingdom.

Make it personal

What would "expensive" worship look like for you?

April 22

Matthew 28:18-20

"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"

Have I been fulfilling the Great Commission this year?

We call these verses the Great Commission because they tell us Jesus' final call on our lives before ascending to be with his Father in heaven. As Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, Jesus handed on to us the ministry that he came to earth to begin.

God's desire for you, whether you're a pastor, a student, an IT specialist, an accountant, or a tradie, is that whatever you do, you lead people to Jesus Christ at the same time.

God doesn't want you to neglect your job in order to 'preach' to people. Rather, look for opportunities in your everyday conversations to turn the discussion to spiritual things, to share what God means to you, to ask if you can pray with someone about something in their lives, to talk about the way to get right with God.

If they're open and interested, keep the conversation going. If not, just wait for the right time.

Make it personal

Ask God to show you an opportunity today to share something about him. Write your prayer here:

April 23

Jeremiah 23:21-22

"I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds."

Spend time listening to God if you wish to speak to people in his name!

We like speaking into people's lives, but we must be careful to be God's servant when we do so. We want to be thought of as wise, as having a word in season. We want to be the one to encourage or challenge someone. But what's God doing in their lives? What does he want to say? That's crucial.

These prophets were bringing a message of encouragement to God's people. Perhaps they thought that's what God wanted to communicate but they never spent time with God to be led by him or get his message. What God wanted to do was warn his people. That warning was never delivered. If it had been delivered, the people would have repented. But because the prophets didn't take the time to listen to God, both they and the people would face God's judgment.

God wants you to spend time with him, just reading his word and listening to him. Then you can minister to others the way he wants you to.

Make it personal

Have you ever taken the time to pray about being able to listen to and hear God's voice? Why is this an important thing to do?

April 24

Proverbs 7:6-23

"And I have seen among the simple, I have perceived among the youths, a young man lacking sense, passing along the street near her corner, taking the road to her house…

…With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him. All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast till an arrow pierces it's liver; as a bird rushes into a snare; he does not know that it will cost him his life." (vv. 7-8, 21-23)

Don't expose yourself to temptation!

The book of Proverbs has a way of taking life principles and making them very obvious. As we read this passage, we agree that this young man lacked sense. He has placed himself in the way of temptation, not realising that "it will cost him his life".

God is reminding you today that the cost of sin in your life is always far greater than you expect. So you should avoid it at all costs. Once you put yourself in the place of temptation, you have lost half the battle already. If certain TV shows are a source of temptation, you know what to (or not to) do. If certain places or people are the source, then do something about it!

The more we keep ourselves pure and the more we are attuned to God's desires rather than our own, the more God can use us in the lives of people around us and in his plans for the world.

Make it personal

How can you avoid temptation in your life today and keep yourself useful to God?

April 25

Philippians 2:17

"Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all."

How could Paul be glad that he could be poured out as a drink offering? Because he looked at his life in the light of the gospel!

Everything Paul did and said was to bring others to Christ. 1 Corinthians 9:22 says, "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some." Paul was ALL about the Great Commission. As a result, he looked at his suffering in the light of how it could bless others. His perspective was not about himself and how much he was suffering, it was about others!

Are you going through a tough time at the moment? How do you think God may be using this time for you to be a witness to others? Are you growing in your faith during your suffering? Can you, in turn, encourage others through that growth?

Do you have trouble understanding why something is happening? Talk to others about it. In you're talking to them, they may be blessed and be drawn closer to God. Remember that we are not perfect. Your struggles and sufferings show you to be human.

Make it personal

If you are suffering, bring it to the Lord and ask him to use you through your suffering. When your perspective changes from an inward focus to an outward focus, the burden becomes lifted. Cast your cares upon him and let him take the reins of your life and you will be amazed at what he accomplishes through you during your suffering.

April 26

Hebrews 4:14-16

"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need."

God's grace in our lives flows from a deep experiential understanding of the issues of our lives!

If God had not become a man and lived life on this earth with all the painful realities of growing up and experiencing pain and rejection and temptation and loss and grief and joy and accomplishment and energy and tiredness and discouragement—if God had avoided all of that, then we would have a hard time relating to him on a personal level.

We would think of him as too exalted and removed from the daily issues of life. But God is saying to you today in this passage that his grace reaches into these everyday issues of your life. Because God understands life in this world, you can be confident, as you come to him in prayer, that he is ready to get involved in your life at this level.

Make it personal

List at least 3 ways that Jesus experienced what daily life is like for you. What part of your daily life do you need his help with today?

April 27

James 4:6

"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

Pride is defined as "a feeling of deep pleasure or satisfaction derived from one's own achievements, the achievements of one's close associates, or from qualities or possessions that are widely admired."

Do you feel that you have your life together, that you don't really need God in your life, that you are the master of your own fate, that God is just like a little boost on your self-made journey through life—like the spare tyre in the boot of your car?

Then, brace yourself! Sooner or later in your life, God will allow the things you're trusting in to come crashing down. Or he'll let you come to the place where you recognise that none of your accomplishments has done for you what you thought they would, in your inner life.

When God finds someone who acknowledges that they need his forgiveness, who recognises that they need his help, who turns to him in faith—then God pours out his grace on that person. He forgives them, helps them, and transforms their inner life.

Do you sense today that your pride has kept you from really turning to God in your life and putting your trust in him?

Make it personal

What is God saying to you today about where he is in your life? Is he in the driver seat? The back seat? Or tucked away in the boot for emergencies?

April 28

John 6:35

"Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.'"

No matter how fulfilled some people may seem on the surface, if they're not right with God you can be sure that their lives are not complete!

God has built into us a hunger for him. He made us for relationship with him, and so he built into us a sense of incompleteness without him. When you step into meaningful conversations with people who don't know Jesus, speak with the confidence of someone who knows that God has sent you into that person's life to meet a deep inner need for God.

They may be trying to meet that need through relationships, through activities, through success in their business, through drugs, through achievements, through entertainment, or through religion.

Their devotion to those things may make it seem like they have it all together. But you know with certainty that there is something still missing. There is an inner restlessness that can only be stilled with the love of God.

Speak with confidence! No matter what image or persona they try to express, the reality is that they need God and nothing else will bring wholeness and rest to their souls. And conversely, however broken their lives are, if they come to Jesus their hunger can be satisfied.

Make it personal

Write down the name of someone God is putting on your heart today:

What are some ways you can show compassion to you friend who is hurting and needs God?

April 29

Proverbs 14:12

"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death."

Stop and think about where you are headed!

Where you are in life does not matter nearly as much as where that way of life will take you. Where you are in your thinking is important because of where you will end up if you keep thinking that way.

A good way to evaluate where you are headed is to think about where you were in your life two years ago compared to where you are now. Have you been moving toward God, becoming more like Jesus, building your life more around his word? What about in your thinking? Have you been allowing God's way of thinking about life, revealed in the Bible, to become the basis for your way of thinking about life?

If not, then God is calling you today to make a change. If your life is not headed towards God and his word, then it is impossible to get there without changing directions. This change does not happen automatically because you want it to. You must stop and think about what is taking you in the direction you are going, and what it would take to move you in God's direction.

Is God living his life through you, or are you only asking him to help you out occasionally? Do the people around you see you living God's life and the difference that makes, or are you just living on the secular level?

Stop and think—it's the first thing to do. Then make choices and take action, confident that God's ways

lead to life!

Make it personal

Look at all the questions in this devotional. Try to answer them honestly in order to identify an area in which you need to grow. Is it your thought life? Is it your prayer life?

April 30

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

"And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

At the heart of Christianity is the cross of Jesus!

When Paul thought of the one thing he would communicate in his preaching to the Corinthians—the one thing that mattered more than anything else he could say—he spoke to them about "Jesus Christ and him crucified".

That's the one thing God wants you to grasp in your life most clearly because the message of the cross sums up everything you must understand about God, man and life. The cross shows you the holiness of God the Father that could not maintain a relationship with his Son when Jesus took the sin of the world on himself. It also magnifies the justice of God that couldn't be satisfied any other way. And it reveals the immense grace of God that overcame all barriers to give you a way to be redeemed.

Make it personal

How does today's Scripture verse set you free from any performance anxiety about having the right words when it comes to sharing your faith?

MAY

May 1

Mark 15:39

"And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God!'"

God was glorified in Jesus' death!

That centurion had never experienced a crucifixion like this one. Jesus did not cry for mercy or try to escape; rather, he prayed for the people who put him on the cross, "Father, forgive them". He spoke to the other victims of crucifixion about life with God after death. As he was dying, for three hours in the middle of the day, the sky went dark. When Jesus died, there was a massive earthquake and the rocks were splitting. It was a terrifying experience.

As the centurion took in all that he had heard and seen from Jesus, he could come to only one conclusion: "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

God was not only glorified in Jesus' miracles and in his words that so amazed his listeners. The glory of Jesus' life went way beyond his training of the disciples. God was also glorified in Jesus' suffering and death.

Don't think of the hard times you face as opponents of God's work in your life. God is as much glorified by your spiritual response to those times as he is by your times of great victory and blessing.

Make it personal

What is one challenging situation you are facing right now? What promises from God's Word can encourage you in this season?

May 2

1 Corinthians 1:18,21-25

"For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God… For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

What Jesus did for us at the cross is simple, but powerful!

People thought that spiritual truth had to be complex and spectacular, but the message of what Jesus has done for us made him seem weak (he was killed by sinful men) and foolish (it seemed too simple).

But we who've turned to Christ know that this simple message of Jesus taking our place before God's judgment and dying to bear the penalty for our sins opens a whole new life for us. Now that God's justice is satisfied we can have a wonderful relationship with him and he can work through us to fill our lives with meaning and purpose!

Make it personal

How could you explain, in simple language, what Jesus did for us on the cross?

May 3

2 Timothy 4:5

"As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry.

God is sending you into the lives of others.

As I think about the Christians God used in my journey towards faith in Christ many faces come to mind. I think of my dad who faithfully took us kids along to church, read bible stories with us and made us kneel down next to the lounge to pray. He instilled in me a belief in God.

I think of my primary school scripture teacher who faithfully taught me scripture for 7 years. She explained the bible stories in a way that made the Bible come alive. I think of my youth group leaders who faithfully served us each Friday night and put up with my crazy attitude and probing questions.

I think of my Christian boss as I began to work on his farm in my teenage years. He encouraged me as a young man and always seemed to have time for a chat. I think also of that girl in my senior years of high school, who God used me to bring me back to himself. She faithfully held to her standards of living showing herself to be as beautiful on the inside as she was on the outside.

I thank God for sending these people into my life. He used the life of each one in a powerful way to influence me towards Christ. They also spoke the word of God into my life. Each one answered my questions and took the time to have conversations with me. Some even dared to lovingly talk to me about the things they saw in my life that were unhealthy, hurtful or harmful to others or myself.

Make it personal

Think through all the people you will encounter today? Then pray and ask God to provide an opportunity for you to speak about him in each encounter.

May 4

2 Thessalonians 3:13

"As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good."

Life can sometimes be hard, can't it? You get home from a long day at work and just need some 'me time'. You have a date with some friends but just feel like curling up in a dark corner and sleeping. This can be especially true for an introvert.

What happens when you are going through tough times in your life—when everything you do seems to be putting emotional energy outwards? What happens when you're sick or have a 'man cold'? This verse seems impossible, doesn't it?

What happens when we are having a terrible day, and your non-Christian friend just wants to unload on you? Or you are in a rush somewhere and you feel God's gentle prompting to ask the checkout person how they are going?

How do we keep from becoming weary of doing good – no matter what? How do we consistently put others first in all that we do?

The good news is this: God never intended for US to be able to do it, did he? Remember the Great Commission and the amazing promise at the end? "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt 28:20)

So when you're tired of doing good remember that the Holy Spirit is with you. Don't rely on your strength rely on his.

Make it personal

Take some time to thank the Holy Spirit that he is with you wherever you are. Hand your day over to him and commit to do good in every situation you find yourself. Ask for his strength and acknowledge that it is him working through you.

May 5

Hebrews 4:12-13

"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account."

Use God's word to win victories within your own heart!

JC Ryle said, "There is no holiness without warfare". He was right, wasn't he? Don't you sense the battle taking place within your own heart—a battle between God's way and the world's way, a struggle between what you know is right and what you feel like doing?

As you struggle to choose what is right, God's saying to us today that there's no more significant weapon in that battle than the word of God. You must learn to make it your habit every day to fill your mind with God's word as you start your day. All day long the world will be pumping its worldview into your heart and mind. At the same time, your own fallen nature will be working to deceive your mind.

But God's word pierces through all of that and lets you see things in the light of God's perspective.

Make it personal

What is something you do every day for at least 15 minutes? Is it more important than reading God's Word?

May 6

2 Thessalonians 1:3-4

"We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring."

Learn from other people's experiences of God's faithfulness!

Paul shares about the Thessalonians' faith because he knows it will strengthen the faith of others. In your own spiritual walk you'll face many challenges to your faith; so prepare yourself by reading the experiences of faith of those who've gone before you.

Start with stories of faith in the Bible—it's full of them! David and Goliath, Daniel and his friends, Joseph's attitude toward his suffering, Moses' repeated lessons of faith, Gideon and his 300 men, the disciples with Jesus in the stormy sea. Then read the lives of great Christians like Hudson Taylor, George Muller, Martin Luther, Amy Carmichael, Brother Andrew, and so many more. Learn from the lessons of faith God took them through.

Learn with Elisabeth Elliot that "God is God. Because He is God, He is worthy of my trust and obedience. I will find rest nowhere but in His holy will, a will that is unspeakably beyond my largest notions of what He is up to."

Make it personal

Who is your hero of faith? And why? What can you learn from them? And how can you learn from their experiences?

May 7

Colossians 4:2a

"Continue steadfastly in prayer…"

Prayer is our essential breath as Christians!

In this passage about soul winning in Colossians, Paul starts with what he considers most important in a Christian's witness. "Continue steadfastly in prayer." The first thing God reminds us to do if we want to see people come to Christ is to pray. Prayer isn't the last resort when we've tried everything else. Prayer is first. In fact, prayer is before we do anything else, and prayer is during and prayer is after. That is, prayer is the air we breathe.

Prayer is recognising that God's in charge, that we need God, that apart from him we can do nothing. Prayer links us to God and his resources, prayer taps into God's power. Prayer helps us focus on what God can do, not what we can or can't do.

God wants you to realise that this applies to all of life, not just to witnessing. If you can't handle a situation in your life, if your finances are out of control, if relationships are strained, if you can't see how the future will work out for good, if you're in need of guidance, strength, hope, wisdom—the place to start is prayer. "If any of you lacks wisdom let him ask God…" (James 1:5).

Make it personal

How is your prayer life? How are you going to make it better this week?

May 8

Galatians 5:16-17

"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do."

Spiritual growth includes spiritual battle!

Your flesh—your old sinful nature—will be left behind when you leave this fallen world. But until then you'll face a daily battle. Your new nature, stirred up by God's Spirit, longs for intimacy with God, pursuing his goals for your life, spending time with him, looking for ways to minister to others.

But your flesh resists everything that takes the focus off yourself and the gratification of your desires. It works against the time you're taking right now to read this devotional. It tries to distract you. It links arms with the secular world and the forces of evil to distort the perspective on life that God is building into you through his word.

How can you resist this powerful inward enemy of your spiritual life? By continually walking by the Spirit—turning to him for guidance, leaning on him for strength, calling on him for help when you face temptation, asking him to change the way you approach your work and your relationships and everything.

Make it personal

How do you normally react to stress in your life? How do you think God wants you to respond?

May 9

Colossians 4:2-4

"Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison – that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak."

Pray for and look for opportunities to share God's word with the people around you!

Do you see what Paul asks for? He asks for prayer "that God may open to us a door for the word". God is reminding you today of the power of his word in a person's life.

Think of how he has used his word in your own life. Never underestimate the power of God's word when you share it with someone.

God wants you to ask him for opportunities to share it with people. As you pray for those opportunities, be sure that you also make yourself available to God for him to use you in this way when the opportunity does come.

Then keep your Bible handy, because you will probably need it!

Make it personal

Write out a prayer asking God for open doors with people today to share his word and point them towards Christ.

May 10

Matthew 5:33-37

"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' But I say to you, do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil"

If you always say what you mean, then you don't need to make vows, because people will know they can trust your word!

Let your "yes" mean "yes" and let your "no" mean "no". We only create problems for ourselves when we try to deceive one another or tell "white lies" or exaggerate or downplay a serious situation.

If you are always honest and open about your statements and commitments, then you will have a reputation of credibility and people will know that they can take you at face value. If the people around you can clearly see the difference in your life and your values, then they will wonder. Their spirit will desire what you have. Live as a witness for Jesus. Speak the truth and always say what you mean.

Make it personal

The Lord wants people to have confidence in you because you represent him. Is he calling you to speak with integrity in a certain situation in your life right now?

May 11

Colossians 4:2a

"Continue steadfastly in prayer…"

How should we pray? We should pray intently!

"Continue steadfastly in prayer," God says. Give constant attention to prayer. Continually give yourself to prayer. Make it a non-stop part of your life. Be busily engaged in it. Pray at frequent intervals in your day.

Don't just make it an occasional detour in your life, but make it something you do all the time. Pray when you wake up in the morning. When you get into a train full of people pray, "Lord, let me shine for you here." When you enter your office, talk to the Lord. Say, "Lord, I am yours in this office; use me today. Speak through me to someone today. Lord, my boss is pressuring me. Help me have a peaceful character for you today."

In conversation with someone, when you have an opportunity to speak for the Lord but don't know what to say, pray! "Lord, put your thoughts in my mind and your words in my mouth. Lord, give me the wisdom and the courage. Lord, I'm yours. Please use me today."

Be devoted to prayer and make it part of your whole day. Sometimes we start to lose heart in prayer because we haven't seen the answers to our prayers as fast as we want. But don't give up. Be constant! be devoted! "Persevere in prayer" is another translation. Keep at it.

Make it personal

Do you believe that prayer can change things? Why or why not?

May 12

John 8:28-29

So Jesus said to them, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him."

If you want God to work through you in the lives of the people around you, always act on his leading in your life!

Jesus modelled this lifestyle for us. He tells us that he didn't act on his own authority, but acted and spoke as the Father led him. But what was the secret to his sensitivity to the Father's leading? How did he know what the Father wanted to say and do through him in various circumstances? He clearly spells out the secret: "I always do the things that are pleasing to him."

Do you long to live this kind of life where God is leading you moment by moment, showing you what he wants you to do and say in the lives of those around you? Learn from Jesus that God will get involved in your life like that when he sees in your heart, as he did in Jesus' heart, that whatever he prompts you to say or do, you will "always do the things that are pleasing to him."

Make it personal

Write down one thing that you sense God is prompting you to act on in a way that's pleasing to him:

How are you going to take action on it this week?

May 13

Proverbs 21:1

"The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will."

God is able to change anyone's heart when we pray to him!

God can do that. God can turn hearts. And that's why we should pray. We may have someone in our lives who seems unchangeable. We have done all we can but nothing works. But God shows us that even the king's heart is in his hand to do what he wants to with it.

In 2 Timothy 2:25 (NIV), it says, "Those who oppose [God's messenger]… he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth."

Do you see that? We can gently instruct or teach people or witness to them, but in the end, it is God who changes them, God, who grants them repentant hearts. He uses our witnessing, but we should always remember that it is God who changes hearts; and when we pray, we are tapping into the mind and heart of God and we can ask God to do the things we can't do.

Make it personal

Why do you think people find it so difficult to trust and accept God's offer of salvation and grace? How can you pray?

May 14

1 Corinthians 15:1-3

"Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you – unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance that I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures."

There is no salvation without the message of the cross!

When you think about the people in your life who need to know Jesus, and you wonder what to say to them about the gospel, the truths in this passage of scripture are the core of it. Paul tells us that this is "of first importance!" That is, you might be able to miss other points of truth, but this is one truth you cannot miss if you want to be right with God: "Christ died for our sins."

There are lots of lessons to be learned about suffering and commitment from Jesus' death on the cross. But they are not why he died. You feel guilty when you do what's wrong, and so you should. God made you that way. You know you deserve his judgment. But here's the awesome news of the gospel God's reminding you of today: Christ died for our sins! He took the judgment you deserved so that you can experience the love of God that he deserves.

Make it personal

Take some time right now to thank God that Christ died for your sins. Ask him to help you share this message "of first importance" with a humble, grateful heart.

May 15

Proverbs 18:2

"A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion."

Listen before you leap!

This is especially important when it comes to sharing your faith with someone. When you think about evangelism, does listening come to mind? For most of us, evangelism means sharing the gospel with somebody; witnessing means talking about Christ to people; sharing my faith means that I am talking.

Because of this, we memorise gospel outlines to make sure we cover all the points that we need to when we launch into our "gospel presentation". But what makes some people so effective in leading others to Christ is that they make evangelism a part of their everyday conversation with people. They don't launch into a gospel presentation; rather, they engage with people about their lives. They ask questions and they listen.

Many non-churched people roll their eyes when a Christian starts sharing with them. Not because they aren't interested in Christ, but because they know that the Christian is not interested in them or what they have to say. The Christian only wants to recite his one-size-fits-all gospel presentation.

But the Lord is reminding us today in this passage that such an approach is not wise. Don't only delight in "expressing your opinion." But delight in understanding the other person and connecting your experience of Christ and the message of the gospel to what they are going through.

Make it personal

What do you communicate to someone when you ask him or her a question and then listen to the answer with focus and interest?

May 16

Read John 14:15-24; 15:9-11

"Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.'" (John 14:23-24)

Is my life marked by obedience to God?

We talk so much about worship, and being close to God, and how much God wants to help you in your life, and about our love for God, that obedience can be pushed into the background. Obedience—it sounds like an Old Testament concept, doesn't it?

But Jesus is reminding you today that the way you know how much you love him is by how much you obey him.

As you think back over the past months and your relationship with the Lord, ask yourself, "When God has convicted me, or guided me, or challenged me to make something a part of my life, or called me to do something, how have I responded to him? Has the pattern of my life been obedience or disobedience?"

Do I respond in faith…or resist in stubbornness?

Make it personal

What do your answers to these questions show you about your love for God? How can you deepen your love for him?

May 17

2 Corinthians 4:18

"…we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."

Has my life been focused on the right things over the past year? What am I focusing on so far this year?

What things are not eternal? Grades, jobs, money, promotions, winning, losing, travel, reality television, cars, computers, sound systems, clothes, physical appearance, redundancy, houses, iPods, sex, popularity, shoes, books.

What things are eternal? God, your spouse, your kids, your parents, your relationship with God, heaven, hell, God's Word, the spiritual impact of your ministry to others, the influence of your love in someone else's life, the life-change of someone putting their faith in Jesus Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit through you.

Read those two lists again, then read the verse again, then think about your life, then listen to God. What is God saying to you today?

You know that you get to choose whether your life will be focused on now or on eternity. If you don't make a conscious choice, your sin-nature will make the unconscious choice for you to focus on the here and now.

God wants you to recognise the path you are on and make a conscious choice to live for the things that really matter. The second list.

Make it personal

What's on your second list that you need to focus on today?

What is on your first list that you need to start caring less about?

May 18

2 Corinthians 5:17-20

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

One of the biggest reasons you are on this earth is to carry on Jesus' ministry of leading people around you into a right relationship with God!

This passage just reiterates what Jesus said to us in his final commission before leaving earth, when he gave the Great Commission. If God's purpose for you was simply to love him deeply and glorify him fully, then he could have taken you straight to heaven when you were born again. Why did he leave you here? To share Christ with others!

Who are the people in your life who do not yet know Christ? People at work, in your neighbourhood, at uni, on your sports team? Could you start a spiritual conversation with one of those people this week and see where God takes it? Take a risk. Aren't you glad someone told you?

Make it personal

Specifically ask God for an opportunity to have a spiritual conversation with someone in your life this week, and to give you the courage to take the opportunity when it comes.

May 19

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures."

Jesus is alive!

The good news of the gospel doesn't end with Jesus taking the judgment we deserve when he went to the cross. That is only the first of two huge truths that make up the gospel. The second huge truth is that God the Father raised Jesus from the dead. He is alive today.

It's easy to think that the gospel is just about forgiveness, which is what Jesus accomplished at the cross.

But today God is reminding us that the gospel doesn't end with forgiveness; it is also about transformation! Yes, God wants to save you from judgment through Jesus' death. But he also wants to revolutionise your life by Jesus' life in you!

Too many believers only live out half of the truth of the gospel. They joyfully receive God's forgiveness, but then they keep on trying to live on their own strength, rather than inviting Jesus to live his life in and through them.

Make it personal

Jesus is saying to us today, "I'm alive and waiting to bring new life into your life. Stop resisting me and allow me to change you." Will you let him?

May 20

Micah 6:6, 8

"With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

One of God's great purposes for you is to live out his desire to help those who are helpless!

God wants you to be concerned, not only with evangelism, but also with justice, and kindness. James tells us that "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world." (James 1:27)

God is the great Helper and if you are growing to be more and more like him, you will naturally grow in your love to help people also. Don't try to be just like someone else. Rather, think about how God has made you and consider how you can help people with your unique personality and gifts.

We must hold God's great purposes for us in balance and constantly ask his Holy Spirit to guide us and show us what God is doing through us in this world. He'll show you as you walk humbly with him.

Make it personal

How will you go out of your way to show God's "kindness" to someone today?

May 21

Proverbs 24:11-12

"Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, "Behold, we did not know this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work?"

Don't avoid the reality that those around you are facing a terrible eternity of God's judgment—get involved in sharing Christ with them!

God has made it so plain that every person has offended his justice and his person and faces an eternity of his judgment and his anger. When Jesus' love moved him to go to the cross for us, Jesus' death satisfies both God's justice and his anger. That means that when a person turns to God with faith in Jesus, their guilt and offence is removed.

But people all around us do not understand what has been done for them. They are blindly walking toward the cliff-edge. Who do you know who is like that? They need to be held back, to be warned, to be told about the love of God expressed in Jesus Christ.

Make it personal

Do you see God's heart in today's passage? What will he say to us who know his love if we do not share it with those that are still in danger? Ask God to give you the words they need to hear.

May 22

1 Peter 2:19, 22-24 (NLT)

"Christ, who suffered for you, is your example. Follow in his steps. He never sinned, and he never deceived anyone. He did not retaliate when he was insulted. When he suffered, he did not threaten to get even. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly. He personally carried away our sins in his own body on the cross so we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. You have been healed by his wounds!"

Christ was wounded so you could be healed!

A believer in Ethiopia hosted a special Easter dinner in his home for his international guests from Ghana and the US. He and his wife brought a sheep to their home and had it slaughtered to provide a special meal that was also very meaningful.

He explained that this ensured that the meat was fresh, but was also a special reminder that Jesus suffered death for us so we could share his life. "Sheep are quiet animals," he remarked. "Even when they die, they don't make any noise. This reminds us of how Jesus gave his life for us."

Some find it distasteful to talk about death, either of people or of animals. But the central fact of our faith is that the Son of God was willing to endure a terrible death to pay for the sins of humankind. We were not redeemed by money–there would never be enough money to pay for all of our sins against God and each other–but by the blood and the death of the Lamb of God. And through his suffering, Jesus was a role model for us when we suffer: he did not complain, or try to get back at those who hurt him; he did not gossip or demand his rights.

Make it personal

When you suffer small or great hurts, will you remember his wounds, and let his love heal your heart?

May 23

2 Timothy 2:1-2

"You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

God has been investing biblical understanding and spiritual teaching into your life so that you can pass it on to others!

Think about the men and women of God who have been your Bible teachers. There are years of training and discipline that went into their development to be effective teachers of the Word. They are valuable to God. The fact that he has invested their time in you shows that he wants to use you. Just as he used others to develop them, he is using them to develop you.

God may not be developing you to preach and teach publicly, but still, he wants you to know that he desires you to pass on what has been entrusted to you in terms of biblical truth. As you go about your day, as you have conversations with others around you, mix biblical insights into your conversation. One day someone will share with you how much you helped them grow spiritually and it will be because you were faithful with the truth God gave you.

Make it personal

Is there someone you will see today with whom you can share something from God's word? It could change their life. Write their name down below and pray for them:

May 24

Romans 5:6-8

"For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die – but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

You must realise that you're helpless to save yourself if you want to find God's help!

'Helpless' means there is no way you can do it. You can't get right with God by going to every meeting your church puts on. Nor can you make things good between you and God by giving money to good causes. Being good to your family won't do it either. Nor will getting involved in worthy causes and helping the needy.

All those activities are good, but trying that route to having a good relationship with God overlooks the important thing—doing good doesn't deal with the ways you've already offended God and done what you knew was wrong.

God's justice lovingly ensures that all the wrongs of this world will be made right, that ultimately no one will get away with the pain they've caused. But that same justice also creates an insurmountable obstacle to our efforts to be right with God.

God waits for us to realise that we're helpless to save ourselves and to receive as a gift the forgiveness we could never have earned. Have you?

Make it personal

Examine your heart today before God. Have you accepted his gift of forgiveness? Are you living dependent on him…or still trying to earn points through doing good?

May 25

John 9:4-5

"We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Only one life—it will soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last!

You can hear the sense of urgency in Jesus' words here, can't you? You aren't just alive in this world—you've been sent into it. Life is short, so get busy with God's agenda for your life! There's no time for messing around. No time for wondering how God's agenda might impact on your comfort levels. It's time to act, time to do.

It's time to ask your neighbour what they think of Jesus. It's time to ask your workmate, "Can I pray for you about the crisis you're facing?" It's time to invite your son's soccer coach around for a BBQ. It's time to go deeper than the surface in your conversations with people. It's time to invite your biking buddies to the next men's event at church with you. It's time to talk to your children on the spiritual level. It's time to pray with your spouse. It's time to ask God how he wants to use you to introduce people to him.

As you think about your life, when do you think it will be time for those things? The time is now!

Make it personal

Write down one thing on "God's agenda" you will take action on today:

May 26

Proverbs 25:4

"Take away the dross from the silver, and the smith has material for a vessel."

What is there that hinders God's work in your life? Get rid of it!

The Hebrew dictionary defines dross as "that which was separated from precious metal". God is in the process of refining you, bringing out all the beauty of who he created you to be. That beauty may have been buried under the dirt of how you were treated in the past; it may have been obscured by your sin nature, which puts self first, instead of God. But God is unearthing it and purifying it. In the end, he will have a beautiful work of silver to display his glory and grace.

God is inviting you to join him in this work, to look at your life and see what there is that you can remove in order to make you more fruitful for God and more sensitive to his leading. What takes up your time and keeps you from spending time with God? It may not be a sinful activity, but just a distraction from the best thing. Get rid of it. What distracts you and uses up your energy that should be given to something else? Get rid of it.

"Take away the dross from the silver, and there comes out a vessel for the smith." Embrace how God is crafting you.

Make it personal

How does the knowledge that God is creating something special in you make you feel differently about the situations (both good and bad) in which you find yourself?

May 27

Colossians 4:3-4

"At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison – that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak."

When we pray, God opens doors for us to share Christ and he helps us make the most of those opportunities.

We need to speak the right words in the right way. We need the courage to speak up at the right time. We need to be able to speak to the needs of the people we're sharing with in a way they'll understand. And that's the work of the Holy Spirit in us. Isaiah 42:7 foretold Jesus coming to "open eyes that are blind," and the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of the spiritually blind as we prayerfully rely on him in prayer. It's the Holy Spirit who makes it clear and personal to people.

2 Cor. 4:4 (NIV) says, "The god of this age [Satan] has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ." They just don't get it. And it's not just an intellectual problem—it's a spiritual problem. Satan's actively blinding their minds.

Make it personal

Who in your world is blinded by Satan? How can you show them kindness today?

May 28

Colossians 4:2

"Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving."

Concentrate on "being watchful" in your prayer!

Watch out! God is telling us to be careful not to let it just become a tradition or a half-hearted ritual. He wants there to be an intensity and focus in your prayer. Recognise that we have a spiritual enemy who wants to distract us, so be watchful. Be alert! Don't become sleepy or lazy in prayer. Some things that can help us be watchful in prayer are:

1) Pray out loud. It's a great thing to be able to pray quietly in our hearts and know that God hears us, and we often need to do that, especially when others are around. But there's a special intensity when we pray out loud to God. It helps us really focus and be alert and express our hearts. So find a place alone and pray out loud to God.
2) Use a list. This helps me stay focused and watchful. Make a list of people to pray for on each day of the week - family, friends, your church, Bible study group members, church leaders, missionaries, people who don't know Christ yet. Make a list of requests you can tick off as God answers.
3) Pray together with others. This can help us as we encourage each other with our passion for God.

Make it personal

Create a list of people and cause you will be praying for this week.

May 29

Romans 14:7-9

"For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lords. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living."

Jesus Christ has the right to be the Lord of your life!

'Lord' is not just a lovely title for Jesus. It reflects his rightful place in your heart and mind. As Lord, he rules. He doesn't simply give opinions or advice. His word carries authority. In fact, he said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." (Matthew 28:18)

He doesn't rule by intimidation and fear. He's a good ruler who rules by love, who's trustworthy and kind and wants the best for his people. But he is Lord. He's your friend, but he is Lord. "So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lords."

Jesus lived during his time on earth as a man. He was fully human—suffering, experiencing loneliness, rejection, and pain, even ridicule. It's easy to think that is the sum of what Jesus is like. A real person who can sympathise with us and understand our pain. That he is, but he's reminding you today that he's also fully God.

He is Lord!

Make it personal

Can people tell that Jesus is really Lord of your life? How is it making a difference in the way you drive? In the way you talk to your family? In the way you spend your money and time?

May 30

Titus 2:7-8

"Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us."

Live in a way that "adorns the doctrine of God our Saviour" in every respect!

As you go about your day, people are watching you. At work when you get given a task to do that everyone else avoids, people are watching you as you carry out that task. As your wife snaps at you or your husband grumbles towards you, your children are watching how you respond. As that car in front of you swerves into your lane your passengers and the people about see how you react. At that party, people are watching how you behave and are listening to your conversation.

Remember that how you live out your life today shows people who Jesus is. People are watching you to see what difference Jesus makes in your life, your decisions, how you speak and what you talk about.

God wants you to realise today that your daily activity and interactions can be a megaphone that declares his grace to those around you by living in a way that adorns the doctrine of God our Saviour in every respect.

Make it personal

Write down below one area where you need God's help to grow to be more like Jesus.

May 31

John 10:39-42

"Again they sought to arrest him [Jesus], but he escaped from their hands. He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at first, and there he remained. And many came to him. And they said, "John did no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true." And many believed in him there."

Live as a witness and trust God to do his work in people's hearts over time!

As you read these verses it's clear that John the Baptist's witness was a huge factor in these people believing in Jesus. It's also clear that they did not believe at the time John talked to them about Jesus. When God gives you a chance to speak to someone about Jesus, or to share a bit of what he means to you, and they are not ready to put their faith in him on the spot—don't think negatively about that encounter.

Rather, be excited and thankful to God for the chance to be a part of that person's journey towards faith in Jesus. What you shared has gone into their minds and will impact the way they think about Jesus and process other things in the future. Keep looking for further opportunities to share with that person or to pray with them. Pray that God will bring other people and experiences into their lives to reveal himself to them.

Trust God that you have been a part of his plan for their lives.

Make it personal

Who is someone that you've shared Jesus with, but it feels "unfinished"?

Write their name here and pray for God to work in their life today, either through you or someone else:

JUNE

June 1

Isaiah 3:10-11

"Tell the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds.

Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, for what his hands have dealt out shall be done to him."

God cares about what you do!

Salvation—being forgiven for your sins and welcomed into God's family forever—is a free gift. It was purchased for you by Jesus when he went to the cross for you.

You don't earn your salvation by being good enough. You don't lose it by being bad enough. It's entirely dependent on what Jesus did, not what you do. You simply receive God's gift by faith. No wonder the Apostle Paul exclaims, "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15)

But God is reminding us today that although salvation is a free gift, it does not mean that God doesn't care how we live after we're saved. Just the opposite—the terrible price Jesus had to pay for our forgiveness shows just how much God hates sin.

Today, Isaiah is telling us one of the basic truths about how God has set up this universe. Those who do what's right will ultimately be blessed for it and those who do what's wrong will experience negative consequences. Any actions that seem to have escaped their consequences in this life will find justice in the next. It's never a mistake to do what is right.

Make it personal

How does today's Scripture verse encourage you to do what's right? And how does it spur you on to help others find forgiveness in Christ?

June 2

Matthew 22:36-40

"'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?' And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.'"

The second biggest thing your life is about is to love those around you!

"The Law and the Prophets" is how the Jewish nation at that time referred to the whole Bible. Jesus is saying that the whole Bible is really telling us about two big things—how to love God and how to love the people around us.

These are the two things that God wants you to think about. How could you love God more fully, and how could you show more love to the people around you? As you think about your relationships with the people you see every day, is your part of the relationships most clearly defined by your love for them?

Make your life count for what is really important.

Make it personal

Who could you spend some time with today? Who could you listen patiently to today? Who could you forgive today? Who could you give a love gift to today? Who could you encourage today?

June 3

John 12:37-38

"Though he [Jesus] had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

You being a good witness does not guarantee that a person will put their faith in Christ!

Jesus was the perfect witness. He was sent by God the Father, filled with the Holy Spirit, used scripture, spoke with authority, convicted people of sin while also showing grace and love. What's more, he did "so many signs before them".

Yet "they still did not believe in him." Sometimes we take too much upon ourselves. We think we are responsible for how a person responds to God. The reality is that all you can do is be a faithful witness, trusting God to work through you. In the end, that person will choose to say yes or no to God. Sometimes they will say no, even if the one who is witnessing to them is Jesus Christ himself.

Make a commitment to living the lifestyle of a witness for Jesus, regardless of whether the person you are praying for decides to trust Christ.

Make it personal

What's going to help you be resilient in living this lifestyle as a witness?

June 4

John 13:37-38

Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times."

Part of learning to live the lifestyle of a witness is failing along the way!

Peter was determined to live for Jesus, no matter what. But Jesus knew Peter was going to fail. When Peter denied Jesus, that denial was sin; it was wrong. Yet it was still part of Peter's journey of learning to love Jesus more than anything else.

As you learn to live as a witness, there will be times when God presents you with a wide open door to speak with someone about your relationship with Jesus and, like Peter, you will freeze up and not stand for Christ, or you may even go as far as Peter and try to hide the fact that you are a Christian.

When you realise what you've done, you will feel guilty and disappointed in yourself and you will know that you have hurt the heart of Jesus. But that is not the time to give up on living as a witness. Think of what a powerful witness Peter became!

Learn from your failure. Bring it to the Lord and ask for his forgiveness. And next time, say something for Jesus when he opens the door of opportunity.

Make it personal

What do you need to bring to the Lord for forgiveness? Take a moment to ask him now to give you more opportunities, and for his power to speak up for him. Write down your prayer for strength to move forward:

June 5

John 13:34-35

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Your love for people is your strongest testimony as a Christian!

By far the biggest thing that causes totally secular people to consider Christ is their relationship with real Christians; and in those relationships the biggest thing that gets their attention is not that you have answers to all of the life's big questions, nor that you are super involved at church—no, the thing that attracts them to Jesus is how a real Christian loves.

They are used to people pretending to love in order to get their own way. They are used to manipulating and being manipulated. But unconditional love? That's something that makes them sit up and take notice of Jesus.

Think about your life. Consider the past 24 hours. How have you showed the love of Jesus to the people in your life? Is there some specific encounter where you see that you have not represented Jesus' love? Does it sometimes seem impossible to love somebody who really irritates you?

Remember that when you are unable to love someone, Jesus is able and he is in you. Invite him to love people through you and see what a difference it makes.

Make it personal

Who do you need Jesus' help to love?

Why is it important to show people Jesus' unconditional love?

June 6

John 14:5-6

Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Don't be hesitant when it comes to sharing with people the truths of the gospel!

When someone asks a question about spiritual things and there is a clear biblical answer, share it boldly, without hesitation or apology. What the bible says, like Jesus' statement to Thomas, may not fit well with the popular view of the culture surrounding you, but the power of God's word will never come through when you apologise for it on the way.

Rather, simply say it as truth and if you know a verse of the Bible that talks about it, take them to the verse and show them it. Make sure you have an app on your smartphone that has the Bible on it so that you and they can look at the verse together as you read it.

It doesn't mean that you club people with the truth. While clearly sharing what the Bible says, make sure you are not the one doing all the talking. Ask questions. Find out what they think. Interact with them.

When you don't know how to respond to something they say, talk with your Christian friends about it and get their ideas. You won't become an amazing witness for Jesus all at once—but you will gradually grow in this ministry to the people around you.

Make it personal

Get a Bible app on your smartphone, and earmark key verses you could use in sharing your faith. Write here what Jesus is saying to you personally through our Scripture verse today:

June 7

John 15:4-5

"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

Jesus wants to be a witness through you!

There is a way of living the life of a witness that is not overwhelming and does not depend on your ability to persuade or convince people to become Christians. It is the way God designed our Christian lives to be.

What is it about this way of life that would transform my ability to live as the New Testament describes? It is a relationship with Jesus that focuses on your relationship with him so that his life flows through your life. His witness comes through your witness.

How does Jesus describe our Christian lives when they are not lived this way? "Apart from me you can do nothing." Do you feel like that pretty much describes your witness for Christ—"nothing"?

But look at the other side of the equation: "Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit!"

Take some time with Jesus now and ask him to teach you this way of life that is constantly inviting him to live through you, to witness through you to the people in your life that need him.

Make it personal

Spend some time thinking about your work, your ministry, your relationships etc. How fruitful are you in these areas? What can you do to become more fruitful?

June 8

John 15:20-21

"Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me."

When you develop the lifestyle of a witness you will see all the different responses to Jesus.

There will be people whose hearts are ready, who are searching. These people will be eager to talk with you and to receive what you share with them as they journey towards Christ.

Others will be open to discuss these deeper things with you but not ready to respond to Christ yet. You are sowing seeds that will need time to germinate and develop in their hearts and minds.

Some will simply dismiss you as irrelevant. With these people, you should keep loving and looking for chances to go deeper. But recognise that their hearts are not open and you shouldn't push it. Wait and pray for things to change.

But there will be some who are angry at God, or at the least, aggressive about him. Because of that they will lash out at you with their words and try to put you down or make you seem stupid.

Here's the thing to recognise: you will never have the conversations with those who are ready to respond to Jesus if you are not willing to have the conversations with those who reject you because they are rejecting him. As they say, "It comes with the territory!"

Make it personal

Pray for those people you know who seem to be resistant to or are rejecting Jesus at this point. Write their names here and ask God to help you show them his love:

June 9

John 16:7-11

"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged."

When you live as a witness, convincing people to trust in Jesus is not up to you!

As a witness, you will love the people around you. You will invest in your relationships with unchurched people you encounter. You will look for opportunities to speak about life issues on the deeper level. You'll share with them about your relationship with God. You'll weave the gospel into your conversations. But none of those things will bring a person to salvation. What you do is not the most important factor. What the Spirit does is the key!

The Holy Spirit takes your words and actions and fills them with his spiritual power that penetrates into a person's heart and mind, convicting and convincing.

You must cultivate the awareness of the Spirit's presence with you as you interact with those who need Christ. Even as you talk and relate to them, be in prayer, asking for insight and for the Spirit's anointing on your words and actions. There's power in that way of living!

Make it personal

Why do you think it is important for you to be filled with the Holy Spirit? Do you think it's possible to be a good witness without the power of the Holy Spirit?

June 10

John 17:3

"And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

Eternal life is the kind of life that comes from truly knowing God.

How can a person know God? Through Jesus Christ whom he sent into the world to create a bridge between God and us!

Don't try to be super clever and complicate what is really simple. There is only one true God. Knowing him brings a different quality of life—the life we were created to live. God sent Jesus into the world to make a way for us to be right with God and start a relationship with him. Jesus did that by dying on the cross in our place so that we could be forgiven.

Our forgiveness removes the barrier between us and God. With forgiveness comes adoption into God's family and the beginning of life with God in it.

There are many ways to express this truth, but these simple truths will always be there at the heart of the gospel (our good news)!

Make it personal

Write in simple terms here what you could share about how it feels to know "the only true God":

June 11

John 17:15-17

"I do not ask that you take them [Jesus' followers] out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."

The best place you can be, from Jesus' perspective, is in the world!

Stop and read Jesus' prayer for you again. He specifically asks the Father NOT to take you out of the world, but rather to protect you from Satan's attacks, which you will experience if you are in the world.

Jesus does want you in church meetings and in your small group gathering—to be strengthened for the battle, to be trained to be more effective in the world. But at church or in your small group is not Jesus' favourite place for you to be. His favourite place for you is out in the world. When you go to school or uni, when you chat with your neighbours, when you interact with the other soccer players or soccer parents, when you say a few words to your waitress at the restaurant, whenever you are interacting with people in the secular world—that's when Jesus is most happy with you!

Learn to speak with Jesus as you head out into the secular world each day. Acknowledge to him that the world is your mission field that you go out into as a witness for him. Pray by name for the people you know you will be encountering each day, asking God to use you as a witness.

Remember, you don't have to be an evangelist, but every Christian is sent into the world as a witness for Jesus!

Make it personal

Has God asked you to go somewhere in faith and you did not obey? What were the effects of your disobedience?

June 12

Nehemiah 6:1-4

"Now when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it (although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates), Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, 'Come and let us meet together at Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono.' But they intended to do me harm. And I sent messengers to them, saying, 'I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?'

And they sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner."

Don't get distracted from the main thing God wants you to be doing!

When you come to an understanding of how God wants to use you in this world and work through you in every situation you find yourself in—then you begin to focus on that and start making a difference. You can be sure that when you start to focus like this, the enemy will try to distract you, either through fears and concerns, or with conflict, or even with other good things.

Don't get distracted. Think about Nehemiah's response to the distractions thrown at him: "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down." If necessary, cut back on some of the other good things you're doing so that you can focus on God's purpose for you. Remember that the disciples had to do this as demands on their time grew (Acts 6:1-6).

Make it personal

What is your life filling up with that is taking time away from God's mission to those in your life who need to meet him? Take some time to hand those distractions over to God and do some pruning of good, but not as important activities. Write down some specific action points here:

June 13

John 21:17-19

He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."

When you develop a ministry mindset it radically changes how you approach every part of your life, even your death!

Looking at these verses, did you notice the part in parentheses? Those are not my words—they are part of the Bible text. The Apostle John puts those words in, to help us understand what Jesus was saying to Peter. Jesus was telling Peter how he would die. But look at how John describes it: "This Jesus said to show by what kind of death Peter was to glorify God." Jesus didn't tell Peter to sit down and prepare himself for some shocking news. No, Peter saw his coming death as yet another way to glorify God to the people around him!

It took Jesus' disciples more than three years to learn to look at life this way, and it will take time for you too. But do you hear God's challenge to your heart today—to look at every encounter with every person in every circumstance in your life (even the ones facing you today) as an opportunity to represent God to people, a moment of sentness, a ministry opportunity, a God moment, a divine appointment, and yourself as an ambassador for Christ to both the believers and secular people in your life.

Make it personal

Take a moment and write down the people and circumstances you know you will encounter today, then pray through them and ask God to help you glorify him in those moments of sentness.

June 14

Isaiah 6:1

"In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple." (Please read vv.1-5)

We would never be the same if we saw the Lord!

Think about what Isaiah says—"I saw the Lord". Imagine it! Isaiah was in the temple, where he probably often spent time. We don't know why he was there or what he expected. But we know that God broke in on Isaiah's awareness and allowed him to see God in the fullness of his glory. That encounter changed Isaiah forever. He would never be the same.

There's so much that God wants to do in your life through his word, the Bible; he wants to transform you by the renewing of your mind. He also wants to empower you through the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. But in addition, there's an aspect of the transformation he desires for you that doesn't come from a renewed mind, or from a greater dependence on the Holy Spirit, but only through a personal spiritual encounter with God himself.

God may not give you the same kind of vivid experience that Isaiah had, and he will probably meet with you through his word and through prayer, or maybe in a meeting, maybe even in a totally unexpected place. But I encourage you to begin asking God to reveal himself to you personally.

Make it personal

How have you "seen the Lord" in your life? Write it here:

June 15

Isaiah 6:1

"In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple." (Please read vv.1-5 again)

Jesus Christ is the highest authority in this universe!

"I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne." In Isaiah's vision of the Lord, the Lord wasn't battling for authority;

he wasn't struggling over the throne. No, he was sitting in absolute power and authority over all things.

In John 12:41, the Apostle John quotes a verse from later in this chapter of Isaiah and clearly states that it was Jesus that Isaiah saw on the throne. Jesus himself said to the disciples, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18).

In Ephesians 1:20-23, the Apostle Paul declares that God the Father "raised him [Jesus] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."

Make it personal

Today I encourage you to physically get on your knees before Jesus Christ and speak with the one who has all authority in heaven and on earth.

June 16

Isaiah 6:1

"In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple." (Please read vv.1-5 again)

God is far and away greater, higher, better, bigger, more awesome and magnificent, more beautiful and different than any other thing that exists or ever has existed or ever will exist!

None is like God!

When Isaiah says, "I saw the Lord…high and lifted up;" it is like he is saying, when I saw God in his unconstrained glory, I realised that God stands alone in his category. He is not only different from any other thing, but he is infinitely better and greater. He is above everything else that is!

No wonder the psalmist cried out, "One thing have I asked of the Lord, that I will seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple." (Psalm 27:4)

No wonder that when all of the humanity sees God as Isaiah did, "…every knee should bow…and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:10-11)

Make it personal

What is God revealing to you about himself today?

Can you picture him exalted on the throne, yet interacting with you? Respond to him right now.

June 17

Isaiah 6:1

"In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple." (Please read vv.1-5 again)

God's glory always accompanies his presence!

The "train" of a robe is the long part of the robe that trails behind the king. It represents the king's glory and majesty.

When Isaiah saw the Lord in all his beauty and greatness and magnificence, the train of God's robe filled the temple. That is, there was an overwhelming sense of the glory of God!

This is the same thing that happened when Solomon first dedicated the temple. 2 Chronicles 5:13-14 tells us: "the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God."

The more you have a personal encounter with God, the more of his glory you will begin to see—the evidence of his presence—in everything. In the circumstances of your life, in the Bible, in your prayer life, in your worship, in your fellowship with other believers, in your ministry to others, in God's provision of your needs.

At every turn, you will find reasons to honour and praise God for his kingly presence filling every corner of your life.

Make it personal

When was the last time you saw the evidence of God's presence?

June 18

Isaiah 6:1-2

"I saw the Lord…Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew." (Please read vv.1–5 again)

A personal encounter with God removes all your pride!

There are many different kinds of heavenly beings, which we lump together and call "angels". The Bible talks about angels, archangels, principalities, powers, cherubim and seraphim. These that Isaiah saw were the seraphim, which means "burning ones". Their name implies that they have a brilliance and glory about them.

These are probably the same beings that appeared to the shepherds at the birth of Jesus. When the first one appeared, Luke tells us (Luke 2:9) that "an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear."

The appearance of one of these angels brought awe and fear to those who saw them, and yet the far greater brilliance and glory of God causes even these great and amazing beings to cover their faces. They also covered their feet, a sign of deep humility before God.

If you find yourself thinking that maybe your opinion is almost as significant as God's opinion, or placing a low value on God's place in your life, then you need to set aside some time simply to ask God to reveal himself to you in a greater way.

Make it personal

Make time now to ask God to reveal himself to you in a greater way. Write out a prayer recommitting yourself to keeping God in the highest/first place in your life.

June 19

Isaiah 6: 3-4

"And one [of the angels] called to another and said: Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.' And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke." (Please read vv. 1-5 again)

The holiness of God is the most unavoidable thing about him!

In the Hebrew language that Isaiah used, saying a word twice magnifies its meaning greatly. In Isaiah 26:3 the word "peace" is used twice in the Hebrew, but in English, we translate it "perfect peace".

If saying "holy" twice would mean "perfect holiness", what a huge emphasis it is when the angel says "holy, holy, holy"! Exposed to the fullness of God's being, that angel is overwhelmed with the inexpressible, unavoidable, irreducible, unutterable, perfect holiness of God and the fact that the holiness of God is his glory. In a voice that shakes the massive foundations of the temple, he cries out, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory."

Isaiah never forgot it. The holy 'different-ness' of God became one of the great themes of his life. When you treat God as holy, people around you notice it.

Make it personal

God wants to help you see his holiness today. Take some quiet time and just think about what Isaiah saw and heard, and ask God "the LORD of hosts" to show you his holiness.

June 20

Isaiah 6:5

"And I said: 'Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" (Please read vv. 1–5 again)

You'll only really understand yourself when you have a personal encounter with God!

Isaiah's immediate response to his personal encounter with God wasn't great joy, excitement and vigour. No, Isaiah was devastated. He'd thought quite well of himself. He had a good self-image.

But suddenly that self-image was shattered by his exposure to God. In the face of God's presence, holiness and glory, Isaiah suddenly realised that he wasn't the centre of his own existence, that his sense of his own goodness was a delusion in the face of God's holiness. Here was this unfallen, perfect angel covering his face in the presence of God. What hope did Isaiah have?

Isaiah fell before his great God a broken man, aware of his weaknesses, failings and sins. That is just where he needed to be; it was where God wanted him. That brokenness was God's goal in Isaiah's life.

It is God's goal in your life too. Brokenness comes first; anointing comes later. Tears come first; joy comes later. Confession comes first; healing comes later. God comes first; then he makes you what you need to be. But you'll never find that brokenness until you encounter God himself.

Make it personal

Have you had an experience of brokenness that led to healing and anointing? Talk with God now about what he is saying to you:

June 21

Isaiah 6:6-7

"Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.'" (Please read vv. 5-7)

Brokenness and confession from me lead to forgiveness and restoration from God!

The angel touched Isaiah's lips with a coal from the sacrificial altar. God gave the people of Israel the sacrificial system as a symbol of what Christ would do for them at the cross. Jesus had not yet come and so God gave them the symbol of the substitutionary death of an animal as payment for their sins. But really it was the great sacrifice of Jesus for us that would make a way for our sins to be "taken away" and "atoned for".

After Isaiah's heart cry of brokenness and despair over his own sin, "then" came God's forgiveness.

God's reminding you today that he doesn't want you to downplay your sin and make it seem not so bad. What he responds to in your life is open confession and grief in your heart about your sin against him. And he's also assuring you that when you see your sin the way he sees it and you come to him with it, he's so ready to restore your relationship with him to relational closeness.

Make it personal

What is the difference between a mistake and a sin?

June 22

Isaiah 6:8-9

"And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here I am! Send me.' And he said, 'Go.…'"

Brokenness and restoration make you usable to God!

Look at the chain of events in Isaiah 6. First, Isaiah had a devastating personal encounter with God ("I saw the Lord" – v. 1). This changed his whole view of life and of himself; he became a broken man before God ("woe is me, for I am lost"– v. 5). His brokenness and confession led to total forgiveness and restoration from God ("your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for"– v. 7). That new heart-condition then made him sensitive to God's heart and God's leading in his life ("And I heard the voice of the Lord"– v. 8).

What started the whole process that ended in such a powerful ministry, bringing great glory to God? It was Isaiah's personal encounter with God. Don't try to bring yourself to a place of brokenness. You can't do it. It must begin with you truly coming to grips with who God is and encountering him personally.

For some, this deep personal encounter with God happens at their conversion. For others, it comes later in their Christian lives. God may meet with you in this special way several times in your life. The result will always be brokenness—and a new anointing!

Make it personal

How has the process of brokenness and restoration made you more usable to God?

June 23

Isaiah 8:19

"And when they say to you, 'Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter,' should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living?"

God wants you to depend on him alone in your spiritual life!

There are many 'spiritual' alternatives readily available today. Tarot cards, palm reading, séances, auras, crystal energies, witchcraft, white magic, mediums, mystics—all these and more invite you to take part in their approach to life and power and the future. However, alternative spiritual pursuits are not an option for you as a Christian.

Notice that Isaiah does not say that there are no spiritual forces or reality involved in these pursuits. Some of them may be tied into demonic or other spiritual forces and offer real results. But that is not what makes something right.

"Should not a people inquire of their God?" Today God is saying to us, "I want you to come to me when you have concerns about issues in your life!" Pursuing those other things will only lead to "distress and darkness" (v. 22) in your life.

If you will begin consulting God about the issues of your life and bringing them to him in prayer, you will find that he is responsive to your prayers. He is ready to act for you! And remember when you pray about something, to trust in God's response, which may be different than you had hoped.

Make it personal

How could you use today's Scripture verse to help someone looking for answers in New Age and other 'spiritual' alternatives? Write your thoughts here:

June 24

John 8:12

"Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'"

Never forget the darkness that was in your life without Christ!

Jesus brought light into your life. You started living in a new way. But all around you are people still in the darkness, people Jesus wants to bring into the light…through you.

There is the darkness of our own fallen nature. Without the work of Jesus Christ changing our inner life, we are trapped by our own selfishness—unable to change even the things we hate about ourselves. Even when we see our way of life hurting people we love, we can't stop it.

Then there is the darkness of the secular world that completely leaves God out of life, glossing over spiritual things by pushing us to focus completely on satisfying the physical desires of our bodies.

And there is the darkness of the forces of evil that are actively working to keep people from understanding the truth of the gospel.

Piercing all this darkness is the beautiful light of the Lord Jesus.

As you interact with the people around you today, rather than trying to argue people into faith or trying to change their minds, focus your conversations on Jesus himself. Talk about the light he has brought into your life. The light of forgiveness, love, grace, friendship, transformation. Help them see him and let the light do its work in their lives.

Make it personal

Write down 3 ways in which Jesus has pierced the darkness in your life with his light and transformed you:

June 25

John 12:24-26

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him."

If you want to follow Jesus, learn to invest your life where he invested his!

You may be comfortable with your life that is focused on the other religious people around you who already know the Bible and are like you in many ways. But listen to Jesus' sense of sentness when the Pharisees wondered why he was spending so much time with secular, non-synagogue-attending sinners: He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17).

Jesus spoke of being sent "into the world". Now put that together with his statement in our passage today: "If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also."

Don't make it your priority to keep your life comfortable. Make it your priority to get into the world, to spend relational time with secular, non-churched sinners. What you want is to just hang out with your fellow Christians, but that is not Jesus' way. Don't ignore your Christian friends, but keep your focus where Jesus kept his!

Make it personal

How can you show compassion to other people today, particularly in your family?

June 26

Isaiah 5:20

"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter"

There is such a thing as absolute truth, despite how 'good' and 'sweet' popular opinion may seem!

God is not just a power that can be bent in whatever way suits us. God will not be what we want him to be or what we think he should be. He will not behave according to our plans; nor will he adjust his morality to fit our expectations.

Remember, God was here long before humanity existed. God is who he is, not who we want him to be.

Our job is not to decide what God is like, but to find out what he is like. He has a moral nature that defines morality in his universe. He has revealed his moral guidelines in the Bible and in his Son Jesus.

When we start redefining what God has said about morality, or sexuality, or spirituality, or marriage, or love, or any other area of right and wrong, we are setting ourselves against who God is and how he has revealed himself.

Today the Lord is reminding us to go to his word for our guidance on the issues of life. It makes life so much simpler and ultimately sweeter when we trust God's wisdom and obey him.

Make it personal

How will this conviction affect your interaction with secular people who think it is ridiculous to believe that only one group of people have the truth about religion?

June 27

Proverbs 4:23-27

"Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you. Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you. Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil."

If you want godliness to flow out of you, guard your inner life!

What flows out of your life comes from inside you. This inner life—the whole non-physical part of you—is called your "heart" in the Bible.

God's clear message to us from this passage is that we must constantly work to take care of our inner lives. The pressures of deadlines and financial issues and temptation all work together to distract us from our inner lives and make us focus on our outer lives. But if you want your outer life to stay in balance and not overwhelm you, you must make your inner life your first priority.

Take time with God each day. Make a point of putting time aside for him. Develop your walk with him. Ask him to talk with you don't just talk at him. Look at your priorities. Are the most important things in life coming first? Fix your gaze on them; don't be distracted.

Make it personal

What are some ways in which you guard your heart? List them down below. What else can you do to guard your heart?

June 28

Luke 5:15-16

"But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray."

The greatest priority in the life of a witness is to take time to pray!

There is a big difference between finding time to pray and taking time to pray. You will never find time. You are too busy and when you aren't busy you are doing some stress-relieving recreational activity or just resting. You will never "find" time to pray. Taking time, on the other hand, expresses priority. It shows that you believe something to be more important than other things.

This is one part of learning to live as a witness that can't be overlooked. You MUST take time to pray. Set apart specific time every morning (even if it's brief) to pray about your encounters with people during the day. Also use in-between times (like when you are taking a shower) to pray about how God wants to use you. Set aside one of your regular trips in the car (going to work on Wednesdays, for example) as a prayer time. Don't turn on the radio or your favourite podcast during that trip.

As the Father expanded Jesus' ministry, Jesus held even more tenaciously to this priority of prayer. Do we need prayer less than Jesus did?

Make it personal

What specific times will you repurpose in your life for prayer?

June 29

Joshua 1:5-9

"No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

God's presence will give you the courage you need to press forward with your godly goals!

From God's words, Joshua knew that following God's leading in his life would involve great opposition and hardship. But he had an unshakeable rock to cling to. God had promised he would be with Joshua to help him accomplish God's will. God is with you, too!

You will face challenges as develop the lifestyle of a witness. Your friends may relate to you differently once you become open and honest with them about spiritual things. But God has said, "be strong and very courageous." Why? Because "The Lord your God is with you wherever you go." That should encourage you to stand up and be counted among the followers of Jesus. The Lord God, the creator of the heavens and earth will be with you.

Make it personal

What does it mean for you to know that God is with you wherever you go?

June 30

Luke 10:16

"The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

Those whose hearts are open will welcome your witness and those whose hearts are pushing God away will reject your witness!

Jesus said these words to 72 people that he had trained and was sending out ahead of him in groups of two to the places he was going to visit. He wanted them to know ahead of time that some people would accept their witness and others would reject it…even if they did everything right. I hope you hear him sharing this understanding with you today too.

There will be people in your life that you pray for and build relationships with and share Christ with, but their hearts are not open to God and in the end, they may reject you along with Christ. There will be others, often ones you least expect, who you reach out to hesitantly, but you find that their hearts are ready to talk about God and how he can become a part of their lives.

Even as you start on the journey of learning to live as a witness, Jesus wants you to know and recognise this. People's rejection or acceptance of your witness will be the expression of their heart's response to him.

After experiencing both kinds of response to their witness, the next verse describes their perspective: "The 72 returned with joy.…" The only way to avoid the rejection is to also avoid the joy of being a witness to those whose hearts are ready.

Make it personal

What do you need to let go of your past rejections so that you can focus on the future?

JULY

July 1

Luke 24:45-49

"Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.'"

"You are witnesses," but you need the Holy Spirit to clothe your witness with God's power!

With Jesus' resurrection, so many things came into focus for his followers: the significance of his death on the cross at the time of Passover, the message of repentance, the forgiveness of sins that his personal sacrifice had achieved. This had to "be proclaimed in his name to all nations."

They realised that this witnessing was what he had trained them for. Yet he told them to wait. It wasn't enough to know what needed to be shared; it wasn't enough that they had a passion to share it. There was still something without which their witness would not make any difference—the active work of the Holy Spirit.

It was the work of the Holy Spirit that had set Jesus' ministry apart from all others. The work of the Holy Spirit will set your witness apart too and make it spiritually fruitful in the lives of the people you encounter today.

Make it personal

How did the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit look like while Jesus was on Earth? Based on that, how should your relationship with the Holy Spirit look like?

July 2

Mark 1:16-18

"Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.' And immediately they left their nets and followed him."

God wants to refocus your life onto what he is doing in the lives of the people around you!

Like these fishermen, it's easy to be focused on your job or on your daily activities. But while your job may be significant, it is what God wants to do through you in the lives those you work with, live with, spend time with, that gives your life real meaning.

God may want you right where you are in your profession or location, but he wants you to redefine the "main thing". Glorify God by doing a great job in your work. Your boss should be so very glad he or she hired you! But don't confuse your job with your purpose. Your purpose lies in the relationships of your life.

God has sent you into those relationships to be his agent of redemption—helping people encounter him, trust in him, find forgiveness and learn to follow him themselves.

Make it personal

How does God want you to "fish" today? Ask him for guidance.

July 3

Mark 1:35-39

"And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, 'Everyone is looking for you.' And he said to them, 'Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.' And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons."

No matter how busy you are, prayer is the foundation of a life lived for God!

This account of Jesus' morning prayer time comes immediately after the busiest recorded day of Jesus' ministry life. He was up late healing people and casting demons out of others. He knew there would be crowds of people wanting his attention the next day. If there was any time for him to choose a little extra sleep instead of prayer it was then.

But "rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed." Good sleep and rest are very important to effective ministry with people. But there is something even more essential. Have you yet come to the conclusion Jesus did?

If you are going to learn the life of a witness, you must learn this lesson: Nothing, NOTHING, is more essential to the life of a witness than spending time with God, talking to him about your relationships and where he wants to take them, listening to him, allowing him to shape your sense of what he wants to do through you next in each relationship.

Make it personal

What do you think of the following statement? "If you are a stranger to prayer, you are a stranger to power!" S. Robinson

July 4

Mark 4:14-20

"The sower sows the word. And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.

And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.

And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."

Your mission is simply to be a faithful witness for God—you have no control of how people will respond to your witness!

Being a witness is like that man scattering seed. Some of the seed finds only hard, uninterested hearts. Some of the seed seems to be joyfully interacted with, but it's only temporary interest. Some people recognise their need for God, but very soon that responsiveness is swallowed up by their worldly values.

But mixed in with all those disappointing responses are those whose hearts are so ready for God's truth, ready to respond to him. You will never find those people if you aren't willing to also encounter the others.

Go on the journey of learning to be a witness with the expectation that you will encounter all of these responses. When you encounter the ones who are ready, you know it is so worth the journey!

Make it personal:

How does the image of "scattering seeds" encourage you?

July 5

Mark 7:6-7

"And he said to them, 'Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"

If you want to live as a witness you must get real with God—no more surface Christianity!

How does God view a Christian life where you honour him with your lips, but your heart is far from him? "In vain do they worship me." What a terrible thought, that God would evaluate my life and worship that way!

There is, of course, the simplest (not easy) solution: honour God with your lips AND keep him in the centre of your heart. How can you keep him in the centre of your heart? Spend lots of time with him. Talk with him. Listen to him in his word. Respond to him when he speaks to you or leads you in a direction. Talk about him with others. Build your worldview around his worldview.

When your inner life and what you say with your lips come from the same place of love for God, then your words and impact on those around you will have great authority and will be full of the presence and pleasure of God.

Make it personal

What's ONE thing you can do to keep God "in the centre of your heart" today?

July 6

Mark 7:20-23

"And he said, 'What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.'"

A secular life flows from a secular heart!

When you look at people you know whose lives are so ungodly that it is difficult to carry on a conversation with them without wincing, remember that they are simply living out their fallen nature. The moral expectations of society can restrain a person's fallen nature to some degree, but the more that society itself accepts the godless values of fallen hearts, the more common it becomes for people to freely express their own selfish, secular inclinations.

These people's lives left to themselves, will never be made whole. But testimony after testimony of people who have been born again by a living relationship with Jesus shows us that Jesus brings redemption to a person, saving their lives and restoring his image in them.

As you think about your relationship with these people and how God may want to use you in their lives, you must approach these relationships with the absolute confidence that God can transform the specific people in your life. Hold that confidence, and that faith, as you pray by name for these people, as you interact with them.

Make it personal

How are you making people a primary concern? What do you need to do to care for people better?

July 7

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."

Spiritual things are more important than material things!

Paul says that the "things which are unseen" (spiritual things) are more important than the "things that are seen" (material things) because spiritual things are eternal.

Are you focusing your life on things that will have no value after your eulogy is read? Or are you focusing your life—your time, your energy, your abilities, your money, your relationships and your thoughts—on things that will last forever? Things that bring God glory, things that lead other people to faith in Christ, things that encourage others in their spiritual growth.

A focus on self always leads your life in the direction of things that do not last. A focus on God always leads your life in the direction of things that really matter.

Make it personal

What is the focus of your life? Ask God to 'open your eyes' to what really matters. Sometimes it's when we close our eyes in prayer that we see most clearly. Write down your prayer and thoughts down below:

July 8

Jeremiah 17:8

"He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit." (NIVUK version)

This must be an Australian tree—"no worries" in a year of drought! (What a great verse to help an unchurched Aussie you know to connect with God's Word!)

Have you ever seen trees in the desert? They are usually small, gnarled, and look like they are barely hanging on. But watch what happens as you approach a stream of fresh water. As you get near the bank of the stream, the trees are suddenly tall and strong. Often there are flowers and fruit on the trees.

What makes the difference? Their roots go down deep and draw from the water in the stream. In Psalm 1 the stream represents the Word of God. When you remove from your life those things that are building the world's value system into your mind, and you fill your life with things that saturate your heart and mind with God's Word, then one day you will suddenly realise that your spiritual life is healthy and thriving. You are growing!

Even better, the leaves of your tree will remain green even in times of drought. You will remain spiritually healthy even in tough times. God is inviting you to come and meet him as you "drink in" his Word. Then you'll be "always green" to share Jesus with someone who's living in a spiritual drought!

Make it personal

Who do you know that's living in a spiritual drought? How can you gently refresh them today with the water of God's word?

July 9

Mark 13:9-11

"But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit."

When you develop a ministry mindset about your life, you recognise that even very difficult circumstances are opportunities to be a witness for Jesus!

In this passage, Jesus is preparing us for what the last days will be like, and we can see these days drawing closer as Christianity is more and more ostracised in the West. Jesus tells us that even when you are beaten and put on trial for your faith in him, the reason you find yourself in that situation is "to bear witness before them."

And in those moments when God puts you in a situation where you can be a witness, and you have no idea what to say, don't stress about it beforehand. Rest in the knowledge that God is the one who wants to speak through you. Just open your mouth and start talking—God will give you the words. "Say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit."

Make it personal

Has there been a time when you spoke but you knew that the Holy Spirit was guiding your words? How did that experience encourage you? Did it teach you to rely more on the Holy Spirit?

July 10

Matthew 5:14-16

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

God doesn't want your relationship with him to be a private thing that is just between you and him!

"Let your light shine before others," Jesus says to the disciples. God's part in your life should be as visible as "a city set on a hill" that "cannot be hidden."

Make sure that your relationship with God comes out in your conversations, not as preaching, but simply as the sharing of what matters to you in life, the expression of your love for him. When God is at the centre of your thoughts—when he is the focus of your life, he will come out in what you do and say, "so that they may see."

Don't leave it to the people in your life to somehow figure out that it is God that is shaping your life. Communicate that by talking about answered prayer, about what he is teaching you, about how his word is guiding you.

Make it personal

What is ONE thing you could say about how God is shaping your life at the moment?

July 11

Matthew 5:43-47

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"

A ministry mindset is unlike anything people are used to!

Do you want your Christian life to stand out like a lighthouse in the darkness, pointing people to God? Then learn to live with a ministry mindset.

You actually can't live that way, but Jesus, who is in you, can. If he can hang on the cross and ask the Father to forgive those who crucified him, then he can love your enemies and pray for them…through you.

Most Christians are great at loving people generously if those people are dear friends and family who love them back. But a ministry mindset approaches even the people in your life who are difficult and unloving—even those who cheat you—and says, "Lord, please show your love for this person through me. How can I love them? Please reach out to them through me and bless them."

Make it personal

What are some practical ways you can show acceptance and love to people, especially the ones the world expects you to turn away from because of what they believe or do?

July 12

Romans 6:5-11

"For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his… Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

A life of total commitment is what Jesus wants to live through you!

Living a life of total commitment to God is not just hard — it is impossible! There has only ever been one person who was able to live that way and that was Jesus Christ. But the exciting reality of your Christian life is that when you put your faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit entered into your life and a spiritual change took place within you.

You were united with Jesus Christ. Peter puts it this way: he says that we have become "partakers of divine nature". We were created spiritually so that we are unable to live God's way without God's life in us. As we welcome Jesus and invite him to lead our lives, he then begins to live out his way of life — total commitment flowing from his love for God the Father — in and through us!

Jesus is saying to you today, "You can't live the way you should. But I can, and I am in you!"

Make it personal

Are you dead to all sin? What sin are you struggling with at the moment? Have you told someone about it?

July 13

Matthew 9:23-26

"And when Jesus came to the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, 'Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping.' And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. And the report of this went through all that district."

Never assume that even God can't change the situation!

Just this week I have heard several stories of people putting their faith in Jesus and being transformed—people nobody would have thought could possibly be converted to faith in Christ.

When Jesus told those mourners that the little girl was not dead but sleeping, they thought it was ridiculous to think she could ever wake up. So ridiculous that "they laughed at him." But when he took her by the hand, "the girl arose" and God was glorified to everyone who heard of it.

Is there someone in your life that you hesitate to talk to about Jesus because it seems impossible that they could ever be open to him, let alone believe in him? God is reminding you today to pray about that relationship with the confidence that he can break through the hardest barriers.

The God who broke through to Saul of Tarsus and the Philippian gaoler, and Zacchaeus the tax collector who cheated everyone, and the Pharisee Nicodemus—that God can reach into the hardest heart and open doors for your witness.

Make it personal

Name three people in your world you think are spiritually dead. Why did you pick them? Do you genuinely believe that God can save them?

July 14

Psalm 1:3

"He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers."

"That yields its fruit in its season." Fruit-bearing is the natural result of healthy growth in the tree. If the tree is in the right soil, receiving the right water, then it will be fruitful!

According to this Psalm, you can be like that tree! God's plan for you is fruitfulness. That is Christlike character and godly choices—and being able to freely share your faith in Christ—can be the natural outflow of your life! The Christian life is not intended to be a matter of whether you have enough willpower to live the way you should. Rather, God wants to change your inner life so much that a godly way of living (the fruit of the tree) is the natural outflow of what God is doing inside you!

How? When you prune out of your life those things that pour the world's way of thinking into you, and you focus your life on what God is saying to you in his Word, then your mind is renewed, your inner life is transformed, and what is happening on the inside of you shows up on the outside of you.

Make it personal

What fruit is showing in your life that would make others hungry for Jesus? What fruit do you need to bear more of because people in your life need it?

July 15

Matthew 13:44-46

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

Becoming part of God's kingdom is the best thing that could ever happen to a person!

The Apostle Paul put it this way: "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."The man in today's verses discovered the kingdom of heaven and considered it a treasure worth selling everything he had to get it. And losing everything else was not depressing! "In his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

God is saying to you today that when you share with others about what it's like to know God, you can speak with the confidence that it is worth anything it might cost that person to follow Christ. Never apologise for the gospel!

Think about what it has cost you to follow Christ and what it means to you to be a part of his family, his kingdom. Think about the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in your life. Think about the place in your life of your brothers and sisters in Christ. Think about the joy of being a part of what God is doing in the lives of others.

THAT is what you are inviting others to be a part of!

Make it personal

How could you explain to someone that, for you, finding and following Jesus has been like finding life's greatest treasure?

July 16

2 Kings 7:3-9

Then they said to one another, "We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news. If we are silent and wait until the morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore come; let us go and tell the king's household."

Don't keep God's good news to yourself!

As their city was under siege by enemies, the people in Samaria were faced with unbearable suffering: the enemy was at the door, people were already dying of starvation, there was famine in the land, food prices were soaring uncontrollably and it seemed as if there was no hope for them.

In these dark times, four lepers decided to go out into the enemy camp to see if there was any hope for them there. As they entered the camp, they saw that God had delivered the people of Samaria from their enemy. The besieging army had fled, the huge camp was empty and it didn't take them long to figure out that the tents were full of food for them to feast on.

While they were eating, they realised that what they were doing was wrong. They were enjoying food and good wine, while other people in Samaria were dying of hunger. They came to their senses, went out and shared the good news with the king and the people in Samaria.

These four lepers were used by God to give the good news of his salvation to the people of Samaria.

God wants to use you, just like he used the lepers, to give good news to the people around you. You have better news than they had—the good news of Jesus and the gospel. Do not keep it to yourself.

Make it personal

Write down five types of people who you struggle to understand/ speak to/ be friendly with. Ask God to help you love them so that you can begin to witness to them.

July 17

Romans 8:28

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

God is using every circumstance in your life to shape you and use you for his purpose!

It can be hard for us to accept this idea of God using all things in this way. We know that God uses his word to renew our minds and transform us. We can accept that God uses our fellowship with other believers in this way and that his blessings in our lives assure us of his loving care for us. All things?

Yes!

It does not mean that God is pleased with all things. God grieves when you bear the brunt of someone else's sin. He is angry when a drunk driver slams into the car of someone you love. He knows from his own experience on the cross what that physical and emotional pain you are experiencing is like, and he groans with you.

But God sits on his throne above all these things, and he overrules even the evilest purpose and uses even those fallen, evil or senseless things to accomplish his good purpose in your life. That means that you can embrace any circumstance you find yourself in (good or bad) as God's opportunity for you to grow and to share the hope you have in God with others.

Make it personal

How can you use your painful experience to minister to people?

July 18

Romans 8:29

"For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to become conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

God is actively pursuing transformation in your life. He is working in you to make you more and more like Jesus!

The "image of God" was severely damaged in the first man and woman when they disobeyed God, and we have inherited that damage. But God is working in your life to restore in you the "image of his Son".

God will use every kind of circumstance and influence in your life to accomplish this inner transformation.

If you choose to embrace what God is trying to do in your life (and not just grit your teeth grudgingly), then

you will grow by leaps and bounds in your spiritual life and this inner growth will overflow in the way that you live.

Many of the things God wants to change in us can mean painful lessons, but if you want to grow, you must respond to him in all things. Let the lessons drive you deeper into him. As you grow better, not bitter, your friends and family will want what you've got!

Make it personal

What's going on in your life today? How can you embrace what God wants to do to help you grow more like Jesus?

July 19

Esther 6:1

"On that night the king could not sleep. And he gave orders to bring the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles, and they were read before the king."

Sometimes uneasiness and restlessness about things in your life come from God. God is trying to get your attention!

King Ahasuerus had an advisor, Haman, who was using the king to try and get rid of Mordecai (a godly man) and the Jews. God gave the king such an uneasiness about the situation that he couldn't sleep, and he acted to discern what was wrong. King Ahasuerus (also known as Xerxes) had the book of records read, and there saw that Mordecai was really a hero. He set things right and Haman ended up on the gallows.

When you are distracted and not sensitive to what God needs to say to you, he may wake you up at night or give you a sense of uneasiness about what you are doing. When that happens, he wants you to make it your instant reaction to ask, "Lord, are you trying to get my attention? Is there something you need me to see? Something you want to communicate to me?"

Then stop and think about your life and what decisions you are making or have made recently. Is there anything you need to rethink or change? Is there someone that you need to forgive so that nothing blocks you from showing them the love of Jesus? Never be too embarrassed to change your mind or direction on something in response to God's leading.

Make it personal

What is distracting you from focusing on God's purpose for you and your eternal investment?

July 20

Mark 10:23-27

"And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, 'How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!' And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, 'Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.' And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, 'Then who can be saved?' Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.'"

Never write someone off as impossible for God to save!

Is there someone like that in your life? Someone who is so secular, or so committed to another religion, or so self-righteous, or so consumed with sex, or so focused on their wealth, or just so ungodly, that you can't see them ever turning to Christ in faith? It seems impossible.

Listen to Jesus' response to the disciples in today's passage: "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."

Saul of Tarsus must have seemed 'impossible' to believers in his day, as he persecuted Christians. But God still reached into his life, got his attention and revealed himself to Saul, who we know so well as the Apostle Paul. Although the people you are praying for seem 'impossible', pray in faith for the work God wants to do in their lives through you.

Make it personal

Take a bit of time right now, to pray specifically by name for the 'unreachable' people in your life. Write their names here:

July 21

Psalm 1:2

"(How blessed is the man who does not…) But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night."

To be a person whose whole life is being blessed by God, fill your heart and mind with God's Word!

Romans 12:2 tells us that we are "transformed by the renewal of your mind." When God's Word begins to saturate your life, it changes the way you think about life; it affects what is important to you; your life begins to change!

Maybe you spend time in God's Word but it's a burden, a chore that you perform because you know you should. What could change you so that time in the Scriptures becomes a delight?

God wants you to approach the Bible as his personal communication with you! Not simply as a place to find spiritual truths, or life principles, or moral standards, or theological teaching. But as a place to meet with God.

The Apostle Paul describes the Bible as "the sword of the Spirit." It is the Spirit of God that inspired the Scriptures and he is the One who will speak to you through them.

Turn your daily quiet time into a meeting with God. Open your Bible expecting him to speak to you personally and you'll begin to delight in his Word. Then, more and more, the words that overflow from your heart will be God's words to the people around you—words that bring them closer to knowing him themselves!

Make it personal

With your Bible open, ask God expectantly: "What else do you want to tell me today?" Write down what God is telling you.

July 22

Matthew 13:24-30

"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

It's not up to you to determine if a religious person is truly saved or not!

As we train people to share their faith in Christ, many of the church people we train come to personal faith in Christ. When you make it part of your conversation to talk about your relationship with Jesus and one of your church friends starts asking deeper questions, consider the possibility that they still need to be 'born again'.

And be very slow to declare someone to be not a real Christian, "lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them."

Make it personal

Why do you think God wants you to practice loving other believers here on Earth? What is it practice for?

July 23

Psalm 1:3

"In all that he does, he prospers."

What a promise God has made to us!

Be careful not to make the promise say what you want it to say. It doesn't mean that if a 50-year old man tries out for a professional basketball team, he will be one of its top players!

It doesn't say whatever he does prospers, but rather that he himself prospers, no matter what he does. You may have thought that being blessed by God means that you are making top marks at school, or that your business is booming, or that the person you are interested in is also crazy about you. And those are great blessings.

But what this Psalm is telling us is that even when your business is not prospering, you can be prospering — in your inner life! Even when your heart-throb doesn't love you back, you can still be finding joy in your relationship with God.

Do you see God's invitation to you in this Psalm? He's inviting you to go deeper than surface Christianity—and that's what people around us need to see! He is inviting you to really walk close to him, to measure your Christianity by more than your bank balance. To find out that life's greatest blessing happens inside you, not outside. To know that the richest person is the person whose inner life is in tune with God. And to be living a life so that friends and family can see that you have something that's really worth having.

Make it personal

How have you grown in your faith in the last six months? Are you prospering or collapsing or on the inside?

July 24

John 13:1

"Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end."

I should be totally committed to God because he is totally committed to me!

Romans 8:32 says, "He who did not spare His own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"

Sometimes we think that total commitment is for those few people who rise above the crowd and become missionaries. We think of it as an optional extra for extreme Christians. But actually, it isn't just an option for me to choose; it is what I owe to the One who laid down his life for me.

Jesus didn't just say to us, "I like you and I hope you like me back." Before we ever showed any interest in him, when there was nothing in us that was seeking for God, Jesus became a man, was ridiculed and rejected, savagely hurt and killed. He laid his life down for us, and he wants us to love him back with that same kind of commitment.

Jesus is not asking you to do what he has not done. He wants your commitment to be your personal response to him.

Make it personal

You have been reading these daily devotionals for a while now and tried to live as a witness. How committed are you to living this lifestyle for Jesus?

July 25

Matthew 7:13-14

"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

You just need to accept what God says about the way to life and salvation!

Sometimes "the narrow gate" seems too narrow. There are people we know and love who are sincere followers of another religion, or who are just nice and good people. We can't imagine God not accepting their sincerity. But Jesus, the most loving and gracious person who ever lived, is the one who spoke the words in today's verses. He is also the one who told us, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Jesus is reminding us today that we should approach the people in our lives with self-sacrificial love and acceptance. We should respect their right to choose their own path in life and love them whichever way they choose to live or believe. But this is different from saying that whichever way they choose is the right choice for them. We must love them enough to point them to the one who has died on the cross to make a way for them to be right with God and find his wholeness and inner healing.

Make it personal

Who do you need to point to Jesus even if you don't approve of what that person believes or does?

July 26

John 6:67-69

"So Jesus said to the Twelve, 'Do you want to go away as well?' Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.'"

Compared to having a total personal commitment of love for God, everything else is insignificant!

Jesus once made an incredible statement. He said that you can summarise the entire teaching of the Bible in just two commands. The most significant of all directions ever given to man, said Jesus, was "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." The second most significant? "Love people." (Matthew 22:37-39)

All your heart. All your soul. All your mind. Just stop and think about those words for a minute.

Jesus is saying to you that the whole Bible was written to teach you to love God so completely that, compared with that love, everything else in your life is insignificant. How much people like you, how wealthy you are, what car you will drive, how big your TV is — all those things matter zero compared to loving God.

How is your spiritual love life?

Make it personal

What could you do to increase your love for the Lord? How would that motivate you to share Jesus' "words of eternal life" with others?

July 27

John 4:28-35

"So the woman [to whom Jesus had been witnessing] left her water jar and went away into town… Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, 'Rabbi, eat.' But He said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about… My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eye, and see that the fields are white for harvest.'"

God's work is more important than my work!

Jesus' life was a powerful example of this value. The disciples had no sense of urgency about God's work. "There is plenty of time to get busy with that in the future," they said. But Jesus said, "Look around you! Can't you see how many people need the work of God in their lives? Get busy with God's work!"

Putting God's work first doesn't mean that you quit your job or change your profession. It means that whatever you are doing, you are looking for ways to minister spiritually into the lives of the people around you.

God wants to reach into the lives of people you know today. Are you available for him to use you in those people's lives?

Make it personal

Who like this woman is `sitting by the well' in your life? Who has a thirsty heart?

July 28

Read Luke 15:11-32

"I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.' And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him." (vv. 18-20)

God's love for you is unconditional—and that's the message we need people around us to know!

This parable is usually called The Prodigal Son, but some people call it The Parable of the Father's Heart. That is a good name for it because Jesus used this parable to show people how he feels toward those people who are rejected by the self-righteous (see vv. 28-30).

Do you feel that you have sinned and offended God to such an extent that you cannot approach him, that he does not want to see you? That is how the son in this parable felt. But when he finally decided to come back to his father, he found his father waiting for him with open arms. As soon as his father saw him returning, his father took off running to meet him.

Even if you feel "a long way off", as soon as you turn back to God in your life, he is running to meet you, with embraces and kisses to welcome you back!

Make it personal

What have you learned about God and his love for you in the good times of your life?

How will those truths get you through the difficult seasons of your life?

July 29

Romans 8:35-39

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

God's love is dependable—and so many people around you need to know that!

If you have begun a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, then you have an anchor for your soul that will hold you steady no matter what you face in life.

No matter what person on earth rejects you, there is One who will "not leave you, or forsake you" (Joshua 1:5). No matter what things crumble away beneath your feet, you will find that "underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27). No matter how many of the things you once found security in suddenly disappear into clouds and darkness, the lighthouse of God's Word will always shine this message into your heart—"I will not leave as orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:18).

Even if you are walking through the valley of the shadow of death, he will be with you every step of the way. This makes you different from every person who does not have Jesus Christ.

Make it personal

Write down ONE of your personal experiences of God's dependable love. How can you share this with others?

July 30

Ephesians 3:17-19

"…So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith – that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

There are two different kinds of knowledge mentioned in the last lines of this passage. If we write those two different meanings into the translation it would go like this: "…to know-by-experience the love of Christ which surpasses intellectual-knowledge…"

When you think about all the amazing things God does for us and you ask, "Why would God do that for me?", so often the answer is simply, "Because he loves you!"

But when you go back one step further and ask, "But why does he love me?", our minds are left groping for an answer. King David put it this way in Psalm 139 — "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it."

God has revealed so much of himself to us in his Word. But he is infinite in all his ways, and there is so much beauty in what goes on in the mind and heart of God that we have not seen yet.

Make it personal

In what ways do you rely on God's love? Take a moment to respond to the immeasurable love of God today. And ask him to help you be so "filled up" that you can't help but let the message of his love overflow to others around you!

July 31

1 Thessalonians 2:17-18

"But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavoured the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us."

Satan is opposed to your work!

Why is it that you can sometimes find it so hard to spend time with God, or when you do sit down to read his word or spend time in prayer your mind begins to think of all the unfinished jobs you have, the phone rings, or the kids begin to argue?

Why is it that connecting relationally with non-believers can sometimes seem so difficult? Why when the opportunity comes for you to speak about Christ the conversation sometimes gets hijacked? And why does life seem to get busy and hectic when you start to make some real ground for the gospel?

It's because you have an enemy that is out to destroy the work of God, distract you from his mission and deceive people about their need for Christ. Since the beginning, Satan has been actively opposing the authority and plans of God. So, as an ambassador for God, you face Satan's opposition against you and the work God has for you to do.

Today you need to be aware of Satan's opposition, but like Paul, you must not waiver from God's mission. Remember that Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples… and behold I am with you always, to the end of the age." If Christ is for you, who can be against you.

Make it personal

Write down three areas you can see Satan opposing your work for God. Then ask God for discernment to act wisely, strength to carry on in spite of this opposition, and faith to trust Jesus' authority to overcome.

AUGUST

August 1

1 Thessalonians 1:5

"because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake."

People will never be saved by your good, loving, Christ-like behaviour. You must share the words of the gospel with them!

The first thing Paul says in this verse about how he shared the gospel with the Thessalonians was that he used words. Yes, your Christian life is a powerful testimony of the reality of God in your life. Your life may cause people to think, "They have something that I need." But until you verbalise what that something is and how they can experience the love of God in their lives too, they will simply think you are a nice person.

You must share the simple, beautiful message of the gospel with the people in your life. Paul tells the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11 that the gospel message is simply that Christ died for our sins and he's alive today for you to know him. You can remember a message that simple and share it easily and naturally. When you do, it's easy to point out God's love expressed in that message, and our need for forgiveness and restoration.

Make it personal

Think through the people in your life that don't know Jesus. Which one of them do you believe is closest to being ready to interact with you about the gospel? What could you do this week to get them one step closer to finding Jesus?

August 2

1 Samuel 16:18

One of the young men answered, "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skilful in playing, a man of valour, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the Lord is with him."

Have you ever tried to learn to play an instrument? If you have, you will know that it takes hard work, hours and hours of practice, discipline and determination to become good at it.

King Saul asks for a skilful player to come in his house and comfort him with music. He doesn't want someone who is average, he wants someone who is good at playing music. That means somebody who didn't quit when it got hard. That means somebody who practised when it wasn't fun and kept at it till they were good—somebody who was determined and would not be turned aside by trivial pursuits.

When David was called into the service of the king, he was prepared. David had no dreams to be king. That was God's idea. David's five-year plan wasn't to play music for Saul. That was Saul's idea. David was just out there on the hillside, watching sheep, strumming away and praising God. All David did was prepare. It was God who presented David with the opportunity to play for Saul. It was God who called David to be the king of Israel.

Are you a musician? Are you a writer? Are you a painter? Ask God to use your skills for his glory. Walk through the doors he opens for you. Who knows how God will use your songs, your books, your painting to speak to people and make himself known to them.

Make it personal

Take some time to think about one skill that God has placed in your hands. How are you planning to develop your gift this year?

August 3

1 Thessalonians 2:8

"So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us."

Living as a witness is not simply the declaration of our message to as many people as possible. It is the imparting of our lives in meaningful, giving relationships with people who become dear to us!

We live in a time when life seems so busy. The boss is asking for the report that's due. Your kids have more activities than you can count. Loved ones are ill and need your care. The school formal is on this week and final exams are lingering. You're preparing to go away or there's a list as long as your arm of maintenance to do on the house. Between family, church and work you don't have time for fun let alone reaching out to people who need Christ.

Consider for a moment your walk towards faith in Christ. It's likely that a significant impact on you putting your trust in Jesus was through a meaningful relationship with a Christian. Now think of the people God used to bring you one step closer to him. In what setting did you spend time with them?

Today God wants you to remember that the gospel spreads through relationships. Do you work out? Consider working out with a non-churched friend. Are you going on holidays? Why not invite an unbelieving family to join you? What are you doing for lunch today? Consider asking a non-churched associate to join you.

Make it personal

What hurting friend have you been praying for? What can you do to take action and help that person heal this week?

August 4

Proverbs 3:5

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

Believe God and act on his leading!

As Christians, we are called to walk by faith and not by sight. We are called to trust in the Lord with all our hearts and not lean on our own understanding. But what does that mean? It means that when God is calling you to do something you have to trust him with all your heart that he will give you what is needed to get it done.

God called Noah to build an ark. Noah trusted God to resource the ark and to bring the rain. When everyone else was leaning on their own understanding—it had never rained before—Noah trusted God and his Word.

Here's the truth. Your natural mind doesn't get what God wants to do in your life. Your natural mind will always make you focus on your limitations, on your inabilities.

Take Moses for example. God called him to go and speak to Pharaoh. What did Moses' mind do? Focus on limitations: "I'm nobody, they won't believe me, they won't listen to me, I'm not a good speaker, I'm hesitant, and I'm slow." (Exodus 3-4) Moses had a choice to make: to either listen to his natural mind, or listen to God and follow his call. Moses followed God's call, trusted God with all his heart, didn't lean on his understanding and the rest is history.

Make it personal

God is reminding you today that you are not who others say you are or who your mind says you are. You are who God says you are! Read 1 Peter 2:9 and write down what God is saying to you through this verse:

August 5

1 Corinthians 1:18

"For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

The simple message of Jesus dying on the cross for us is powerful!

Millions of people who do not know Christ sit in churches every Sunday, unmoved by sermons full of intellectually stimulating theological truths. Yet we have seen these same people respond in tears to the simplest message of the gospel shared by a friend.

Isn't this what Paul said in Romans 1:16? "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." The power of the gospel is not in your skilful sharing of it. The gospel is "the power of God for salvation".

Never be ashamed of this message. It is what has saved you. It's the message that is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. When someone you know shows openness to talk about spiritual things, simply ask them, "Has anyone ever explained to you how you can start a good relationship with God?"

If they say that no one has explained that to them before, ask if you can do that with them. If they say no, even your asking will get them thinking. If they say yes, then you are sharing at their invitation and you can relax in the knowledge that God will work through this simple message as you share it.

Make it personal

Ask God to give you opportunities to ask people in your life: "Has anyone ever explained to you how you can start a good relationship with God?"

August 6

Psalm 99:7

"In the pillar of the cloud he [the Lord] spoke to them; they kept his testimonies and the statute that he gave them."

Obedience is a right response to God!

We talk so much today about how you can find God's help for your life, for your finances, for your relationships, for your work, that we can gradually come to think that the universe, and even God himself, exist for us — that we are the centre of all things. That's how many people around us think too!

How important to remember that God is the one who sits on the throne of the universe. He is the one around whom all things revolve. He is God and we are just creatures. We are so wrong when we take God's directions for life as mere guidelines — general suggestions that we should take into account.

The reality is that God has set two ways of living the Christian life before us. One way leads to life and blessing and fullness of joy. The other way leads to frustration and emptiness and wasted life.

Today God is inviting you to live the way of obedience to him. If you choose to keep enough Christianity to appease your conscience, but still live for yourself, you will come to the end of your life full of regret at how you wasted it. But if you choose to live for him, he'll speak to others through you—bringing both you and them into fullness of joy!

Make it personal

Meditate on the following verse: "And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross". What will you have to give up in your life to experience freedom through Jesus Christ?

August 7

Job 1:13-22

"There came a messenger to Job and said, '…the Sabeans fell upon them and took them [the oxen and donkeys] and struck down the servants.' …While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, 'The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and servants.' …There came another and said, 'The Chaldeans…made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the servants.' …There came another and said, 'Your sons and daughters…are dead.' …In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong."

Prepare yourself for the storm!

When you read Job 1 in your Bible, you see that Job was enjoying a happy, contented, blessed life, when out of the blue everything on earth that was important to him, except his wife, was utterly destroyed. He lost his 10 children, his servants, his financial security. As you keep reading you see that in spite of Job's trust and faith in God, God also allowed a terrible disease to afflict Job. Only Job's deep inner spiritual life prepared him to face such devastation!

The reality of life is that there is no time to get yourself ready to face suffering when it arrives, is there? The deep reservoir of Job's relationship with God meant that he was spiritually prepared for those dark days of loss.

Get close to God. It is the only way that you will be able to continue to trust him when suffering comes your way. And your trust in God through tough times will be a bulletproof witness to those around you!

Make it personal

What is God saying to you through today's Scripture verses? How does Job still 'witness' to you today?

August 8

Colossians 1:28-29

"Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me."

The relationships you have with the people around you are a huge part of God's plan for your life!

Sometimes we treat our relationships lightly, as though they were a "little thing", but we should be constantly giving every relationship we have to God and inviting him to work through us in those people's lives. Don't think that God only wants to work through you in your pleasant relationships; he also wants to work through you in those relationships that are tough.

Like the Apostle Paul in the passage above, work hard to impact every life you touch for God. When you encounter a person, always think, "How can I encourage this person spiritually? How can I turn their thoughts to the Lord? How can I pray for them?" Trust God to guide you as you speak with them.

Treat no conversation lightly, but look for ways to be used by God!

How might God be able to use you today if you approach your relationships like this? The little word, the little time you give can have eternal impact!

Make it personal

What relationships could you add more "value" to?

August 9

1 Thessalonians 2:4

"but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts."

Please God! Not people!

I was at a BBQ with friends and God gave me the opportunity to share the good news of Jesus Christ. I thought I had done a good job of communicating the key truths. I shared how we all have chosen to rebel against God, I explained that God is just and is unable to let sin go unpunished and the punishment for our sin is death, I explained that there is nothing we can do to repair our relationship with God or escape the punishment of death. I went on to explain that God loved us so much that he sent Jesus to die as punishment for our sin. I explained that it is only through placing our trust and hope in Jesus and choosing to surrender our life to him that our relationship with God is repaired for eternity. I explained that everyone has a choice to either receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour or stay separated from God and experience eternity in hell.

And then the question came, "So what you're saying is: if I choose not to believe in Jesus I'm going to hell?" It's at this point I had to make a choice—do I speak to please man or speak the truth to please God?

The friend that asked this question died unexpectedly a few years later.

I'm so grateful that God gave me the grace to speak the truth that night. God provided the opportunity to speak for him and the grace to respond in a way that pleased him.

Make it personal

Do you have a tendency to be a people pleaser? At the end of your life what God says about you will matter more than what thousands will say about you. Reflect on this and let God speak to you now:

August 10

Proverbs 6:16-19

"There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers."

The truthfulness of our words can often seem like a little thing to us, but it matters greatly to God! Notice that two of the seven things he hates in this passage have to do with lying.

Sometimes when we tell a "white lie", when we just shade the truth a little to deceive, we think it doesn't matter very much. But listen to this warning from Charles Spurgeon:

"Just get one small error into your minds, get one small evil into your thoughts, commit one small act of sin in your life — permit these things to be handled, and fondled, favoured, petted, and treated with respect, and you cannot tell whereunto they may grow.

"They are small in their infancy; they will be giants when they come to their full growth. You little know how near your soul may be to destruction when you wantonly indulge in the smallest act of sin! Dread sin; though it be ever so small, dread it."

Can you bring your words to God today? Trust him to help you always be truthful. It's especially important if we want the people around us to be able to trust us when we share the truth about Jesus!

Make it personal

Do you tend to obey God in some areas more than others? How truthful are you?

August 11

Psalm 139:17-18

"How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you."

The God we serve has a perfect knowledge of us, and he sees all the motions and actions both of our inward and of our outward life!

David acknowledges, with wonder and gratitude, that God cared for him all of his days. He was fully aware of the fact that God knew him and thought of him, and that God's thoughts towards him were thoughts of love.

David goes on to share that when he is awake he is still with God. God is constant at all times, ready every day to take care of us, to protect us, to speak to us, to counsel us and to surround us with his love.

The same verse that reflects God's commitment towards David also reflects a continual response from David to God. Through this verse David is basically saying, "I know that you are with me God, in the night, in the day and I am going to make sure that from the moment I wake up I am with you too—that I don't leave you hanging, that I focus my thoughts on you, that I lift my praise to you, that I come to you with my worries and with my hopes from break of dawn.

Make it personal

What do you do when you wake up? Do you take some time to connect with God and to ask him to guide you and help you through the day? If not, make a decision today to start your mornings like David did: with God.

August 12

Matthew 22:8-10

"Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests."

Invite as many as possible to Jesus!

This challenge from Jesus' story illustrates the heart of God. He has prepared a wedding feast full of his presence and blessing. He wants as many people as possible to come into this place of blessing. So he is sending you with the instruction: "Invite as many as you find."

This invitation is for "both bad and good." It's not the goodness of the person that makes God want to invite them. It's simply whether they want to come to the feast. Those that want to come are welcome. His forgiveness and grace are greater than their sins. He is able to transform anyone.

But they will never know that unless they are invited. Invite as many as you find. How do you find them? Well, most likely, God has already sent you into their lives. Who are the people you work with? Live with? Live near? Exercise with? Buy things from?

How do you invite them? Share with them what the feast looks like in your own life. Tell them about Jesus. Share your answers to prayer. Talk about God's presence in the midst of your hard times. Then invite them to put their trust in him too.

Make it personal

How would you describe to someone what this "feast"—this place of knowing God's presence and blessing—is like in your own life?

August 13

Matthew 6:25-27, 31-34

"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? …Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

When you are on God's side, what is there to be anxious about?

If you listen to the Holy Spirit's voice and share Christ with that person you are with, God will look after you. If you invite a friend over for dinner, God will guide the conversation how he wants. Remember he is in control! Even when it may not seem like it.

Don't you think you matter more to God than a bird or a flower matters to him? He takes care of the birds and the flowers, and he will take care of you, too. There is just one prerequisite to this peace-giving provision: put him first in your life!

Make it personal

How is God speaking to you today? What worries you at the moment? How does God want you to handle this situation?

August 14

Galatians 5:22-25

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit."

The Christian life only works when we allow the Holy Spirit to live his way of life through us!

We can achieve a measure of goodness in our activities on our own strength, but it is only surface goodness. We live that way to meet up to other's expectations, or to assuage our own conscience, or to try and live up to a moral standard; but that goodness does not flow from who we are—our inner life. We are still fallen beings, full of selfishness and pride and independence.

The Holy Spirit restores our inner lives. His inner life overflows with goodness and the fullness of God's character. As we say to him, "I can't live that way, but you can, and you are in me," he not only changes the way we act but changes our very inner being to be more like Christ. Then the godly life just flows from you, instead of draining you.

God wants you, rather than trying hard to live for him, to allow him to live through you.

Make it personal

Who or what is pressuring you to be something you are not and shape your identity? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand who you are in Jesus and the things you can achieve for his kingdom.

August 15

Matthew 24:37-44

"For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

Don't assume that you have unlimited time to introduce someone in your life to Jesus!

When God opens a conversational door for you to talk about Christ with someone in your life, don't hesitate; don't wonder if this is really the right time. If the opportunity comes up, take it.

Don't be afraid to ask them questions about their spiritual life. Don't hold back from sharing the gospel. Who knows when your time of influence in their lives will end? They may move away, or change jobs, or get too busy for time with you. Or Jesus may return. "For the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect!"

Make it personal

When you face an intimidating situation such as telling your co-workers about Jesus, is your first reaction to look at your own resources of God's promises? Why?

August 16

Matthew 26:39-42

"And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." …Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, 'My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.'"

Living out your sentness in the lives of the people around you takes commitment!

Jesus knew that one of the reasons he came into our world was to die on the cross, opening the only way for people to be made right with God. There was joy involved in this. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that "for the joy that was set before him [Jesus] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

But there was also a deep, deep cost.

There will be a cost for you too.. You will need to reach beyond your comfortable circle of relationships to include others in your life; you will need to open up your heart to them; not all of them will return your love; you will need to stop just taking life as it comes and begin living with intentionality in your relationships; and your life may be impacted in more costly ways than these.

But God will take pleasure in your commitment to his call on your life, and he will bless you and strengthen you for what he calls you to. Like Jesus, your commitment to God's purpose for you will add great meaning to your life!

Make it personal

Why do you think it's so difficult to be committed to God's call? Why do you think people who are involved in ministry often? Commit your day to God! Go into today committed to live "not as I will, but as you will."

August 17

Romans 8:14

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."

Allow the Holy Spirit to lead you and he will change your life!

In Acts 7:29, when Philip was walking on the Gaza road and a chariot went by, it says, "The Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over and join this chariot.'" As Philip followed the leading of the Holy Spirit, it led to a wonderful opportunity to talk to one of the leading government officials of Ethiopia about Christ and the man put his faith in Jesus!

When the great Council of Jerusalem met in Acts 15:28, James came out of the council meeting and said, "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements…"

The Holy Spirit wants to lead you in two ways. As you make yourself available to God for him to use you in other people's lives in this world, the Spirit will guide you so that you are fulfilling his plan for you, just as he guided Philip. The main thing is your availability to him.

And in your own personal spiritual life, the Spirit wants to lead you into the great life-changing truths. He wants to transform you from the inside out! This is God's message to you today: make your life, your mind, your heart totally available to God, and you can expect the Holy Spirit to guide you in life!

Make it personal

How have you seen the Holy Spirit prompt you to come alongside someone and help them in their spiritual journey?

August 18

Matthew 23:37-39

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'"

When you truly care about people's souls there is a deep sense of sorrow and loss when someone rejects Christ!

Jesus had just been talking about how God would judge his generation. But rather than having a sense of satisfaction over the fact that God would judge those who were rejecting him, he bursts out with this sense of grief. What he wanted was not judgement, but for them to respond to his love!

As you try to develop Jesus' way of reaching out to people with a ministry heart and leading them to faith in him, recognise that when you open your heart up to love people deeply, to care about their inner lives, to introduce them to Jesus—opening up to people like that opens you up to both the overflowing joy of seeing people turn to Christ in faith and the deep pain of seeing some reject the lover of their souls.

Jesus kept on loving people with the love of the Father, even though he knew some would reject both him and the Father. Why? Because he was sent to be a witness and he did everything with that sense of sentness. No matter what!

Make it personal

Are there people in your life you find hard to love? The Bible says God will never give us more than we can handle. It is very likely that with Jesus' help you can love those people. What do you think about that?

August 19

1 Corinthians 2:14

"The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."

Pray for each person in your life who needs Christ, because they are unable to grasp spiritual truth unless God reaches into their heart!

Those people that God has sent you to, the people you encounter each day, have values and perspectives that are completely different from God's. There is no way that they will see life from God's perspective and "accept the things of the Spirit of God."

This is why prayer is such a huge part of living as a witness. Saving faith is a person's response to God's initiative in their hearts and lives. God must open a person's understanding and reveal himself to them. Only then, as a result of the work of God's Spirit, will they be able to recognise the truths of the gospel and turn to God in faith.

That means that you must call on God for his work in the lives of the people you encounter. God loves to answer that kind of prayer. Make this kind of prayer a part of the way you operate and you will see your witness making a deep impact on those you pray for.

Make it personal

Take a moment now to pray for the people you're building relationships with—and for anyone else God brings across your path today—that he will help them grasp the spiritual truths you share with them. Write your prayer here:

August 20

John 8:10-11 (please read verses 1-11)

"Jesus stood up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.'"

God does not just want to forgive your sin; he wants to change your life!

The fact that Jesus didn't condemn this woman's sin does not mean that he didn't care about it. His intention was to redeem her life from the destructive nature of that sin. And it is the same with you—and the people he has "sent" you to reach!

Yes, Jesus is so ready to pour out his mountain of grace on your life. That grace is so much greater than all your sin, even though you have hurt him deeply and personally. He wants to restore your relationship with him and make it even better than it was before.

Bring your life, and especially that area of sin, back into a total commitment to the leadership of Jesus Christ. Then feel the growth process begin to operate once again. You will be like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, whose leaf does not wither, and who prospers in everything he does (Psalm 1).

Make it personal

What bad habit have you let define you? Where in your life do you need God's mountain of grace right now?

August 21

2 Timothy 2:24-26

"And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will."

If you want God to use you, don't be quarrelsome!

The more I talk with non-churched people the more I realise they expect Christians to have strong views on life. Some will resist engaging in conversation with Christians because they don't feel like quarrelling over an issue. I heard someone once say "Christians are quick to tell you what they think but never listen to what you have to say".

I have to be the first to admit that sometimes I have been more interested in being 'right' and winning the fight than in helping the other person understand the gospel and journeying with them towards faith in Jesus.

Paul says the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome. But he adds to this that we should be kind to everyone. This means being kind to that person that always makes smug remarks about your faith, teaching them the truth of your faith and correcting their views with gentleness. When people openly attack you for what you believe you are encouraged to stand firm in your faith patiently enduring evil.

God is reminding you today to resist the urge to fight but leave the battle to him. Commit today to be kind to everyone in patience and gentleness and leave the results to God.

Make it personal

Are you easily angered? Are you quick to tell other people what you think without listening to what they have to say? Do you struggle to show kindness to people who have different views than you?

Answer these questions honestly down below:

August 22

Psalm 99:6-7

"Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel also was among those who called upon his name. They called to the Lord, and he answered them. In the pillar of the cloud he spoke to them."

Calling on the Lord is a right response to God!

In the Bible, "calling on the Lord", means asking God to be involved in areas where you need his help. When you study those who were men and women of God in the Bible, you find that those who were godlier called on the Lord more. That is, they recognised that they needed God's involvement in every area of life!

Sometimes they called on the Lord for forgiveness (see verse 8), or for help in battle, or for guidance, or for his anointing on their work for his Kingdom, and the list goes on. When "they called...he answered".

As you read this devotional today, God is inviting you to change the way you approach life—and every person he puts in your path today—so that you involve him in every aspect of your life. What relationship do you need to call upon the Lord about? What decision do you need to bring before him? What ministry are you trying to accomplish with your own abilities and resources?

God wants you to learn to take every daily issue of life to him.

Make it personal

Have you learned to rely on God through the good and difficult times of your life?

August 23

1 Corinthians 1:22-24

"For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

The gospel is the most foundational message of Christianity and cannot be changed, whether people like it or not!

The Apostle Paul took the gospel to two very different kinds of people: Jews and Gentiles who had been deeply impacted by Greek culture. These two groups expected very different things from a religious message. The Jews expected miraculous signs and the Gentiles expected a deep intellectual philosophy.

But despite their expectations, Paul's message had neither of these things. "We preach Christ crucified," he said. A new message from God without miraculous signs was hard for Jews to accept. A religion whose foundational truths were simple seemed foolish to the Gentiles. But although Paul desperately wanted to connect these people with God, there was one thing he could not alter: the gospel.

He knew that there would be those whose hearts God had already been working in, and for them his simple message of "Christ crucified" would be "the power of God and the wisdom of God."

Share our beautifully simple message with as many people as possible and like Paul you will find those that God has already been working in. To them, this simple message will be life-changing.

Make it personal

How did this simple message of "Christ crucified" impact you when you first heard it?

August 24

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

"And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God"

You can sense from Paul's words that he felt quite insecure in himself about sharing the gospel with the Corinthians. He had decided ahead of time to just share the simple gospel of Jesus dying on the cross. He wasn't confident of his ability to share it well. "I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling."

So what made Paul's sharing of the gospel so effective? "My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." As you learn to be a witness for Jesus, accept your weaknesses and inabilities. Don't try to pump yourself up with "I can do this!"

Rather, call on God's Holy Spirit to work even through your weaknesses and stumbling words. Then you will be a "demonstration of the Spirit and of power."

Make it personal

Why do you think it's a good thing "that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God"?

August 25

Romans 5:20

"Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."

God's grace is greater than all your sin! That's the message of hope that we need to share with the people around us!

You say, "You don't know the failure in my life. I fail God; I ask forgiveness; then I turn around and fail him again." Maybe you would say, "Just this week, I failed God spiritually; and now I cannot even approach God because I know he doesn't want to see me."

I invite you, in your mind right now, to bring all of your sins together into a pile. Heap it up! Bring the sins of your mind—your lustful thoughts, your anger toward people, your unforgiveness, your bitterness.

Bring your words—the hurtful things you have said to people, either in the distant past or just recently. Bring them all together.

Bring your laziness—the times you should have been in God's Word, the times you should've been doing things for God and you ended up just wasting it.

Bring your actions—things you have done that you know you shouldn't have done, or things that God called you to do and you didn't do them.

Bring it all, everything you can think of, and mountain your sin up until it stands as high as the highest mountain you have ever seen! But that mountain of your sin will always be in shadow…because there is a mountain behind it ten times as big—the mountain of God's grace!

Make it personal

How does this mountain of God's grace make you feel? How can you share this hope with someone you know that needs to hear it?

August 26

Philippians 3:12-14

"Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Make sure that your goals are 'God goals', not simply 'good goals'!

Setting goals in your life is one of the most important things you do, because your goals set the direction of your life energy, and help you to move toward. It's important not to simply react to life, but to be pro-active and move with purpose. Remember to listen to that still small voice of God in every situation you encounter. You never know what he may be asking you to do or reminding you of.

However, the Lord is saying to us today to make sure that your purpose is a purpose that flows from his will for you. Paul recognised that "Christ Jesus has made me his own" for a purpose. His desire in life was to fulfil that purpose. He "pressed on" to accomplish it.

And all the time, in the back of his mind, spurring him on, was the knowledge that at the end of the race he would go home to be with the Lord. And you will too! What a prize.

Remember to listen to that still small voice of God in every situation you encounter. He will often remind you of his purpose through you in this world…if you're listening.

Make it personal

What are the "God goals" in your life and what are the "good goals" in your life? Can you tell them apart? What makes them different?

August 27

1 Corinthians 15:1-8

"Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you— unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me."

To be an effective witness, you must know the simple truths of the gospel!

There are two essentials in the gospel, according to Paul: 1) Christ died for our sins. Evidence? He was buried. 2) Christ was raised from the dead and is alive today. Evidence? He appeared to many people.

Christ died for our sins and he's alive today for us to know him. You must lock these two foundational truths of the gospel in your mind so that on the spur of the moment you know what to share with someone.

Of course, as you discuss these things with them your conversation will go deeper into why we need Christ to die for our sins and what it means to know him. But that will all flow as long as you hold the core in your mind.

Make it personal

Take a moment to memorise these two basic truths of the gospel. Write them down below! This will help! Share them with several of your friends over the next few days to make sure they are locked in.

August 28

Galatians 1:6-9

"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed."

Make sure you don't change the gospel!

Do you remember the hope you experienced when you came to know that Jesus is alive and provides eternal life for all those who by faith receive him and choose to no longer live for themselves but for him? This is the gospel of Jesus Christ that the Apostle Paul is reminding the Galatian church.

Our world is not too different to the world back in Paul's day. Today we have people preaching a "gospel" based on works, or a "gospel" that promises great wealth and prosperity. Some preach a "gospel" that is based on the views of man rather than the teaching of the bible. When you begin believing these "gospels" you cease to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

Don't desert "him who called you in the grace of Christ". Don't be tempted to be "turning to a different gospel". The world is desperately searching for hope and God wants you to remember that only he can provide lasting hope and life through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Make it personal

Which of the gospels mentioned here are you tempted to believe and share?

August 29

Galatians 2:8

"For he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles"

God works through us as we follow his unique call on each of us as his witnesses!

Peter was called by God to be a witness to the Jews. Paul was called to be a witness to the Gentiles. Each of these groups needed a different approach, a different ministry. It wasn't natural for Peter and Paul to operate in each others' spheres. But they recognised that God's call on them didn't mean that everyone should have the same call.

It's natural to feel very passionate about the way God has called us to do things, but we must take care not to criticise those God has called to reach a different group of people or to connect with people in a different way. John the Baptist and Jesus had very different ministry approaches, and both were very effective in their calling. John the Baptist had a very narrow menu and wouldn't drink wine. This caused people to take notice of his difference and pay attention. Jesus came eating and drinking with people. This made him very welcome in the homes of secular, non-religious people and opened their hearts to him.

Both Jesus and John, like Peter and Paul, had effective ministries and were following God the Father's call on their lives. They didn't criticise each other for their different approaches but glorified God for his work through the other.

Likewise, God is calling you today to pay attention to the way he wants you to be a witness to those around you. Don't try to be like someone else in their ministry. Love who God has called you to be!

Make it personal

Do you tend to criticise or speak negatively about those who share the gospel differently than you? Do you tend to compare yourself to other people? What is God telling you today?

August 30

Psalm 139:23-24

"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"

Total openness with God is the way forward in spiritual growth!

It's amazing that we hold ourselves back from this kind of openness with God. He is completely trustworthy; he always responds with love and tenderness to those who come to him with humility and openness; he is open-hearted toward us, ready to reveal his own heart to us any time he finds us responsive to him; he wants what is good for us; he loves to bless us; the change he wants to bring into our lives, though sometimes painful or challenging, is always full of blessing for us.

Yet still, we hesitate to pray the prayer of these verses. If God searches my heart, he may expose some ugliness there that I don't want to deal with. He may find a "grievous way in me" that I am used to and don't want to root out. He may call me to cut out of my life some sinful way of relating or acting that I really don't want to change. He may ask me to go talk to my neighbour or best friend about him and I don't want to "damage" that relationship or invite that person over for dinner who I don't really get along with.

"Lead me in the way everlasting" is a prayer that says, "Lord, if you will show me the way forward, I'll trust you and go that way, even if it's painful".

Make it personal

Can your pray the prayer above and mean it? If God leads you to act will you obey him? If not, what is holding you back?

August 31

Psalm 23

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

The life lived in fellowship with God is an overflowing life!

Read the following paragraphs out loud if you can: God provides for my needs ("I shall not want"); he gives me rest ("He makes me lie down in green pastures"); he restores my soul; he guides me in the right way to go.

Even when I go through terrible times of sadness and loss, he's there with me, comforting me. He takes care of me when I face opposition.

He welcomes me into his house to fellowship with him.

When I consider all this, I know that I'm blessed beyond comprehension! "My cup overflows!" God's unconditional commitment to me means that his goodness and kindness will continue to bless me all through life and into eternity.

Our cup should overflow into other people's lives as we come in contact with them. Everyday meetings are transformed into life-changing encounters as a result of the overflowing of God's cup of grace.

Make it personal

God pays attention to every detail of your life, and he takes action on your behalf. How can you apply those same two principles to your relationships?

SEPTEMBER

September 1

Philippians 1:20-24

"…as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account."

Don't be afraid of death, because it is the doorway into a life that is "far better" with Christ!

Do you hear the conflict in Paul's heart as he writes these words to the Philippians? Yes, he wants to go on living on earth so that he can build Christ's Kingdom here on earth in the hearts and lives of people. But at the same time, he knows that life "with Christ" is going to be so much better and he can't wait for that!

God is reminding you today that, as a Christian, life after death is not only something to be very excited about, but it should also galvanise you to reach those friends of yours who are lost so that they can join you! Your enthusiastic confidence about that makes you radically different from the people around you. So let them see it!

Make it personal

Can you honestly say, as Paul said, "to die is gain?" What is stopping you from saying that? How is that reflected in the way you live and relate to the people around you?

September 2

Matthew 4:18-20

"While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him."

Your purpose in life is not just to walk close to God, but to live for him!

Jesus' call of the disciples did not end with "Follow Me". Following him was essential; it was the first thing; without it, the rest would be meaningless. But following Jesus was just the first part of the story. Jesus knew that if the disciples walked close to him they would take up the purpose that brought him into our world.

What purpose was that? "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:10) Their time with Jesus would change them. They'd become fishers of men!

No longer would they be living simply to better their lot in life through their fishing business. Their lives would now be focused outward — on the people all around them who God wanted to reach.

Make it personal

What's the focus of your life? Have you gotten close enough to Jesus yet to catch his heart for this world and make his purpose your own?

September 3

Galatians 2:15-16

"We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

By the works of the law, no one will be justified!

People have a hard time accepting this truth. It goes against our human nature to think that we don't have to do anything to be acceptable to God. We struggle to comprehend that everything has already been done for us to be made right with God.

But it's hard for us to accept that "the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord". There's something deep within us that makes us want to contribute something because we know we have offended and disappointed God so much in life. We want to try to make it right with God.

The truth is that there's nothing we can do to be made right in God's sight. It's only through the price Jesus paid on the cross for our sin that it's possible for us to have peace with God and a real relationship with him.

God wants you to know with all certainty today that you are "justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law because by works of the law no one will be justified."

MAKE IT PERSONAL

Have you fallen into a works mentality to please God? Don't let your works become a burden to try and please God. Rather, let your works be an act of worship in response to his love for you. Write down all the "works" you do to please God. What works do you need to let go of? How can you approach these works as an act of worship instead?

September 4

Colossians 1:9-12

"And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light."

Learn how to pray for the people you care about!

The heart of Paul's prayer is that they would "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord." That is, that they would live in a way that honours God. He prayed that they would have a spiritual understanding of God's will for them and that they would live lives that pleased God in everything.

He prayed that they would be fruitful in their ministry to others and that they would increase in their real, personal knowledge of God.

Wouldn't you love it if someone was praying these things for you! Maybe your spiritual life is the fruit of the faithful prayers of your parents or your grandparents. God wants you to learn to give the gift of prayer to those you care about.

Make it personal

Prayer makes a real difference! Remember to pray daily for those people you are trying to reach. Write down their names again and as you do, write a prayer next to the name.

September 5

Colossians 1:9-14

"And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light."

Your friends need your prayers!

Paul knew that the Colossians would not be able to live this way on their own strength. So he prayed that God would strengthen them with his strength so that their spiritual growth would last a long time.

He prayed for joy in their hearts as they thanked God for his grace in their lives. We sometimes think that the important things to focus on in life are "endurance and patience," which Paul prays for, but that experiencing joy is optional and just if you're lucky. But Paul is concerned that the Colossians experience joy in their relationship with God.

To God, it is perfectly legitimate to pray for his joy in people's lives. Pray that they're filled to overflowing. Pray that the joy in your life would be so great that it would naturally overflow into the lives of the people around you.

Make it personal

When was the last time you felt joyful? Joyful that you are alive, saved and loved? Are you too busy getting things done that you forget to stop and be grateful and joyful?

September 6

James 4:13-17

"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.' As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."

Life is short. Do what's right!

Your life may be shorter than you think. Even if you are a careful driver, the person who runs the red light and hits your car may not be. Or something could go wrong with your health. There are no guarantees. And even if you live to be old, you will feel that your life has flown by so fast!

Don't waste your life on insignificant things when there is so little life to be lived. Focus your time and energy and creativity on things that matter. When you "know the right thing to do," do it! What if you never get another chance to share the gospel with that neighbour who you get along with so well? What if that young lady at the petrol station you were too scared to talk to never makes it home to her family?

If you live for things that don't really matter, you are wasting what can never be retrieved. Make your life count.

Make it personal

What is something that you can do this week that will count for eternity?

September 7

1 John 2:15-17

"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."

We are naturally drawn to the things that do not last!

"The desires of the flesh" (desire for physical pleasure), "the desires of the eyes" (desire for things we see) and "the pride of life" (the desire to be right, to be popular, to be in control, to be important) — these things come very naturally to us, don't they?

If that's so, then we have to take the initiative if we want to live for things that matter. The fact is that we drift towards these meaningless things and we have to purposefully set our minds and hearts on "the love of the Father." We have to actively decide each moment to live for God.

What is there that you focus on in your life that will make a difference forever? Prayer, time with God in his word, sharing Christ with others, encouraging people, helping those in need, representing God in every situation you find yourself. Set your love on what will last.

Make it personal

What is God challenging you about today that you are drawn to but will not count for eternity?

September 8

Galatians 2:20

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Christ lives in you!

Notice the past tense and the present tense in this verse. Past tense: "I have been crucified with Christ." There is something that happened in the past but has impact up till now. That past event? When Jesus died on the cross, I died with him. God has judged my life and found me guilty of sin. He has also passed sentence—death. And he has already carried out that sentence—I was crucified with Jesus. What freedom that truth gives me! Do I need to worry that another sin in my life might separate me from God? How would he judge me? He has already put me to death with Christ.

That leads us straight to the present tense in this verse: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." Just as beautiful as my connection with Christ in his death is Christ's connection with me in life! He wants to keep on living in this world with the same purpose he had as he walked through Galilee. He does just that … through you and me!

Make it personal

Think about the people you will encounter today. Jesus wants to minister to them through you. He wants to love them, help them, serve them, speak to them, through you. How can you allow Christ to live in and through you today?

September 9

Psalm 84:10-12

"For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favour and honour. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you!"

Think of what you're missing when you don't put God first in your life!

When you go your own way, you miss the very best part of life. In fact, walking with God is so much better than a worldly life that one day spent in fellowship with God is better than a thousand days out of fellowship with him.

Someone who has not experienced the joy of God's blessing and favour and presence can't fathom this. To them, the Christian life is just a bunch of don'ts and a hard slog of battling to do better.

But we who have experienced a close relationship with God know that Christianity is not about "doing better" but about knowing and loving God and experiencing his loving presence. What could be better than that? Nothing! That's a way of life you want to share with your friends.

Walk his way, and he promises that he'll withhold no good thing.

Make it personal

Do you hear God's invitation to you today to put him first and experience his joy? Respond as God invites you to draw closer to him.

September 10

Ephesians 3:2-3

"…assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly."

You are a steward of God's grace for the sake of others!

I love that expression "steward of God's grace". A steward is someone who represents another person as they use what belongs to that other person. Has God given you his grace? Yes, in such an amazing, self-sacrificing way through the death of Jesus for us when we actually deserved his judgment instead.

But don't forget that you are a steward. You are not to simply enjoy his grace to you and love all his blessings that come with that grace. No, you are also to be a dispenser of God's grace to the people around you! When people come in contact with you, they should be amazed at the grace they encounter in you. And your conversations with them should leave them in no doubt that the difference they see in you (God's grace) is because of Jesus.

Are you a recipient of God's grace? Yes? Then you are a steward of God's grace. You aren't a dam that just collects God's grace poured out to you. Rather, you are a stream, receiving God's grace and immediately passing it on to those you encounter.

God is reminding you today that his grace was given to you so you would join him in his mission to bring his grace, the good news of Jesus Christ, to the lives of others.

MAKE IT PERSONAL.

How can you grow from being a simple receiver of the God's grace to being a steward of God's grace for the sake of those he has put around you?

September 11

2 Peter 3:8-10

"But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed."

God has not yet destroyed this world in judgment because he wants more people to have a chance to turn to him and be saved!

Two thousand years may seem like a long time to us, for God to wait to bring his promised judgment. But thousands of years mean nothing to God, who exists outside of time. What means a lot to God are the souls of people.

God's sense of justice is dragging us ever closer to the "day of the Lord" when he makes all things right; but his measureless mercy is holding that day back for a little bit longer to give more people time to find his forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

God's destruction will be awful, his judgment terrifying—so let's join him in inviting people to find protection in Christ. Can you see the merciful heart of God here? His desire to see as many people come to trust in him as possible.

Make it personal

How do your actions and attitude towards the people around you reflect the heart of God? Write out a brief prayer responding to what he is saying to you.

September 12

2 Peter 3:11-13

"Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."

We can "hasten the coming of the day of God!"

That day of reckoning is coming. God repeats that theme again and again in this chapter. There is no avoiding it. God is going to utterly destroy this world and carry out his judgment on people without Christ.

The reason that people who have entered into a living relationship with Christ will not be judged is that the judgment they deserve has already been carried out on the person of Jesus Christ, who suffered in our place.

God's judgment is coming. The only reason God is holding it back is to give more people time to turn to him. So how can we hasten his coming? By leading more and more people into God's forgiveness found in Jesus.

Make it personal

Have you ever brought someone to Jesus? How did it feel when they became a Christian? Did it spur you on to tell more people about Jesus?

September 13

2 Peter 3:14-15

"Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him,"

Since you know for sure that Jesus is returning, live in a way that will bring him great joy when he returns!

"Since you are waiting for these…". Peter expects that we will keep Jesus' return in our minds all the time—that we are expecting it and anticipating it eagerly. What a difference that expectation would make in our daily lives!

If we truly believed that Jesus was returning soon, wouldn't we be much more aware of the things in our lives that need to be cleaned out and thrown away? Wouldn't we be much more careful to do those things that we know he loves? Wouldn't we spend more time with him and obey his leading in our lives?

Wouldn't we spend more intentional time and effort in trying to reach the people in the world around us with the message of Jesus?

The good news is that he is returning at any time. Maybe tomorrow. Maybe before tomorrow. Maybe next month. Make sure that when he arrives, your relationship with him is right and good, strong and responsive. "Be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace."

Make it personal

If he came right now, how would you feel? What do you need to get right with God about today?

September 14

Revelation 22:12-13

"Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

God is the measure of all things!

Every person's life will be measured against God. We like to think that we are the captains of our fates, that we decide the standards of morality for ourselves, and that our ultimate accountability is defined simply by whether or not we have been true to our own principles.

But there is a measure far greater and more absolute than ours in this universe. That measure belongs to the one who existed long before anything else, whose existence is based on nothing but himself. He is the one who defines right and wrong. In fact, we would not even have a sense of right and wrong if his image was not indelibly stamped upon us.

In Greek alphabet terms, alpha is the first letter of the alphabet and omega is the last. There is one who is the Alpha and the Omega. All existence is defined and measured by him. He is the first and the last, the beginning and the end.

That one is here with you right now as you are reading, and he will return to this world in power one day to judge all people. That friend of yours who says "I am a good person" will be measured up to God. Their "goodness" is like a filthy rag next to the goodness of God. Maybe neither you nor they have ever considered this, and you need to get involved, to speak with them honestly about this.

Make it personal

Is there something in your own life that you know will not be acceptable to God? Something that is niggling at the back of your mind and that you know isn't right?

September 15

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

"For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."

Jesus' plan for you, when he died for you, was to refocus your life onto his perfect priorities and purposes for you!

The Lord's message to us today is clear in this passage, isn't it? You can either live for yourself or you can live for God. Living for ourselves comes naturally to us. We can dress it up with religious language and actions, but still self is at the heart of our natural life.

If you are going to live for God, it will not be natural. You will need to consciously decide each day: "My life is for God and today I will put Him before myself — his desires, his purposes, his pleasure, his plans before my desires and purposes and pleasures and plans.

Jesus died and rose for you, and now he is calling you to live for him. He will enable you to do what he calls you to do. In fact, he will do it through you! But he will not choose for you. You must choose to live for him and not for yourself.

Make it personal

If you don't think you have much to give right now to God and to the world, what do you think God expects of you?

September 16

Matthew 6:5-8

"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

Don't pray only when you are with other people; develop your secret, private life of prayer!

When you have a special friend, you love doing things with them in a big group of friends. But the best times in the friendship are the times when it is just the two of you. That's when you go deep.

It's the same with God. He loves to be involved in our meetings, our group times. But it's the inner, secret, private times of prayer that take your relationship to a much deeper level. If you want an intimate walk with God, learn to spend lots of time with him "in secret".

Make it personal

How do you need to adjust your schedule so that you can make time to spend with God?

September 17

Genesis 2:18

"Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.'"

Build friendships that will help you live a godly life!

We were made for relationships. We need one another!

It is a terrible mistake to try to face temptation and grow spiritually without the support, encouragement and accountability of spiritually-minded people around us. As AW Tozer put it, "God knows nothing of solitary Christianity". Or as our passage says, "It is not good that the man should be alone".

We need to be building meaningful relationships in two directions. On one hand, we need to be spending time with people who do not have God in their lives so we can be walking with them towards Christ. But our spiritual lives will always be in danger of falling into temptation if we're not also building spiritual relationships with people who love the Lord.

If you want to stand firm in your spiritual life, beware of lonely moments. Loneliness leaves you open to temptation. Rather, work hard at your spiritual relationships. Talk to your Christian friends about taking your relationship to the next level.

Pray together and hold one another accountable for your responses to temptation and for your responses to God's purposes in your life. Discuss what God is teaching you. Listen and learn. You won't be sorry!

Make it personal

Who could you form a special group with to hold each other accountable?

September 18

Matthew 6:19-24

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also!

Many of us wouldn't feel like we are rich enough to have a treasure. But ask yourself the question, "What do I treasure?" That is, what matters a lot to you? Are they the things that matter to God? You can only have one thing that rules you. Do you treasure looking good in front of your peers more than obeying God, or standing up for what is right? Do you worry about what they may think of you if you admit you are a Christian more than representing Christ to them?

The Lord is asking you today, "Am I your One Thing?" It's a question you must face every day of your life.

He is the one treasure that lasts.

Make it personal

What is something that you may be holding onto more tightly than you should?

September 19

Ephesians 3:7

"Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power."

Ministering the gospel is a gift of grace and is done by the working of God's power!

When you step out of your comfort zone and start sharing Christ with the people around you, you may at first think that sharing Christ is a burden, something that is hard to do but necessary. But as you start to see God use you to change people's lives, you will very quickly realise that God has been so good to you to let you be a part of what he does for people around you. You also recognise that this kind of life change that is happening in these people's lives is not because of any awesomeness in you, but because God is at work with his power.

For sure it is wise for us to be prepared. 1 Peter 3:15 say to "always be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you". It is important that you study the bible to know the truths of scripture and the message of the gospel. But today God wants you to realise that ministering the gospel isn't just about being prepared, it's done by the working of his power. We must realise that we are made ministers of the gospel according to the gift of God's grace, which was given to us by the working of his power. Take a moment to meditate on that thought.

Make it personal

Record the opportunities that God has given you in the last couple of weeks to share about Jesus with someone. Now record your reaction to that opportunity. Were you trusting your own ability or trusting God to minister through you in those situations? How did that affect your interaction?

September 20

Matthew 22:35-40

"And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?' And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.'"

The second most important thing you can do in life is love those around you as yourself!

The first most important thing, Jesus says, is to love God with all that is you. But after this first priority, the thing that matters most to God is your relationship with the people around you.

Love them, God says, and not just a sentimental love. Rather, love them like you love yourself. That is, take care of them. Be concerned for their needs. Care about their feelings. Pray about their struggles. Try to make life better for them.

If someone loved you like that, it would make you sit up and take notice, wouldn't it? No wonder it matters so much to God that you represent his authentic love for the people around you.

Make it personal

What's ONE thing you can do today to love the people you come into contact with the way God calls you to love them?

September 21

Matthew 7:24-27

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

The life that is lived with God's word at its centre can withstand any storm!

A violent storm shakes and pulls apart whatever it finds. But a solid rock is unmoved by whatever storm rages above it. God's word is the rock in your life. It's the only foundation you can build your life on that is always sure.

God's word never changes because God never changes. At some point in your life, the storm will hit. God wants you to know that if you build your life on God's word, trusting him, following his principles, obeying his leading in every situation, then you'll be ready; if you ignore him, the storm will destroy your inner life.

Stand on his word; it's a rock you can trust. Build your life around him. Soak up his word, spend time with him in prayer, talk about him with others around you. Let him permeate every aspect of your life – both your private life and your public life.

Make it personal

What are you truly building your life on that may be "sand"?

September 22

Psalm 46:10

"Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

Give God some still time!

If this is going to happen, you're going to have to allocate time for it!

You will not naturally just find yourself giving time to meditation on the things of God. But once you begin, you will find it to be one of the most important activities in your life.

The truly great people in almost any sphere of activity take time out just for thinking deeply about their lives and work. The Lord is calling us to apply this same discipline to our spiritual lives. It is difficult to take the time to simply be quiet with God and his word. Not necessarily praying so much as listening and thinking about God and what he is putting on our hearts and minds. That's why the Lord is saying to us today, "Be still and know that I am God".

When you first try this discipline you might struggle a bit. Andrew Murray said, "If any are inclined to despond, because they do not have such patience, let them be of good courage. It is in the course of our feeble and very imperfect waiting that God himself, by his hidden power, strengthens us and works out in us the patience of the saints, the patience of Christ himself."

Make it personal

Commit a time in the next two days that you will find somewhere quiet and take some time to meditate on the things of God. Write down the time below and ask that God will meet you there.

September 23

Romans 8:26-27

"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

Pray, even when you don't know what to pray!

This passage is right, isn't it? We're weak in prayer. We often don't know how to pray about something. We know that we long for God to heal someone, or to open someone's heart to him, or to bring some other outcome. But we don't know what God wants in this particular situation, and so we hesitate.

But God doesn't want you to hesitate. He wants you to pray about it. Tell him you don't know what to pray, but here is what you want. God promises you in this passage that the Holy Spirit whom he's placed in your heart will take your request and intercede for you according to the will of God.

God will get involved because you prayed, even though you were not sure how to pray about it. Think about the picture of the Holy Spirit in this chapter. He's taking our needs (even the ones we don't know we need) to the Father with such passion and love FOR US that it's too deep for words! Should that not encourage us to pray and pray unceasingly?

God is inviting you to make prayer a much more central part of your life. Pray to the Holy Spirit that he would guide you in your prayers and help you pray "according to the will of God."

Make it personal

Do you have to think further back than one month to see God's presence in my life? If so you might need to revisit your prayer life and see what you can improve. Write down your thoughts here:

September 24

Galatians 6:12,14

"It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ…. But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

Because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for me, he is now the thing that matters to me, not the world!

We owe the Lord Jesus more than we could ever repay him, yet he doesn't come to us demanding payment. His death on the cross for us was a gift to you from the heart of God. It reflects the depth of his love for you!

But while the Lord does not demand repayment from us, our experience of his self-sacrificing love for us, his willingness to face the unthinkable separation from God the Father for us, his humiliation and shame on our behalf — our experience of that changes us. All of a sudden our level of embarrassment about sharing him with others seems insignificant.

We're now loved people, and that unshakable fact is the foundation of our lives. What it means to us is that he's now the centre of our lives. Making "a good showing in the flesh" doesn't mean to us as much as it used to. Now we're willing to lay things aside in order to be pleasing to him.

Make it personal

How much does your flesh control you and the choices you make? Is Christ's sacrifice for you changing your perspective on life?

September 25

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

"Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"

When things don't go exactly as you planned, thank God that his goals for you are better than yours!

"Give thanks in all circumstances." Notice that the Lord is not saying to us today, "Thank me for the nice, pleasant things in your life." Of course, we should thank him for those things too, but they are just a part of "all".

It's good to have goals and to be moving with purpose in your life, but sometimes God's plans are different than yours. When that's the case, the Lord wants us not to resent his plans but to recognise that he has plans we know nothing about, and to embrace his plan for our lives with even more motivation than the ones we came up with.

It may mean a change of directions. It may not be comfortable, but if you embrace God's plans, you will find yourself living out what he made you for. That may not be clear at first, but that's what faith is all about, isn't it? Often his plans will have to do with your witness for him.

As you consider your day today, move with purpose to fulfil your God-honouring plans, but hold them lightly, accepting God's detours and changes of order with joy and thanksgiving. Those you live and work with will be thankful!

Make it personal

How tightly do you hold onto your plans? Are you willing for God to drastically change them if his plan differs from yours?

September 26

1 Corinthians 5:9-13

"I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you."

God wants you to associate with sexually immoral people, greedy people, drunkards, swindlers and idolaters!

These verses are a clarification of something Paul had written in an earlier letter when he told the Corinthians not to associate with these kinds of people. He realises that some of the Corinthians thought he meant they should only hang out in their bubble of Christian relationships and stay away from these kinds of totally secular non-Christians.

"No, no, no!" Paul says, "That's not at all what I mean." Jesus' plan is for you to be in the world so don't try to stay out of relationships with worldly people unless they are Christians who are ruining their witness for Jesus. Secular people hate hypocritical Christians and God hates hypocrisy just as much. Don't claim the name of Christ if you aren't going to live for him.

But also, if you are going to follow Christ, follow his example (and Paul's example) of associating with "sinners".

Make it personal

Who do you know—outside of your Christian bubble—that you can have a coffee or a cuppa with this week?

September 27

John 15:1-5

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing"

If you want to accomplish the spiritual goals that God has placed in your heart, you must learn to live close to Jesus!

What does Jesus want us to take away from this word picture where he is the vine and we are the branches? The branch depends on the vine for everything — its growth, its energy, its life, its nutrients. In the same way, you can't bear spiritual fruit unless you're getting your energy and life from your living, daily relationship with Jesus.

Abandon all other things that compete with Christ for your source of life and energy and meaning. Prune from your life whatever takes your attention from him. Focus yourself on your relationship with him, make that relationship THE priority in your life, and allow him to live in and through you.

Make it personal

What is taking the priority away from your relationship with God? Do you need to prune it?

September 28

Luke 5:29-32

"And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, 'Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?' And Jesus answered them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.'"

You can't say you are following Jesus if you aren't spending relational time with secular, non-churched people!

This statement seems a little extreme when you first read it, because most Christians live in the Christian subculture, only spending truly relational time with their Christian friends and family. But think about

Jesus' life and you will have to agree that the amount of time and friendship and love expressed towards "sinners" was one of the biggest marks of his life and constantly irritated those who felt that God's people should only hang out with God's people, lest they be tempted and drawn away by the secular values of "sinners".

Make it personal

Read the verses again. What would that look like in your life? In what contexts could you begin to spend relational time with people who don't know Jesus?

September 29

Psalm 111:10

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!"

The most important thing about your life is your perception of who God is. If to you God exists to empower your desires and goals in life to become reality, then you will not have the wisdom or perspective to discern his way forward for your life. You'll simply set your goals according to your own desires and count on God to bring them to fruition.

But if you truly understand the nature of God in all his glory and omnipotence and infinity and eternity, and his holiness and goodness and mercy and love, then you'll realise that God doesn't exist for you, but you exist for him. In fact, all things exist for him.

That reverence ("fear") for God will change your perspective on life and enable you to see clearly the way forward from where you are. What would he want for your life? What would he want you to do? How would he want you to respond to your circumstances? How would he want you to respond in your everyday situations? Which way forward would most enable you to serve him in life? By considering what he wants, you'll gain wisdom and overflow with praise.

Make it personal

Do you have a "fear" of God? Spend some time now reflecting on this and praising him for who he is.

September 30

John 17:18-20

Jesus' prayer to the Father for you: "As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word."

According to Jesus' prayer, your role in the world can be summed up in one word: Sent!

Who sends you? Jesus. God sent Jesus into the world as a man who would depend on the Holy Spirit and on God the Father for guidance, anointing and power. This Jesus, who obeyed the Father's leading and saw the Spirit working through him in amazing ways that could not be explained by his humanity, is sending you out in that same way. He wants you to obey his leading and rely on the Holy Spirit. He doesn't want you to rely on what you can—or can't—do.

Why is he sending you? To live in his name and continue his mission in this world—to seek and to save the lost.

Where is he sending you? Into the world! This is the thing you must keep coming back to until it is part of the way you think, part of you. The best part about your Christian life is the part where you live for Jesus in the world, where you go deeper with your secular friends in the world, where you talk about Jesus in the world. As Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden."

Make it personal

Write your name into this statement of truth from Jesus: As you [God] sent me into the world, so I have sent _____ into the world.

OCTOBER

October 1

Psalm 139:16

"Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them."

I am here because a purposeful God planned my existence!

The secular world would like you to believe that your life has no meaning of its own, no higher purpose, that your life is the random outcome of a chance series of events emerging out of hundreds of millions of years of chaos. But in this Psalm, God is saying to you, "I was intimately involved in making you. I have plans for you. You fit into what I am doing in this world."

You may have been born into a cruel home and grown up in hard circumstances. You may not even like yourself. Or you may be happy and secure. But from God's perspective, you have been uniquely shaped to fit his good plan for you.

If you have not yet discovered God's plan for your life, I encourage you to begin focusing on your spiritual life. Spend time with God in prayer. Read his Word, the Bible. Listen to what he is saying to you about your life.

As you get yourself to a place where you are spiritually sensitive to God, you will find that he is leading you forward in his will for you. Your daily times with him will take on new significance as you ask him to reveal his will for you each day.

Make it personal

Do you know God's plan for your life? If so write it down as a reminder of what you are here to do. If you don't know God's plan for your life yet, can I encourage you to start asking God questions? He is happy to answer. Write down the questions you want God to answer:

October 2

Ephesians 5:13-17

"But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, 'Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.' Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

Make the most of your time!

None of us wants to waste our lives. We don't sit down and plan to waste our years. Yet, often before we know it, time has passed and we look back in shock at how time has flown and we have not done with our lives what we ought to have done by now. Once you've missed that opportunity for witness, you'll never get that moment back again.

The Lord is reminding us today that we can avoid this tragedy, not through some big formula or complicated time-management system, but simply by "making the best use of the time!"

One man has said, "Most time is wasted, not in hours, but in minutes. A bucket with a small hole in the bottom gets just as empty as a bucket that is deliberately kicked over."

He's right, isn't he? When we let the little minutes slip away with nothing of value in them, our life is slipping away. Once gone, time can never be retrieved.

Make it personal

What do you waste a lot of your time on? Do you feel prompted to make a change?

October 3

Ephesians 5:13-17

"But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, 'Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.' Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

Use your time to accomplish God's will for you!

Sometimes our lives get used up by our job and the leftover time we spend watching TV or browsing the internet. We use our time like this, not because we want to waste it, but because there is nothing motivating us to use it another way.

If you get an opportunity to use your time on something you're passionate about, you will never spend it just watching TV instead. So get passionate about God and what he wants to do through you!

How would you use your time differently if you always first asked yourself, "How would God like me to use my time right now?" There will be times when God wants you to kick back and rest or have fun with friends. And there will be times when he wants you to spend some time with him, or equipping yourself for ministry.

Have you thought how you can use even your "busy" time more effectively for God? When you are at the shops, when you are at work, commuting to work, or talking to the parents at sports or playgroup. Sometimes we are so busy being busy we forget about what God may want to be doing through us even while we are busy!

Make it personal

How much of your time is spent on service? What are ways that you can serve others today?

October 4

John 14:23-27

"Jesus answered him, 'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.'"

You can have peace in any circumstances!

We know that until Christ's return there will never be political peace in the world. Conflict is a very real part of life in this fallen world. Stressful situations abound, whether we're Christians or not.

We'll never have perfectly peaceful circumstances in this life. But that's not what Jesus is talking about in this passage. He's not talking about peaceful situations, but peace in your heart. It's the kind of peace that others around you can see. A deep indwelling peace no matter what life throws at you. Someone once said this about peace: "Peace. It does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble or hard work. It means to be in the midst of those things and still be calm in your heart".

Make it personal

What are some of God's promises that you can claim when you are going through a tough season and your heart is troubled?

October 5

Ephesians 6:18-19

"…praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel."

Pray for your brothers and sisters in Christ as they represent Jesus in the world!

So often when Christians come together for prayer we pray for the needs of those in the church and the needs of loved ones. We also pray that God would soften the hearts of people we know who don't yet know him. But when praying, we often leave out something that ought to be in our prayers.

When was the last time you prayed for your own sharing of the gospel with others? When was the last time you asked a brother or sister in Christ to pray for you as Paul requests prayer for himself? He asks his brothers and sisters in Christ to pray "for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel".

If we are ever going to see God transform the lives of others through us we need to both pray and request prayer, as Paul did. Pray that God will open your mouth, pray that God will give you the words to be bold in your witness for him, pray that you can proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ clearly and simply so that others will understand.

Make it personal

Take time now to pray for the people in your life who don't know Jesus. Pray that God would soften their hearts and give you an opportunity to share about Jesus to them. Write your prayer here:

Now contact a brother or sister in Christ and request that they pray for you about this also.

October 6

Psalm 27:1-5

"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall. Though an army encamps against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident. One thing I have asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple. For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock."

God's peace is most evident in difficult circumstances!

This passage oozes with the peace of God. "Whom shall I fear…my heart shall not fear…I will be confident." But the passage is also overflowing with trouble. "Evildoers assail me…an army encamps against me…war arise against me…in the day of trouble."

Many times the Lord's plan for your life is not to remove you from troubling situations, but to show the world the difference he makes by giving you peace in spite of those things. How can you find peace? Trust him, and remember that he's with you.

The peace of God is most strongly evident when the storms of life assail you. It's that peace that makes the people around you sit up and notice and ask, "What is different about this person? I want that!"

Make it personal

Do you have God's peace? Speak to him today and hand your problems over to him and let his peace fill you. As you hand those problems over to him, write them down.

October 7

John 16:29-33

"His disciples said, 'Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God.' Jesus answered them, 'Do you now believe? Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.'"

Jesus' presence with us gives us courage and peace in the midst of craziness!

In this passage, Jesus knows he is about to go through that terrible time of testing. The disciples are going to abandon him and the physical torture is going to be excruciating. What gives him peace? He says, "Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me."

And in the stressful situation you face in your life today, Jesus is with you! Just as the Father was with him, so he is with you. What is Jesus' message to you today? "In the world you will have tribulation, but take heart; I have overcome the world." In him, you can overcome anything.

Make it personal

Jesus says "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. My yoke is easy, and my burden is light."(Matt 11:28-30). What stress do you need to give to God? Will you do it today? Will you let go and let God take over?

October 8

John 14:1-3

"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."

Who, or what, are you trusting in?

The world's answer to that question is that you need to trust in yourself and what you can do about your circumstances. Or some people trust in the circumstances themselves. But neither of these are dependable things to trust in!

Circumstances are constantly changing. A person who trusts in them will be constantly swinging between happiness and discouragement. And a person who trusts in his own ability to deal with circumstances will soon discover that he can't control his health, or the actions of other people, or even his own sinful nature.

No, there is only one place to put your trust if you want to find peace. That place of rest and security is found when you decide to totally trust the Lord and his will for you. That doesn't mean that you just resign yourself to God's will—it means that you embrace his will as the best thing in your life. Why? Because you trust him!

Make it personal

Why do you think God does not always reveal his purpose to us? How should we respond when this is the case?

October 9

Psalm 63:1-8

"O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich good, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me."

The Lord wants you to stop and take time to meditate!

It is difficult for us to get quiet without an agenda of activities, or without some kind of media entertaining us, isn't it? Because we are part of an active culture, we think the most important thing we can do is offer ourselves to God for what he wants us to do. But the most important question we can ask God is not, "What do you want me to do?", but rather, "Here I am God…what are you saying?" Listening like that helps your heart to "cling" and "sing".

Make it personal

What has God asked you to do for a while but you keep avoiding? Is he asking you to do that very thing today? Will you finally say yes?

October 10

2 Corinthians 6:1-3

"Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, "In a favourable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the favourable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry"

Put no obstacle in anyone's way!

What obstacles are in the way of those you know who are on a journey towards God?

Do you act differently around them when you're with your Christian friends or would they say your love for them is authentic?

Do they feel they have to dress or act a certain way to come to church, or do they feel comfortable to come as they are?

Is prayer foreign and confusing to them or have they experienced you praying for them and understand prayer to be just like a child talking to his/her father?

Do they see the Christian faith as a series of rituals based on rules or have you helped them see your faith in Jesus as an expression of a genuine relationship with God?

Do they feel judged by you and "preached" at or do you take time to interact and answer their questions?

God is reminding you today to put no obstacle in the way of those who are searching for him. We are to remove all obstacles, religious rituals and man-made expectations, and present Jesus Christ as the bridge to help people get from where they are, separated from God, to where they need to be, in a relationship with him.

Make it personal:

What obstacles do you feel you have mistakenly put in the way of someone coming to experience a real relationship with God? Write them down and next to them record how you can intentionally remove those obstacles.

October 11

2 Corinthians 9:12-15

"For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!"

Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

As Paul talks about the joy of giving and receiving and how God provides what we need to be generous toward others, he bursts out in this exclamation of enthusiastic thanksgiving to God for his supreme gift to us.

Paul spends a lot of time in his letters describing God's grace, but as his heart fills up with emotion over what God has done for us in Christ Jesus, he can't put into words what it means to him.

When we are given an amazing gift, what do we want to do? We want to share that gift with others! We say, "Look what I've been given!" In the same way, when we become truly aware of the gift of grace that God has given us, we cannot help but want to share that gift with others – "Look what I've been given by God!"

Make it personal

What has God done for you? How has he helped you when you needed him the most? What prayers has he answered recently? Can you take some time to thank God for what he has done and share your testimony with one person?

October 12

Matthew 14:22-23

"Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone."

You must get alone with God!

The Lord Jesus' own life teaches us this lesson so powerfully today. If we are going to learn to meditate on the things of God, we need to follow Jesus' example and often get alone with God. Jesus would often slip away to the wilderness, or go up on a mountain. He would find a secluded place to focus on His heavenly Father.

Get away from the Internet, from your magazines, from the TV. Turn your phone off, and your computer too. Do what it takes to truly have time alone with God. He is looking forward to that special time with you, alone together up on his "mountain."

You want to be greatly used by God in other people's lives. But as Leonard Ravenhill put it, "To be much for God, we must be much with God." He was right. Your inner spiritual life determines your usefulness to God.

Think about how busy Jesus was. How many people were clamouring for his attention? And yet he often found time to get alone with his Father. Don't let your busyness be an excuse. You will always make time for what is important to you.

Make it personal

They say that in order to find out someone's priorities you need to look at your schedule. If someone was to look at your daily schedule would they find that God is your number one priority?

October 13

Matthew 5:14-16

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

God wants to reveal himself to others through you!

This is why God made us "in his image". He wants people to see him in us. This is why he has put you in the family you are in, in your specific workplace, with your flatmates, in your neighbourhood, in that club you are a part of.

These are all places where people need to see God in you. Be aware that people are watching your life closely. It may not seem like it sometimes, but it's true. And they're evaluating your God by what they see of him in you.

Representing God to people is a job that is way too big for us, but the great news is that Jesus will live his life through you if you will invite him to lead your life. You cannot live God's way of life, but Jesus can, and he is in you, waiting to do it.

Make it personal

Name one person who you think does a good job at letting their light shine. What do they do practically that you can start doing?

October 14

Luke 22:31-32

"'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.'"

The power of God is brought to bear in a person's life when someone prays for them!

It's easy to focus on the first part of this verse and get all caught up in the idea of God giving Satan permission to sift Simon Peter like wheat. But the outstanding truth of this verse comes next!

Yes, Peter, it is a terrible thing to be "sifted" by Satan, "BUT I have prayed for you"! Jesus knew that praying for Peter was not just "hoping out loud". He knew that when he prayed for Peter, he was getting actively involved in Peter's life. He knew that God the Father would respond to his prayer for Peter and that Peter would come through the trial in direct response to his prayers.

Jesus didn't say, "If you make it through." No! He said, "When you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

God is reminding you today that you can get actively involved in the circumstances of people in your family, or next door, or on the other side of the world, through prayer! It's easy to think that if we don't pray it's okay, but what does this passage tell us? As a result of his prayer, Jesus knew that Simon would not fail and would turn again.

Make it personal

Ask God: "Which two people would you like me to focus my prayer on today?" Write their names here – then pray expectantly!

October 15

Colossians 2:13-14

"And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross."

We were made by God as spiritual beings.

Our spirit enables us to have a spiritual connection to God's Spirit, through whom we experience the life of God flowing through us. But because of our sin and fallenness, that connection is broken. So we are left spiritually dead.

Still, at some point in your life, the Holy Spirit began stirring in your heart an awareness of God and his presence in the lives of some people around you. You came to desire a good relationship with him like they had. You may now be that person that God is using to stir someone else's heart with an awareness of God's presence!

But even that awareness and desire would not have been enough to bring you to God if Jesus had not "forgiven us all our trespasses." All the ways that we have broken God's laws stand against us, accusing us; they are "hostile to us" (v 14 NASB).

But Jesus "set [it] aside, nailing it to the cross." It is a gift that we can never pay for, but can always show gratitude and love for.

Make it personal

God is the really the best gift giver there is. Who could you bless with a gift today?

October 16

Acts 1:14

"All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers."

There is great value in praying together with others!

If you want to develop your prayer life, you need to develop it in two directions: firstly, in the area of your own personal relational interaction with God, and secondly, in the area of praying with others. If you choose the right "others" to pray with, your group prayer will be one of the biggest factors in the growth and maturity of your own personal prayer life.

When I was a teenager, I began meeting with a group of older men in my church for prayer at 8am every Saturday morning. It was immediately obvious to me that these men knew God deeply and knew how to pray. There were times when we prayed for two hours and I just listened and agreed with their prayers, and times when I couldn't keep from praying the things on my heart.

We were not just praying through a list, we were calling on God for his work in our lives and in our church. Through those men, I learned when to claim something in faith, how to express my heart to God, how to use the Bible in prayer.

Make it personal

Who is there in your life that you could begin meeting with to pray? Write their name down and commit to asking them to start meeting with you to pray.

October 17

Luke 15:25-32

"Now his older son was in the field and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never game me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

You can be a committed Christian and still bring God grief if you ignore his greatest concern! This older brother worked hard for his father and obeyed his commands, but totally ignored his father's deep burden to find his younger brother.

Make it personal:

Which character in the story would you say is most like you?

☐ Younger brother

☐ Older brother

☐ Father

October 18

Matthew 10:28

"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."

Don't take God lightly!

It's easy in the midst of the pressures and distractions of life to get so focused on our own lives that we start to think that the universe revolves around us, that even God exists for us and that we can assign him any level of importance in life that suits us at the moment.

What a terrible mistake! The universe revolves around God, not us. All living things, including us, exist only because he wills it to be so. Every person will one day be accountable to God for his or her life. Because each one of us has broken God's moral laws, we all deserve the horror of eternal hell.

Don't take it lightly. It is your future unless you find forgiveness with God. You will not gain forgiveness by doing lots of good things or going to church or getting baptised. The only way to forgiveness is the way that God himself has made. Jesus died on the cross. He took the penalty that you and I deserve so that we can be made acceptable to God.

Think of the people around you in life. God has sent you into their lives. Think of them facing hell for eternity. Let that reminder galvanise you to get active in moving forward with your redemptive relationships! This is really serious.

Our penalty is paid. But people must receive the forgiveness God offers them by trusting in Jesus Christ.

Make it personal

Do you believe that God can forgive your worst sin? Why or why not?

October 19

John 3:3-6, 16

"Jesus answered him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?' Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.'" (vv.3-6,16)

You've been born physically, but have you been born spiritually yet?

God created mankind to be in a healthy spiritual relationship with him. At first, it was the way it was meant to be--and life was beautiful. But then men and women decided to live life their way.

Their selfish disobedience broke their relationship with God and they became spiritually dead to God. We've been born in that same condition: physically alive, but spiritually dead.

Jesus died on the cross in your place, to pay the penalty for your sins so that you could be restored to God and made spiritually alive. God's inviting you: put your trust in Jesus Christ today.

Make it personal

What does John 3:16 mean to you? "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

October 20

2 Corinthians 9:8

"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work."

You do not have to be rich to be generous!

"So that you may abound in every good work." How are you using the abundance that God has given you? Are you using it for "every good work"? That's the reason God gave it to you.

God doesn't give us financial blessings, large or small, just for our own benefit. Everything we have belongs to him and he wants us to use it for his purposes. Every financial and material blessing in your life is an expression of God's grace to you, blessing you with the ability to use it for something that will make a spiritual impact in this world.

Have you ever thought of using some of that blessing that God has given you for buying a couple of coffees, going to the local park, and offering a stranger a cup and then sitting down to chat? Maybe not about God, but just about life. Then see where God takes it. I know someone who did that and ended up having a powerful spiritual impact on that person's life.

Make it personal

How can you use what you God has blessed you with to be a blessing to others? What do you expect God to give you? Are you showing the same generosity to others?

October 21

2 Corinthians 2:14

"But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere."

They just have to encounter a Christian. God plans to spread the knowledge of him to people around you, through you!

God doesn't only spread the knowledge of him through preaching at church, or through reading the Bible. People don't have to come to a special place to encounter God, they just have to encounter a Christian who is living as a witness.

DL Moody once said, "Of one hundred men, one will read the Bible, the ninety-nine will read the Christian." He was right. In this verse Paul pictures Jesus leading Christians around like a parade, showing what a difference he makes in their lives, so that "through us he spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere."

That's why it's important for you to drop little titbits about your relationship with God into your normal conversations about life. Being open about your relationship with God spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him to people around you. It attracts them to the incredible person, Jesus Christ.

Make it personal

Do your neighbours know that you're a Christian? Do your workmates know that you are a Christian? Do your friends know that you are a Christian? If they don't why is that? If they do, is it because you told them or is it because you act like a Christian?

October 22

2 Corinthians 1:3-6

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation."

Your painful experiences prepare you to be an effective witness!

"If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation," says the Apostle Paul. One of the reasons God allows pain in your life is to make you a better witness. People who don't know Jesus often connect much more strongly with the painful experiences in your life than with the blessings you love to experience.

You may be tempted to push God away in frustration when he allows painful experiences to come, but that is exactly when you need to draw close to him and ask him to walk through the valley with you, to be especially close to you. Your response to God in those times not only decides the positive or negative impact of your suffering in your life, but also weakens or strengthens your witness to others in your life in the future who may be going through hard times of their own.

Make it personal

What are you facing in your life right now that is hard? How can you respond to it and to God in a way that will strengthen your witness in the future?

October 23

Isaiah 40:15-18

"Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust. Lebanon would not suffice for fuel, nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering. All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness. To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?"

God is more significant than everything else that exists put together!

As Isaiah gropes for a way to compare all the nations of the earth to God, he keeps going to greater extremes to find a fitting comparison. Compared to God they are "like a drop from a bucket…the dust on the scales…fine dust…not enough for a burnt offering…as nothing before him…less than nothing…emptiness".

Finally, when he cannot make the comparison any more extreme, he says, "To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?"

How foolish we are to ever put God on the sideline in our lives!

Put God first, and your life will be as it should be: less stressed, more balanced, joyful and meaningful. When you obey his leading no matter what he is asking you to do, your joy of fulfilment will be completed in him.

Make it personal

Where haven't you put God first in your life? Write it down below. What could you do today to ensure that he takes his rightful place in that area?

October 24

2 Corinthians 2:15-16

"For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life."

It brings God pleasure when we represent Christ to the people in our lives!

To those who are rejecting God our openness regarding Christ is a bad smell, a fragrance from death to death. And to those who are seeking or moving towards God, our relationship with Christ is attractive, a fragrance from life to life.

But notice Paul's main point here. We are the aroma of Christ to God. This is the most important part of representing Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing: God loves it when we let people see how Jesus is walking with us through the difficult times. He loves it when we give him the glory for the blessings in our lives, when we share what he is teaching us about life.

If we truly love God and desire to please him above all else in our lives then we will be open with non-Christians about our relationship with Jesus, because this is what God is all about in our lives.

Make it personal

Take a moment to jot down a few things about your relationship with God or about what God is teaching you, that you could share with people in your life who don't know him yet.

October 25

2 Corinthians 2:15-17

"For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ."

We are people of sincerity. Representing Christ to the people in your life, in a way that draws people to him, is beyond your ability, but God will work through you anyway!

After talking about the kind of life that represents Jesus and is attractive to those who are seeking and open to God, Paul says, "Who is sufficient for these things?" I know that I sure feel that way. What should I say to the people around me? How can I be open with them about Jesus in a way that will draw them to him? How can I know the right time to speak? I'm not good at talking to people one-on-one.

Paul goes on to say that the answer is not in learning good 'sales techniques'. We aren't peddlers of God's word! No, we are people of sincerity, simply sharing the realities of life with Jesus. We can have confidence because we have been commissioned by God to share Christ with people. And we know that he has not left us alone in our witness. "In the sight of God we speak in Christ."

Step out with confidence in Christ today and share openly about your relationship with him. You and your words may be weak, but he and his Spirit in you are strong!

Make it personal

What do you think it means to be a "person of sincerity?

October 26

2 Corinthians 3:4-6

"Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."

Do you feel inadequate to be an effective witness about your life with Jesus? That's good!

One of the most important places to arrive at, as you learn to live the lifestyle of a witness, is the place where you accept your own inadequacy. It's so ingrained in us that we should be sharing Christ with people around us that we feel a responsibility to say, "I need to do this. I can do this. I just need to try a little harder."

Today's passage says that we can have confidence not because of our own ability, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant! It's God's Spirit who gives life.

Relax about being able to do this well. You know and God knows that you can't. But you can still be a witness with confidence, because God's Spirit will work even through your inadequacy. God doesn't want your ability—he wants your availability! Then he will do the work.

Make it personal

What kind of excuses do you make when an opportunity to share the Gospel arises? Do you tell yourself you don't have the time? Do you tell yourself you will mess it up? Or that the person doesn't want to hear what you have to say?

October 27

Matthew 22:35-38

"And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?' And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.'"

How has my love for God grown this past year?

This is the most important question of your life. Notice that Jesus is telling us what is the most important concern God has about our lives. God wants your love for him to be the core of your life. Your love for God should be the bottom line of all decision-making in your life.

When deciding what to watch on TV, remember your love for God. When reacting to someone who has treated you badly, remember your love for God. When given the opportunity to share Christ with someone, remember your love for God. When your alarm goes off for your quiet time with God and you are tired, remember your love for God.

Has your love for God grown stronger or weaker this past year? Think about relationships. What things make any relationship grow deeper and stronger? Now apply those things to your relationship with God. Commit to him with all your heart, soul and mind.

Make it personal:

What is one way you can take your relationship with God even deeper this coming year?

October 28

2 Corinthians 4:2

"We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God."

Don't try to mix cunning or manipulative practices with being a witness.

Just talk honestly and openly about your relationship with Jesus. You don't have to have all the answers and you can share freely about your struggles. But don't try to present a false reality as if everything is great and there are no problems for you because you are a Christian. People know that's fake. It's how Jesus is with you in your problems and struggles that matters to them.

And guard yourself from the temptation to soften what the Bible says about how sin separates us from God or about Jesus being the only way to deal with our sin problem. You might think that people will react negatively to these things, and there is that possibility. But people are much more likely to respond to the open statement of the truth from God's word than to your politically correct tampering.

Make it personal

What can you do to model authenticity? Why is it important for you to be authentic?

October 29

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

"By the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Satan, 'the god of this world', is actively at work to keep people from understanding and accepting the good news about Jesus!

Sometimes you share the gospel very openly and clearly with someone, or you take them to an event where the gospel is powerfully and clearly declared. You speak to them later, hoping they are ready to turn to Christ but you find that they still don't really understand and you wonder how they could have missed it.

The influence on that person's heart and mind is not one-sided. Yes, God is reaching out to them as he works through you. But at the same time, Satan is working hard to keep them from understanding the truth.

What can you do about this? You can pray about God's work in your friend's' life through you. The same God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness" will shine piercing the darkness Satan is trying to create.

Make it personal

Do you have any experiences where you took someone to church and they didn't seem to be impacted by the message of the Gospel? Are you allowing these experiences to keep you from inviting people to church?

October 30

2 Corinthians 4:6-9

"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies."

Treasures in jars of clay. When you are struggling, don't hold back from being a witness—God loves to work through us when we are feeling our weakness. It makes his power even more evident!

Paul talks about this ministry of being a witness as a treasure. How amazing it is that God shines in our hearts to give people the light of the knowledge of what amazing things God has done for us in Christ.

But this treasure (our witness) is in jars of clay—that's us. We are the jars of clay that are not amazing and beautiful, but ordinary and weak. It's this witness about Jesus that shines out of us that is amazing, and that is all due to the power of God.

God wants you to know that when you feel the clay—when you feel afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, struck down—that's when the life of Jesus may also be manifested in your body. It's when Jesus meets you in your weakness that your witness shines the brightest.

Make it personal

When your life have you seen God use your "weakness" to benefit others?

October 31

Romans 3:21-30

"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it – the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (vv. 21-24)

A gift only benefits you if you receive it!

Have you ever received God's wonderful gift of forgiveness for the ways you have broken his moral laws? You receive his gift, not by doing good deeds, or becoming very 'religious'. Remember, the gift is paid for by the one who gives it. You receive his gift by "believing".

You may have been trusting in your good works or your involvement at church to make you acceptable to God, but you should trust in what Jesus did for you on the cross.

You've been trusting in your old way of life to bring you meaning in life, but now you're going to trust God and turn over the leadership of your life to him.

Make it personal

Write down a prayer and express your new (or renewed) faith and surrender to God. Why does surrendering to God lead to freedom and adventure?

NOVEMBER

November 1

John 17:15-18

"I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."

Stop and think about the people God has put in your life!

Look at Jesus' prayer to the Father for us in the verses above. He wants us in the middle of the secular world, even though its values are so different from our own. He wants us there because he has specifically sent us there to be his witnesses.

You have been sent into the lives of the people around you to represent God to them. That's why Paul says, "we are ambassadors for Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Think about the people in your life who don't know Jesus. They may barely even be acquaintances to you at this point. Still, you may be the greatest gift God has ever given them because you know Jesus.

Through you, God wants to help them find the greatest gift he will ever give them—forgiveness and a loving welcome into his family, and a place in his plan of redemption for this fallen world. Don't miss what God is saying to you today.

Make it personal

Stop now and think about the people God has sent you to. Do you see yourself as a gift from God to them? Write down your response below.

November 2

Proverbs 15:1

"A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

Stop and think about your words!

Words shouted in anger are not the words that accomplish good things. Harsh words might feel good for a moment because you get to vent all the anger, stress and frustration that has been building up inside you.

But if you stop and think, you will quickly recognise that nothing constructive was accomplished with those words. In fact, they almost surely made the situation worse. More than that, those two or three little harsh words you say to a friend might forever close the door to you witnessing to them.

Those feelings of frustration and stress should not be stuffed down and ignored; instead, think about how you can express them in ways that do not accuse, but rather share how you feel, and invite the other person to engage in meaningful conversation with you about how they feel.

Train yourself to stop and think about your words before reacting to someone. It will be one of the most valuable disciplines in your life. God wants you to learn self-control as you represent him to the people in your life. He knows that this way of gentleness and patience is not natural to you. Your word for it might even be "impossible." That's why he has given you his Holy Spirit—to enable you to live God's way when you make that choice.

Make it personal

Why do you think it's so difficult to let go of your need to to get even or "have the last word"?

November 3

Daniel 3:16-18

"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, 'O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

Faith and obedience to God are inseparable!

If you are trusting God, you are also obeying him; if you are not obeying God, then there is a problem with your faith. When you get frustrated with your spiritual life because there's an area of sin that you can't seem to overcome and you don't know why obedience is such a problem to you, you can be sure that it finds its root in unbelief. There is something that God has said that you do not believe.

Faith leads to obedience. You follow God because you trust him. And in a beautiful upward spiritual spiral, obedience also leads to faith! When you step out to obey God, you inevitably find that God responds to your obedience with his faithfulness. Your experience of God's dependability then leads you to greater faith and greater obedience. And so your faith continues to grow.

Sometimes it's a challenge to obey God's leading. I don't imagine that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego relished the thought of being thrown into the fiery furnace. But their unconditional obedience is an example for us to follow.

Make it personal

Do you agree with the following statement? "Obedience is a sign of faith; disobedience is the result of unbelief"

November 4

1 Peter 2:9-10

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

What were you made for?

The significance of your life is found in your relationship with God!

Without God we're no more than complex animals, serving our instincts for pleasure and self-preservation, caring for our young until they can independently pursue their own pleasures and self-preservation. Such a life holds no meaning, it's mere existence.

But when God touches our lives, we become part of his family and his great purpose. Our essential nature changes—we become spiritually alive, his Spirit begins to guide us. This is far more than existence; it's transcendence! We have a meaningful relationship with the God of the universe, not because we deserved it, but because he reached out to us in love and revealed himself to us. We can know him!

As J.I. Packer puts it: "What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we have in life? To know God. What is the eternal life that Jesus gives? To know God. What is the best thing in life? To know God. What in humans gives God most pleasure? Knowledge of himself."

Make it personal

Spend some time now just listening to God. Get to know him. What is he talking to you about? Write it down below.

November 5

Romans 1:1, 5-6

"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,…to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ."

You have a clearly designed part to play in what God is doing in this world!

In this passage, Paul knows that God "called" him to be an apostle; he knows that he was "set apart" for a special purpose that God had designed him for. As we read the Bible it is obvious to us that Paul was right about this. He played such a crucial role in laying the foundations of the early group of believers. Through him, the gospel spread throughout the Roman world.

But notice the last clause of the passage above, where Paul says, "…including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ." Paul is saying to us: "I was called for a special purpose God had designed me for, and you also have been called for a special purpose that God has designed you for."

Does your life have meaning? God is giving you a resounding YES today. Where will you find that meaning? Ask God to begin to unfold to you what he has designed you for, how he wants to use you in the lives of others. God wants you to know his purpose, so ask confidently!

Make it personal

What causes do you strongly believe in? Connect with? This could be a first step towards identifying your purpose:

November 6

1 Thessalonians 5:17

"Pray without ceasing."

To increase your faith, increase your communication with God!

This is one of the shortest verses in the Bible—just three words—but it is one of the most powerful keys to your Christian life. Your faith will flow from your current of communion with God. When you are experiencing God himself in your life and his nearness is something that you are consciously aware of, what is there to fear in anything else that comes along?

Your living, interactive, personal connection to God makes your faith bulletproof. It is this kind of connection with God that Paul is talking about in this passage and that God is challenging us about today.

God wants you to not only have a special time with him in his word and prayer each day; he also wants you to learn the practice of communicating with him throughout the day. When you meet someone new, seek God's guidance. Let him speak through you. When you're driving, ask him how he wants to use you in the lives of those around you—yes the other drivers!

Keep your awareness of the presence of God constant and you never need to worry that your faith might falter at the critical moment. Your faith will pour out of your experience of God.

If you are able to think while doing other things, then you are also able to pray while doing other things. Why not work on it today? Develop the habit of constant fellowship with God.

Make it personal

Write down one instance when prayer helped you persevere through a difficult time in your life. Do you have somebody in your life who is having a difficult time? Can you share this story with them?

November 7

Psalm 119:103

"How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"

Jesus said, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me." (John 5:39)

Jesus said these words to people who searched the Scriptures for the wrong reasons.

But for those of us who have a living relationship with Jesus, these words of his draw us to search the Scriptures for the right reason!

Because we love Jesus, we love the Bible. We want to get to know Jesus more and so we soak our lives in the Word of God.

If you have a relationship with another person and you want to get to know them better, you have a conversation with them. You listen carefully to what they share with you about themselves. You focus on them.

It's the same with your walk with God. God is speaking to you; but as long as your Bible is closed you miss out on so much of what God wants to say and do in your life! The Bible can be dry if you approach it academically. But if you approach it with an open heart, listening for the voice of God in your heart, it will be "sweeter than honey to your mouth." No one can taste it for you—you must open your Bible and savour its sweetness for yourself.

Make it personal

Take some time today to open up your Bible and listen to what God is trying to tell you. Ask him to direct you to what he wants to show you. Journal your response below:

November 8

Jeremiah 1:5

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you;"

You are not here by accident!

No matter the circumstances of your birth, you are here on purpose—God's purpose.

God sent you at this point in history as a unique person to make a difference for him in a way that no one else can.

The words in the verse above were spoken by God to Jeremiah when he appointed him a prophet. Jeremiah thought there must be some mistake. He felt completely incompetent to be used by God in any way. But there was no mistake. God told him the same thing he is saying to your heart today: "I wanted you born and I made you for my purposes. You fit into what I want to do in the lives of the people you touch!"

With this understanding of purpose comes a flood of meaning into our lives. Every day becomes an exploration of what God might want to do through me in the lives of the people around me. My eyes lift from a search for what will satisfy me and make me feel better to a focus on representing Jesus in my world.

Make it personal

Why is knowing your purpose in life important to you?

November 9

Hebrews 3:12-15

"Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.… Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

Fellowship is one of the tools God has given us to transform our lives!

Do you see in your own life the danger that this passage warns us about? Do you feel your heart growing hard toward God in some area? The best way to avoid a hardened heart is to get close to other people who have a real love for God. Really get into each other's spiritual lives.

Don't just hang out together. Rather, share with each other what's happening in your spiritual lives. Talk about what God is teaching you. Pray together. Study the Bible together.

You'll find that this keeps your heart soft toward God and you'll be growing spiritually as you "encourage one another."

Make it personal

Who can you meet with like this? If you're already meeting together, how can you encourage the other members to become more Christlike?

November 10

2 Corinthians 6:4-10

"But as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honour and dishonour, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything."

Endure whatever it takes to stay true to God and the gospel!

From within the pages of the Bible and all the way down through history there have been men and women of God who have endured all things in order to stay true to God and the message of the gospel. God has used these people in powerful ways to see his plan of salvation reach the ends of the earth and to us today.

Take a moment to think about the people in your life whom God used to help you journey towards faith in Christ. Consider their lives. Have their lives been free from hardship and tragedy? How did they respond to life's circumstances?

When we face hardship and tragedy we can be encouraged by the words of the Apostle Paul, "…as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything". In his circumstantial hardship and apparent tragedy, Paul endured and in so doing made many rich in the kingdom of God and possessed everything he desired for life.

Make it personal

In the hardship and tragedy you are facing right now, what is your testimony to those around you?

November 11

2 Corinthians 8:9

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."

Jesus became poor so we could become rich!

After a sermon on the topic of giving, a man said to me, "I don't have a problem with giving, I just have a problem with how much I keep for myself." Isn't this true for many of us? I must admit, when I think about my giving, my first thought is often, "Well, how much do I need?" But is this the mindset God wants us to have?

In this passage, Paul is writing to a church that has lost its passion for giving generously. He's reminding the church of Jesus' generosity to motivate them in their giving. Paul is, in effect, saying, "Remember, Jesus didn't just give a tithe, he gave up his riches in heaven in becoming a man, all the way to his last breath on the cross. Remember that when Jesus gave all we became rich with his grace!"

This is the mindset God wants us to have when it comes to our giving. A mindset that says, "God I surrender all. Lord, I will give up my own comforts so that others can encounter you."

In a world that values money and worships materialism, we have an opportunity to give generously so that those who are lost can be found, those who are blind can see and those who are poor may become truly rich in Jesus' grace.

Make it personal

Record how God has used your local church to develop you as a follower of Christ. List the gospel ministries that have been a blessing to you. Note down missionaries and faith workers you know. Now pray and ask God how he wants you to assign the finances he has entrusted to you.

November 12

1 Corinthians 10:23-33

"'All things are lawful,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful,' but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbour. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. For "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. …So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved."

Always consider how what you do impacts on your witness for Christ!

Paul is writing about how he decided whether or not to do something frowned upon by some Christians when he knew he had freedom from God to do it or not. He tells us that the deciding point for him in each situation was how it would impact on his ability to share the gospel with those people.

It's easy to simply make our own preferences the deciding point, but today God is reminding you that just as Jesus put our salvation before his own life, we need to learn to embrace his priorities as our own and put others' salvation before our own preferences.

Make it personal

Take a moment to write a one or two-sentence response to what God is saying to you.

November 13

Isaiah 14:27

"For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?"

God does what he plans, and nothing can keep him from it!

Think about who God is. He's the Supreme Being of the universe, the Creator of everything besides himself, the Author of life. He's omnipotent, all-powerful. If God decides to do something, what could possibly thwart his purpose? Nothing!

Some Christians are afraid of God's power as if it could mean disaster for them. But only those who are opposed to God's purpose need to fear his power. If you're building your life around God's purposes in this world, then you can be sure that all of God's power stands behind you, ready to support his work through you.

If you don't have a clear sense of what God's purpose is for you, then build your life around the purposes of God that are true for everyone. He wants you to honour him with your life, to speak of him to others, to give him the credit for what he does in your life, and to pursue a deeper relationship with him each day.

God is reassuring you through this verse today that he's dependable; his promises are reliable, and you don't need to be nervous about following his will in your life. If he is for you, who can be against you?

Make it personal

Think of your walk with the Lord so far. Would you say that he is dependable based on your experience? What about the Bible? Does that Bible say that he is dependable? What about the community of believers surrounding you? Would they say that he is dependable?

November 14

John 3:26-30

"And they came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.' John answered, 'A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him. The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease.'"

To make it your aim to exalt Jesus, rather than yourself, is the most joy-filled way you can live!

It seems backwards, doesn't it, that living for someone other than yourself would be better than living for yourself? But John's illustration helps us understand. Just like you can be so excited when your good friend finds an awesome person to marry—or like a grandparent can be overjoyed when their grandchild does well—in the same way you can find great joy when someone falls in love with your dear friend Jesus and doesn't take as much notice of you.

Promote Jesus. You will be surprised by the joy it brings you when people notice him.

Make it personal

Write down one way you can promote Jesus, rather than yourself, to someone you meet today:

November 15

Ephesians 2:4-5

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved."

God's grace toward us is even more amazing and beautiful in light of his holiness!

What is God's grace all about? It's about the fact that we don't deserve God's love and mercy, but he gives it to us anyway. This generosity isn't because of what's in us, but because of his own loving nature.

Why don't we deserve God's goodness? Because God is holy and perfect. He doesn't even have the hint of sin or imperfection. Because of this, he cannot have a meaningful relationship with anybody who carries the guilt of sin.

Since every one of us has done what we knew was wrong countless times, we all deserve God's judgment, not his goodness. Just stop and think about what your life and all of eternity would be like for you if God gave you what you deserve from him. Take a minute and consider it.

Now do you see why God's grace is so amazing? God's reminding us today of how much he's given us, although we didn't earn it.

Make it personal

God invited you into his circle of love long before you invited him into your circle of love. Who could you invite in your circle of love even though you are not in their circle of love?

November 16

Psalm 66:18-20

"If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me!"

Your relationship with God must be right if you expect him to answer your prayers!

When you come into a living relationship with Jesus Christ, your guilt before God is taken away and you begin to relate to him as his child. You are secure in that relationship with him as his son or daughter. But as his child, your daily fellowship with God is hindered when you disobey him or resist what he wants to do in your life.

When you become aware of a problem in your fellowship with God, when you know that you need to make things right in the relationship, don't delay. Get the issues out in the open. Talk to God about those things and ask for his forgiveness and restoration of your fellowship with him. He still loves you as his dear child and wants you to be walking close to him.

When you make things right between you and God, then you will find that there is such a great confidence in your prayers and an openness in God's response.

Make it personal

What issues do you need to bring out into the open? God can handle your honesty.

November 17

1 John 5:14-15

"And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him."

Get your prayers in line with God's purposes and watch him work in response!

This kind of praying means that our prayers are actually the response to what God is showing us of his will in the things we are praying about. These verses tell us that "if we ask anything according to his will", the answer is guaranteed. If that is the case, then what is the most important thing about prayer?

Discerning the will of God!

This means that when we are bringing issues to God, we should not start our prayers immediately with what we want God to do, but rather should spend time on our knees with our Bibles open in front of us talking with God about the issues concerning us and asking him to show us what he is doing in our own hearts and in the lives of the people involved. How he is preparing the people in our lives and around us.

How does he want us to minister and be a witness for him?

When you begin to discern what God is up to, then you can pray with absolute confidence about things.

Make it personal

Pray now for your friends and people you know who do not know the Lord. Pray that God will work his will in their lives and that you may get an opportunity to be a part of that plan. Write down some of your thoughts below.

November 18

Proverbs 15:8-9

"The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him. The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but he loves him who pursues righteousness."

When your prayers flow from your walk with the Lord, God loves your prayers!

Prayer is not wishing-out-loud; it is not some guessing game. Nor is it a genie's bottle, which if rubbed the right way and the right words are said in the right order, will produce the desired result. No…prayer is communication and fellowship with the God of the universe.

In prayer, you share your innermost thoughts, needs and feelings, whether beautiful or ugly, and you think deeply on Scripture, allowing God to speak to you. You acknowledge God's place as the leader of your life.

As you do so, God shares his heart with you and you will find that your requests take on a more heavenly perspective as if they are flowing from God's own heart, with the full assurance of God's responding answer.

God wants you to know that this kind of prayer life is "his delight". As you begin to build your spiritual life in this way, you will quickly discover that it is your delight too! No one in the world is happier than a Christian who is truly walking with God.

Make it personal

A fruitful prayer life requires a foundational conviction that God is your Father, he is totally for you, without hesitation on his part, he is wholly for your good. Just how key is this conviction for your prayer life?

November 19

2 Timothy 2:3,10

"Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus… Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."

Don't forget what the battle is about!

The battle is about what God is doing to draw more and more people to turn to him for forgiveness and a new life empowered and directed by him. That is what God has been working for in this world all along. It is the reason why he has not brought history to a conclusion yet. It is why he has left you on earth instead of taking you straight to heaven.

God wants you to know that he wants to use you today, and tomorrow, and the day after that, to help the people in your life move towards Christ. As you pray about your day today, focus your prayers, not on your wants, but on your relationships. Ask God to use you in those relationships to help those people take one small step closer to him today.

Then look for God's answer as you spend time with people. Look for any chance to have a spiritual conversation, to talk about what God means in your life, or how he has changed your life, or something you learned from Scripture this week.

Make it personal

What can you give up this week in order to make more time for the relationships that matter?

November 20

John 19:28-30

"After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), 'I thirst.' A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, 'It is finished,' and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

It is finished!

The work Jesus was doing was paying for your sins. That work? It is finished! Was his payment enough? It is finished! Are you in danger of doing something bad enough that Jesus' death did not pay for it? It is finished! Did Jesus take all of God's anger that was directed toward you? It is finished! Is there still some religious activity you need to do to finish what Jesus started in purchasing your salvation? No! it is finished!

Should we still be giving our lives to the work of the Lord on this earth, honouring him in all that we do? Yes! But is that work done in order to earn our salvation? No. The work of salvation is finished. When you were united with Christ there was nothing else to do for salvation.

Make it personal

Reflect on that phrase "It is finished." Write your response below.

November 21

Luke 4:16-19

"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'"

When Jesus came back to the town he had been brought up in, he wanted to clearly declare his calling from God the Father. He wanted people to know what the Father had sent him to do. So he found a verse in Isaiah that expressed it and read it to them: "The Spirit of the Lord…has anointed me to proclaim good news…to set free…."

This is still his purpose on earth and he lives it out through you!

As you interact with people today, ask questions that could open a conversational door that will allow you to encourage them with the hope that Jesus' good news brings.

Take a little time right now and ask God to bring you those moments of opportunity. Ask him to start you talking when those moments arise.

Make it personal

Write your prayer today here, asking God to bring you those "moments of opportunity":

November 22

Proverbs 11:17-29

"One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want. Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered." (vv. 24-25)

You will find your greatest possible blessing when you are a blessing to others!

God's way of life often turns the world's way of thinking on its head. The world thinks you get the most out of life by protecting and hoarding what you have and spending it on yourself. But God's says that we gain the most by giving the most, that we live by dying to self, that we are victorious when we surrender to God.

This is not a natural way of thinking. It only makes sense to a person whose understanding is being opened up by the Holy Spirit. "Dying to self", "the way of the cross", "the lordship of Jesus Christ", "a servant spirit", "living sacrifices", "sacrificial love" — all these expressions are different ways of describing the person who has learned this life-principle.

Today God is challenging us to get our focus off getting for ourselves and onto giving to others. He wants you to develop an attitude of giving about every encounter you have with every person you know.

Make it personal

Who are the people you find the most difficult to deal with and who irritate you the most? How can you show them more grace?

November 23

Proverbs 14:31

"Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honours him."

God wants you to be as gracious to the needy as he has been to you!

Take just a moment; stop and think about God's grace in your life.

Did you deserve it? Did you do something for God first? No, it was God's own character that caused him to pour himself out for you.

When you help a needy person, it reflects God's character at work in you. It "honours him"! The greatest thing you can do for a person is lead them to faith in Jesus Christ. But it also expresses God's heart for them when you simply help them at a point of need. And very often God will get their attention spiritually when you help them materially.

If you take the name "Christian" —meaning "Christ-one"—then you must represent the One whose name you carry. You must have a giving, loving attitude even to those who have done nothing for you. If this is not natural for you, then invite God to live this way through you.

God is waiting for you to say to him, "Lord, I can't love like you, but you can, and you are in me. How do you want to love this person through me? I am available."

Make it personal

How can you express the love of God today to someone you meet? It may or may not be someone you know, but it will be someone that God has brought into your life for you to show his love to.

November 24

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me."

Jesus doesn't simply want you to believe in the historical fact of his resurrection—he wants you to know him!

He's there with you now as you read this, helping you understand him better. When you invite God to lead your life, it's Jesus whose life changes your life. When the Holy Spirit works in your heart and life to reveal what God wants to do in your life, that's Jesus revealing his heart to you.

Jesus told the disciples, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you." (John 16:13-14)

Make it personal

Write down some thoughts on how to communicate the difference between knowing the truth about Jesus and knowing Jesus himself:

November 25

Proverbs 27:17

"Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another."

Don't only work on your own spiritual life, also build up the spiritual lives of those around you!

The Bible is full of guidance on how we can grow much faster if we share in each other's spiritual growth. When we get together with other believers, we can play a major part in helping them walk more closely with the Lord.

God wants you to learn to use your times with your brothers and sisters in Christ to encourage them spiritually, to motivate them in their times with God and in prayer, to discuss ways to more effectively share Christ with others, to serve them and help them. We miss out on so much potential growth when we only ever just "hang out" together.

Hanging out can be very restorative and stress relieving. But if we simply add a relaxed spiritual discussion to our hanging out, we will leave that time together encouraged in the Lord. And if we add a brief prayer time at the end, we will deepen our spiritual relationship with each other and the Lord even more.

Make it personal

Who will you see today that you could ask about what God is teaching them, or pray together, or share about what you got from the Word today? Who could you encourage in their sharing of Christ with others? Ask God to use you to strengthen them spiritually when you get together.

November 26

Psalm 37:3-4, 10-11, 16

"Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.… In just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there. But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.… Better is the little that the righteous has than the abundance of many wicked."

Living a godly life is great!

The kind of life described here is much more wonderful than simply being able to scrape through. It's a life of "abundance". It's a life that has way more than enough. Even though the righteous person is described here as having "little" in the world's eyes, that "little" is more than enough when God is blessing your life!

When God himself becomes your delight, then your desires are fulfilled in your daily walk with him. God may or may not cause a godly person to also be wealthy; but to that person, wealth is not what satisfies.

Rather, they're satisfied with God, and wealth becomes something God has entrusted to them to use for his purposes on earth.

The life that's sold out to God may be something you fear. You may be scared about surrendering that last little corner of your heart to him. You may fear losing friends if you talk to them about Jesus. You may be terrified of speaking to that stranger that God has prompted you to speak to. But God wants you to step out in faith and choose that life. Then you'll overflow, not with fear, but joy!

Make it personal

Is there an area of your life that you haven't surrendered to God? What is stopping you from fully surrendering to God?

November 27

2 Corinthians 5:6-9

"So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him."

When God becomes the most important thing in your life, then your deepest desire – your ambition, "whether at home or away" – will be "to please him"!

When I fell in love with my wife, I had an impossible schedule. I was working full time, doing theological studies full time, learning Greek and Hebrew, teaching a large group at church. Yet I still found lots of time to spend with her. That's what happens when you fall in love. When I fell in love with Jesus Christ, I found myself wanting to spend lots of time with him too.

For the person whose greatest love is the person Jesus, it is not enough just to spend time with him; we also want to bring joy to him by our lives. We want to obey him. We want to do the things that would please him the most. We should be saddened by the things in our lives that don't please him and get rid of them when he brings them to our attention.

Make it personal

What are some ways that you could bring joy to Jesus today? Use the space provided to express your deepest desire to the Lord.

November 28

1 Thessalonians 5:11

"Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing."

Work hard to be an encourager of everyone in your life!

If people are living and ministering in a way that is pleasing to God let them know how much you appreciate them, how much you benefit from being around them, what God is teaching you through them.

And if people are acting in a way that is wrong and offensive, then encourage them towards the Lord.

Gossiping about someone who offends you is only done out of selfish motives, never out of love for them or a desire for them to grow. There is no godliness in talking badly about someone to someone else.

If you love someone and want them to grow in their behaviour to be more Christlike, you will not gossip about them; rather, you will talk to them in an encouraging way and you will talk to the Lord on their behalf. Leonard Ravenhill once said, "Notice, we never pray for folks we gossip about, and we never gossip about the folk for whom we pray! For prayer is a great deterrent."

Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:43-45)

Make it personal

Encourage the people in your life. Pray with them about the issues they are facing. Use it as an opportunity to bless them.

November 29

Matthew 9:27-31

"And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, 'Have mercy on us, Son of David.' When he entered the house, the blind men came to him, and Jesus said to them, 'Do you believe that I am able to do this?' They said to him, 'Yes, Lord.' Then he touched their eyes, saying, 'According to your faith be it done to you.' And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, 'See that no one knows about it.' But they went away and spread his fame through all that district."

We could experience so much more of God's power at work if we only trusted him more!

"According to your faith be it done to you," Jesus said to those blind men. And that's what he's saying to you today as you read this passage. So often in Jesus' ministry, he asked people, as he does in this passage, "Do you believe?" God works in response to faith. There is so much that God wants to do, not only in your life but in the lives of people around you even today if you will trust him completely and take him at his word. Ask God to open your eyes to what he wants to do in and through you, to know him, to trust him.

If you trust him, then you will obey him and honour him in every circumstance, knowing that his power will be at work on behalf of his purpose in your life and also in the lives of those around you. Trust and obey!

Make it personal

What does Jeremiah 17:5-6 say about those who trust themselves and not the Lord? According to Isaiah 40:27-31, what does the Lord do for those who have hope in him?

November 30

2 Thessalonians 1:9-10

They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

This punishment and destruction is not God's desire for these people.

He loves the world so much that he has sent his only Son into the world. As Jesus said, "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:17). Nevertheless, if people choose to ignore God, then they will face his judgment. This truth is not pleasant, but it is still truth and we are foolish to ignore it as if that will make it not be real.

Who has God sent into your life that does not know him? Unless they encounter Christ, they are destined to suffer the punishment of eternal destruction.

Still, because of his love, God has sent you into the lives of those people to be his messenger. You've been entrusted with the good news of the Saviour.

When you put the reality of eternal judgment together with God's desire to forgive and rescue people from that judgment, you are left with a driving motivation to share Christ with people. As Paul put it, "The love of Christ compels me…".

Make it personal

What does the love of Christ compel you to do? Fight for social justice? Pray for the sick? Preach? Lead worship?

DECEMBER

December 1

Matthew 22:35-38

"And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?' And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.'"

According to Jesus, the chief end of your life is to love God with all that is in you!

You may have memorised at some point that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. And this is not in conflict with Jesus' words. But one is the result and the other is the cause. One is the root and the other is the fruit.

The root, from which all other right things in the Christian life flow, is your all-consuming love for Jesus Christ. If you get loving God right, all the other aspects of your life will become right too. If you love God you'll obey him and honour him and live to please him. If you love God you'll love his will for you. If you love God you'll trust him in the hard times. If you love God, he'll fill your mind and your speech. If you love God with all your heart, soul and mind you will not be able to help talking about him to the people around you. It will simply flow out of your love for him.

Make it personal

Is loving God an emotion, a feeling, or a decision? Write down your thoughts and share this with someone:

December 2

2 Corinthians 5:17-20

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

One of the biggest reasons you are on this earth is to carry on Jesus' ministry of leading people around you into a right relationship with God!

This passage just reiterates what Jesus said to us in his final command before leaving earth, when he gave the Great Commission. If God's purpose for you was simply to love him deeply and glorify him fully, then he could have taken you straight to heaven when you were born again. Why did he leave you here?

To share Christ with others!

Make it personal

Who are the people in your life who do not yet know Christ? Could you start a spiritual conversation with one of them this week? Write down their names and ask God to give you an opportunity to share the Gospel with them.

December 3

2 Thessalonians 3:1-3

"Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honoured, as happened among you."

God is the one who opens people's hearts to the gospel, so ask people to pray for you as you witness for Jesus!

That's what Paul does here. He asks the Thessalonians to pray for him as he shares the gospel, that it would be honoured by the people he is sharing with, just as it was when he shared it with the

Thessalonians. If we look back to his first letter to these people, we see how they received the gospel:

"You received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 1:6).

"For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

"And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers" (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Paul knows that only the work of God in answer to prayer could have produced such a response in the Thessalonians' hearts when they heard the gospel, so now he calls on them to pray as he shares the gospel with others, that their hearts would be open and responsive too.

Make it personal

Why do you think God wants other people to play a role in your spiritual growth and ministry?

December 4

Philippians 2:19-21

"I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ."

God's desires are more important than my desires!

Even among Paul's friends and co-workers, it was hard to find someone who had this value in their hearts. Jesus had the same problem. Remember those hard words he said to Peter—"Get behind me, Satan… for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man" (Matthew 16:23).

Every day of your life, two roads are set before you. You can choose to follow God's desires or you can choose to follow your own desires. One of those roads leads to spiritual growth and greater sensitivity to God's work in and through you, to meaning and a sense of rightness about your life. The other road leads to the deterioration of your spiritual life and the hardening of your heart, to being half-hearted, lukewarm, and having no impact for him on the people around you.

God is inviting you to set as one of the foundational values you live by that his desires are more important than your desires. As you leave your own desires in God's hands, you'll find more and more joy in seeking after what he wants for your life.

Make it personal

Is the object of your desire something that God has clearly denied? Why do you want what you want? Is it to benefit God's kingdom or you kingdom?

December 5

Isaiah 55:1-3

"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat was is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant…"

God offers to give you what you could never afford to buy!

That's what grace is all about—God paying for what you could never pay for, and then offering it to you as a gift of love. You could never afford to purchase your forgiveness. We know that because of how much your forgiveness cost—the death of God's only begotten Son. But God purchased your forgiveness and offers it to you in the person of Jesus Christ. This is something that we have to share with others! We just have to show others what God means to us, by the way, we live and the values we hold dear.

And in giving you Jesus he also wants to give you eternal life, a calling to ministry, purpose in your existence, joy, fellowship, a sense of wholeness and rightness, overflowing blessings, and a very close relationship with his Holy Spirit.

How foolish it would be for you to spend your money, time and energy trying to get what the world says will satisfy when God is waiting to give you all that and more, as you live his way.

Make it personal

What are you spending your energy and time on? What is the first priority in your life? Are you turning to God for what you need on the inside?

December 6

Matthew 5:38-42

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you."

A "weak" life. Don't just be as Christ-like as the law demands; go way beyond that!

Sometimes we get the idea that as long as the law allows something it must be okay, or that if the law requires something of us, that's as far as we have to go. But remember that our highest allegiance is not a legal allegiance, but a relational allegiance to Jesus Christ.

It's not weak to live the way Jesus describes in these verses. In fact, this description fits Jesus' own life perfectly. They struck him on the cheek; they took his clothes; they demanded so much of him. He responded by not lashing out, not claiming his rights as God, not summoning his legions of angels, but by healing the soldier's ear (Luke 22:51), and praying for their forgiveness.

It was his apparent "weakness" that won so many hearts to him.

Make it personal

Reflect on today's word. In what ways could your "weakness" impact those people around you? How do you think they will view it? Could it become a talking point?

December 7

John 3:17

"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

God sent his Son as his ultimate gift to us!

As John Stott has said, "What dominated Jesus' life was not the living but the giving of his life!"

Think about that statement for a minute. What would need to change in your life for that to be a description of you? What makes it even more amazing in Jesus' life is that all of creation was made for him (Colossians 1:16). We were made to honour and glorify him.

But although he had the right to allow all things to be focused on him, God chose to give, to sacrifice for us. If he had not, we would have no hope of ever being right with him. There was no other way.

God wants you to know today that giving is in his heart; it's a part of his character. Because of that, he has given you the ultimate gift — the life of Jesus poured out on the cross. Now that you've received the unbelievable blessing of his gift to you, he wants to make giving a part of your character too.

Make it personal

In what way can you serve the people around you today? How can you make it all about them and not about you?

December 8

Psalm 118:24

"This is the day which the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it."

Focusing on God can help you wake up!

Psalm 118 is a 'Messianic Psalm' and this verse is talking about the day when Jesus came into our world. But still, isn't it true of every day we begin? Motivational speaker Jim Rohn points out that one of the reasons that many people are not doing well is that their outlook on life is wrong. They are simply trying to get through the day.

Instead, we should be looking for what we can get out of the day! As you think about this day today, God wants you to recognise that it is his day. He has brought you into it; he has things in store for you today that will bless you and strengthen you. Rejoice in God's plan for your life today.

As you begin today with the anticipation of God's involvement with you throughout the day, it will change your whole perspective on life. Life becomes, not drudgery, but an anticipation of God at work.

How would your day be different if you woke up thinking: "God made this day. How does he want to use it in my life? How does he want to use me in someone else's life? What is he going to bring to my mind for prayer about? What challenge will require his intervention? How will I see God at work today? Bring it on!"

Make it personal

Are you going to try to get through the day? Or will you try to make the most out of it?

December 9

John 7:16-17

"So Jesus answered them, 'My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority."

Am I willing to obey God, no matter what?

God speaks to those who are ready to obey his will for them!

Would you ask someone to do something for you if you already knew that their answer would be "no!"? Of course not! So why do we expect God to speak into our lives when we have no intention of obeying him unless he says exactly what we want him to say?

Jesus asked people one time, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and not do what I tell you?" (Luke 6:46)

Today, God's speaking to you. If you want to begin recognising him speaking to you, you must first come to the place where you say to him, "Lord, even before you tell me what it is you want in my life, or what you want me to remove from my life, or who you want me to speak to or who you want me to forgive, I want to say to you 'Yes Lord', I don't need to hear your will first, so that then I can decide whether or not to do it—I have already decided! I trust you and your will for me and my answer is 'Yes Lord'."

Make it personal

What is God's will for you today? Are you ready to do whatever he reveals to you? Write down what God puts on your heart.

December 10

1 Samuel 17:24, 26, 31, 37

"All the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were much afraid… And David said to the men who stood by him, 'What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?'… When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul, and he sent for him… And David said, 'The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.' And Saul said to David, 'Go, and the Lord be with you!'"

Look at your present 'Goliath' through eyes that remember God helping you in the past!

Goliath was huge. David was little. Goliath was strong. David was weak. Goliath was experienced in battle. David was inexperienced. If David's thinking only weighed the current circumstances, he'd have run in fear, just like the rest of the Israelite army. But David's perspective was shaped by his experience of God's involvement in past crises (his encounter with a lion and, later, a bear).

Today God's calling you: Remember how I've helped you in the past, and how faithful I've been in caring for you. Let that give you confidence beyond what your reason says as you face today.

Make it personal

Is there a 'Goliath' in your life? Is there someone you love, with whom you just don't know how to talk about God? Is there a situation that you know you need to fix, but it's too daunting? Hand it over now to the Lord and trust that he is bigger than that situation.

December 11

Colossians 3:12-14

"So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity."

What makes the church work? A focus on others instead of ourselves!

"A heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience"—every one of those words reflects a focus away from self, a focus on other people. In fact, none of the things in this passage could describe a self-centred person.

So we could answer the opposite question, too: What stops the church from working like it should? Self-centred people!

Are you frustrated with your church? Ask yourself, what am I bringing to my church? Do I approach church with a mindset that focuses on others or on myself? Remember Jesus' example: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

Make it personal

Write down 3 things that frustrate you about your church. Ask yourself: What can I do to change this?

Write down practical solutions.

December 12

1 Peter 1:3-7

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

If you want to strengthen your faith, exercise it

When someone wants to build muscle, they know it doesn't happen all at once. They don't go to the gym on Thursday evening at 7pm and come out at 8pm bulging with muscles. No, they know that it'll be a long steady process of exercise that makes them strong.

In the same way, God's letting you know that annoyances, difficulties and trials can be used to gradually strengthen your faith. When difficulties come along, don't view them as obstacles to your faith, but rather as opportunities from God for you to trust him and grow.

Make it personal

How have you viewed your trials lately? Have you viewed them as opportunities to grow closer to God? Take some time now to respond to God. Ask him what he is wanting to teach you through those hard times in your life.

December 13

Ephesians 6:11-13

"Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm."

We may sleep but Satan doesn't. Prepare yourself for spiritual battle before it comes to you!

We have a powerful and clever spiritual enemy, but God has given us armour and weapons that will enable us to defeat his attacks in our lives.

Still, unless we use that armour and prepare for battle we will experience constant defeat in our spiritual lives. As Charles Spurgeon said, "We may sleep, but Satan does not".

The time to start praying and reading your Bible and going to Bible study is not when you are in a tough time and being tempted and attacked spiritually at every turn. For sure, run to God then; but God is speaking to you today through these verses and telling you that the key to victory is to be walking in close fellowship with him BEFORE the attacks come.

Make it personal

What are the distractions that keep you too busy to spend time with God? Is Satan using them as tools against you?

December 14

1 Timothy 1:12-15

"I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."

Part of God's purpose in saving you was to put you on display for others who need his grace!

Do you sometimes look at the actions of others and think to yourself "I would never behave the way they do," or say to yourself "I would never talk like that"? Or conversely do you sometimes look at other believers and think "I could never do what they do" or say to yourself "I could never be as good as they are"? In either case, if you do, you have an unhealthy view of the gospel.

Today God wants you to realise that you have been saved by his grace and by his mercy he has given you a story of his grace in your life to share with others, not to keep to yourself. The gospel says that you are a sinner saved by his grace. End of story! You have no need to compare yourself to anyone else. You are no better or worse than any other. Where unbelievers are, is where you used to be. You have received God's mercy; he is patient with you so that you may be patient with those who don't yet know him. God doesn't want you to judge others but be willing to journey with them towards faith in Jesus Christ.

Make it personal

Who has God sent into your life that you compare yourself to? Ask for God's forgiveness, thank him for his mercy. Write down what steps you can take today to stop comparing yourself to them.

December 15

John 10:9-11

"I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

As you talk to people about Jesus, remember that you are inviting them into the best life possible!

Sometimes because we can get uptight about speaking with people about spiritual things, we think that they will respond with negative emotions as well. We can get the idea that being a witness for Jesus is kind of like shoving horrible-tasting brussels sprouts into the mouth of a child. If that's the way you feel about it, they will start to feel that way too.

But Jesus says, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd." When you stop and remember that you are introducing people to 'the good shepherd' and that what he wants to do in their lives is full of beauty, hope, and life—then you will come to the place where you are actually eager to share Christ with people.

You're not shoving brussels sprouts into a reluctant mouth; you're serving them pavlova covered with cool, thick cream and topped with all sorts of delicious berries and fruit!

Make it personal

What's one way God has "topped" your life with something that your unsaved friends would be hungry for? What unsaved friend could you invite over to share dinner, and maybe a little "pavlova"?

December 16

Galatians 4:4-5

"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."

How different things would have been if Jesus wasn't born!

Oftentimes the run up to Christmas can be hectic. There are church events that we need to attend, Christmas work parties we need to be at, presents we need to buy, decorations we need to put up, recipes we need to test before the big day. We can get so caught up in doing things for Christmas that we get to Christmas day too exhausted to even enjoy it!

Why do you celebrate Christmas? Christmas should be all about celebrating Jesus' birth which changed history forever.

Frederick Buechner puts it this way "It is impossible to conceive how different things would have turned out if that birth had not happened. For millions of people who have lived since, the birth of Jesus made possible not just a new way of understanding life but a new way of living it. It is a truth that, for twenty centuries, there have been untold numbers of men and women who, in untold numbers of ways, have been so grasped by the child who was born, so caught up in the message he taught and the life he lived, that they have found themselves profoundly changed by their relationship with him."

There is nothing wrong with trying to make this season special, but make sure that you don't forget what it's all about.

Make it personal

Make it your purpose to ask people who don't know Jesus why they celebrate Christmas. They might ask you why you celebrate Christmas and this will open a door for you to share your faith. Write down your reasons for celebrating Christmas here:

December 17

Luke 2:7

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Make room for Jesus!

The story of Jesus' birth in the stable captures our imagination, but I think it's a story that often parallels our own lives. Have you made room for Jesus in the inn of your life? Or have you put him in the stable out back?

When we live our lives that way, we miss the very best part of life! God designed us for a beautiful relationship with him and beautiful relationships with others. But your relationship with God doesn't work very well when you try to keep him out back. And when your relationship with God doesn't work very well, your relationships with other people don't work well either, because God designed your life to work properly only when he is at the centre of it.

This Christmas God is reminding you to open the door to your inn and give him more space and make more space for people. As you welcome him into the centre of your life, also make more space for the relationships that matter and for strangers who might need to find comfort and friendship in you.

Only then will you be able to experience your life as God meant it to be. Only then you will be able to fulfil his purpose for you, which is far grander and more significant than you imagined.

Make it personal

How will you make more space in the centre for God and people this Christmas?

December 18

Psalm 147:3

"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."

God wants to use you this Christmas!

For many, Christmas is not the same as the depictions in glossy advertising brochures in the sense that it's not all laughter and presents and family time. For many, Christmas can be a very stressful time. A lot of people are not looking forward to Christmas for various reasons: loss of a loved one, relationship breakdowns, homesickness, loneliness, etc.

Today's verse tells us that God heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. We read in the gospels that Jesus did exactly that when he was here on Earth. And now it is your job and mine to follow in Jesus' steps.

Someone has put it this way: "Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours."

It's your job and your responsibility to be Jesus' hands, feet and mouth this Christmas. It should be your mission to bind the wounds of the brokenhearted this Christmas. Pray and ask God to use you this Christmas to give you practical ideas of how to show his love, grace, and acceptance.

Make it personal

Do you know someone who might be struggling this Christmas? Maybe a widow, or maybe a foreign student, or a single parent? How could you represent Jesus and bind up their wounds this Christmas?

December 19

John 1:12

" But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

Believe and receive this Christmas

Turn on your television or surf the Web this Christmas and you'll discover all sorts of messages. Christmas is all about Santa, presents, good food, family time, etc. But for the one who invented Christmas—God—there's only one message that truly matters.

God wants to share eternity with you. That's what Christmas is all about. You weren't created to just live 80 or 90 years. You were created for eternity. God made you to live forever. He sent Jesus as a baby so one day he could die for your sins and now you can spend forever with him.

That's the great news of Christmas. God's offer is available to anyone. The Bible says of Jesus, "To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

God wants to spend eternity with you, so he made the way simple: You believe and you receive. Christmas is about believing and receiving—believe that the baby born in a manger is the Son of God and receive him into your life. Open your heart to him.

To celebrate Christmas but not receive the number one gift God has for you is pointless. The invitation is wide open. Simply believe and receive.

Make it personal

Think about your Christmas plans. What can you do to emphasise to your family and friends that God's ultimate gift was sending his son to die for them?

December 20

Matthew 1:16

"And Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ."

Let your faith be bigger than your fear!

Have you had an experience where God asked you to do something that seemed ridiculous?

When Mary became pregnant with Jesus, it was surely a terrible shock to Joseph. Though he and Mary were engaged, they had not yet lived together as man and wife. The only logical conclusion Joseph could reach on his own was that Mary was pregnant by another man – in other words, that she had cheated on him.

Proven adultery was punishable by death under the Mosaic law. The Gospel of Matthew explains that Joseph was a "righteous man, yet unwilling to expose Mary to shame" so he decided to "divorce her quietly." (Matthew 1:19). Though we don't know a lot about the logistics of what it means to divorce someone "quietly", it means that Joseph intended to break their union with as little fanfare as possible.

The Gospel of Matthew then explains that an angel came to Joseph in a dream and told him not to be afraid to take Mary into his home, because the child Mary was carrying was not conceived with another man, but through the power of the Holy Spirit. "She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus because he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21) This heavenly message changed everything, and Joseph took Mary into his home as initially planned.

God asked Joseph to believe that the baby growing in Mary's womb was from God and not another man's baby and to raise this baby as his own. It sounds totally ridiculous. Yet, Joseph trusted God and took him at his word.

Make it personal

Is God calling you to do something that seems ridiculous in the world's eyes this Christmas? What will your response be?

December 21

Colossians 3:12

"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience."

No act of kindness is ever wasted.

I imagine all of us still have shopping to do for Christmas. Who doesn't this time of year? This is, after all, the busiest shopping time of the year.

Here's the challenge for you this week—if you're going to be spending that much time out shopping these last few days before Christmas why not make it a point to show kindness while out?

You could easily give the person you find next to you in line a compliment. You could be patient and nice to any of the store employees or cashiers that help you out. You could help an elderly lady carry her bags to the car park. You could buy a coffee for the next person who is about to order. You could buy lunch for a homeless person. Buy a Christmas present for the workmate no one seems to like.

This is what Jesus did when he lived on earth. No, he didn't go Christmas shopping, but he did walk the streets helping whomever he could help. Follow his example and help whoever you can help this week.

Make it personal

Write down an instance when a complete stranger showed you kindness. How did that make you feel? You could place value on a lot of people this week by showing them kindness. Will you take the challenge?

December 22

John 10:11

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

Plant a seed of good news this Christmas!

If you are having people over this Christmas you should stock up on candy canes. They might come in handy if you want to share the Gospel in a way that relates to the festive season and is easy to understand. Children especially will love it.

Tradition tells us that the candy cane's shape as a "J" should remind us of Jesus and when flipped around remind us of a shepherd's staff and how Jesus is our shepherd and we are his sheep. The white colour of the candy cane stands for purity. The large red stripe reminds us of his blood which he shed for our sins to make us pure before God while the 3 small stripes represent the trinity. Talk about a great way to get to the gospel from something that will most likely be a decoration in your house!

People love presents and stories at Christmas. So why not share the story of how Jesus loves us and give your guests a present at the same time. Share the candy cane story with the kids and the parents will get it too. Who knows? A candy cane might be all that someone needs this Christmas!

Make it personal

What do you think of this idea? Do you think it's a bit too cheesy for you or do you think that it might actually work? Will you buy some candy cane for a work party? Or family get together? Will you share the story with them?

December 23

Matthew 2:11

"And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh."

Don't let Christmas go by without giving God a gift, which he desires!

Imagine I planned a party for you and invited many people. Everyone brought lots of gifts, and the invitees traded presents with one another—and you got nothing. No one came to you to say 'Happy Birthday!', no one seemed to be in the least interested to celebrate you.

That's Christmas. We give gifts to everyone but Jesus. We give our attention to our family and friends but not to Jesus. But let's be honest—what do you give the God who has everything?

Actually, Jesus doesn't have everything. There are things he doesn't have unless you give them to him this Christmas. Give him your trust. Jesus doesn't have your trust unless you give it to him. He will never force it. Give Jesus your heart. Your heart is important to Jesus because he said that "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:34). Bring other people to Jesus. God wants a family more than anything this Christmas. Invite someone to start a relationship with Jesus this Christmas. Tell someone about what Jesus has done in your life.

Don't let Christmas go by without celebrating the one worthy of our praise and celebration. Don't let this day go by without giving God a gift which he desires.

Make it personal

What do you need to give Jesus this Christmas?

December 24

Luke 1:13

"But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John."

Our God is a miracle worker!

Why is Christmas such a magical time of year? I think it's because everyone is expecting a miracle at Christmas. Think about all the Christmas movies. Each one has a miracle as its central plot. Whether it's a boy hoping his parents get back together, a shop-owner hoping he can keep his business running, or a town who needs a new hero to help "save Christmas".

You might be reading this and hoping for your own miracle this Christmas. It may be a miracle in a relationship, or in your business, or in your finances. It may be smaller than what makes a holiday movie. But it's no less important to you.

Two thousand years ago, there was a couple who hoped for their own miracle. Zacharias and Elizabeth prayed for a child. Year after year that prayer went unfulfilled … so they gave up on the dream.

But this couple didn't give up on God. They stayed faithful. Then, one ordinary day the extraordinary happened. An angel of God appeared to Zacharias and told him that he and his wife Elizabeth would have a son after all. He would have a special purpose and would prepare Israel for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus.

The story of Zacharias tells us that there is nothing too hard for God and that God is still in the business of doing miracles. He loves cries for help!

Make it personal

What miracle do you need from God this Christmas? How does the story of Zacharias and Elizabeth encourage you to keep believing that God is a miracle worker?

December 25

John 1:14

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

Take a moment and celebrate!

Celebrate the Father's sacrificial love, which enabled him to send his one and only son to earth to die for you, so that you can be saved. Celebrate Jesus' arrival on earth, which displayed so much humility and fulfilled so many Old Testament prophecies. Celebrate his life which was an example of what it means to love the Father, spend time with the Father, listen to the Father, and do what the Father asks even when the costs seem too high. Celebrate his death, which showed selflessness and unthinkable love and grace in the face of oppression and pain. Celebrate his resurrection, which displayed victory over the curse of sin and the sting of death. Celebrate the Holy Spirit and the guidance and comfort he offers you every day.

Celebrate the identity you have in Christ—a child of God, no longer a slave to fear but more than a conqueror through the power that lives in you.

Celebrate acceptance, love, forgiveness, grace, mercy, adoption, restoration, freedom, new calling, purpose, power, peace, joy, a new family, and the list can go on and on.

Luke 12:48 says that "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more." This Christmas remember how much was given to you and make sure you don't forget to give what you have been given: love, grace, and acceptance.

Make it personal

Will you be spending today with difficult friends or family members? How can you show them love, grace, and acceptance this Christmas?

December 26

1 Timothy 6:1

"Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants regard their own masters as worthy of all honour, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be spoken against."

Be conscious of how your lifestyle impacts your witness.

I once asked a Christian businessman how he was going. He explained that business was going well and he saw real progress taking place. He acknowledged that the business was starting to reap the reward of some hard work put in by his employees. I responded that this must make him proud of his team. His response to my comment impacted me greatly.

He went on to explain that he has both Christian and non-Christian workers and that his best workers are predominantly the non-Christians. In general, it was the non-Christians who worked more diligently, complained less about working conditions and generally took up the slack. It was some of the Christians that brought him the greatest stress and allowed issues outside work to interfere with their production. While this impacted his business, his main concern was their witness in the workplace.

This businessman experienced first-hand how a Christian's lifestyle impacts their witness. In conversation, he recommended one of his staff to try a local church. In response, this staff member declined because of the lifestyle of another staff member.

Today God wants you to realised how much your lifestyle as a Christian impacts, both positively and negatively, those you work with, live next door to and interact with. The world is watching to see if your faith in Jesus truly makes a difference in your life.

Make it personal

Where do you rely on others for what you should take responsibility for? What action can you take today to mind your own affairs? Consider sharing them with someone who can keep you accountable.

December 27

Titus 3:4-7

"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

There are two ways that most people view their lives.

Some look at the way they live and feel a sense of accomplishment and confidence that they are living a good life. They have a sense of security, trusting in their good works as a means by which they are saved.

This passage reminds us that it is "not because of works done by us in righteousness" that we are saved. Others reflect on their lives and live with a sense of guilt and shame over things they have done in the past and doubt that they are ever worthy enough for God. This passage reminds us that it is through Jesus Christ alone that we have been washed clean, given his Spirit and are now his children, heirs of eternal life.

Today you need to realise that there is no amount of good you can do to earn your salvation. Jesus has paid your debt in full by dying on the cross. Likewise, nothing you have ever done can keep you from God's love.

God wants you to remember his kindness and mercy towards you. God wants you to realise he has sent you into people's lives that need to know this simple truth and that they, too, can only be saved when they place their trust in Jesus.

Make it personal

Find three passages in the Bible where God's kindness and mercy are described. Write them down below and meditate on them today:

December 28

1 Timothy 2:3-6

"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time."

Do you find yourself complaining about your noisy neighbour? Do you have a tendency to grumble about the government or are you fed up with those annoying people in your life? Having this attitude seems to come easily sometimes. Maybe you're not a complainer, but when was the last time you prayed for your neighbour? When did you last intercede for the annoying people in your life or call on God for your country's leaders?

The apostle Paul urges Timothy to make supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings… for all people because this is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour.

God wants you to realise today that he gave himself as a ransom for all. He gave himself for your neighbour, that annoying person in your life, and he gave himself for the leaders of your country. He's now calling you to give yourself so they can come to the knowledge of the truth of Jesus Christ.

Make it personal

Write down the people, organisations or circumstances in your life that you find yourself complaining and grumbling about. Now thank God for them and begin today to intercede for them before God.

December 29

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

"Aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one."

Always be conscious of how your lifestyle impacts your witness!

Several months ago we had new neighbours move in next door. We had met them a few times and even said 'hello' over the fence before our first conversation one day.

One afternoon I got home at the same time as my neighbour and we got talking in the front yard. In conversation, they asked me "Are you guys Christians"? I responded, "Yes we are, what makes you ask that?" To my surprise, they said "You guys are different to our last neighbours, you're good neighbours, your kids behave themselves and your yard is always tidy." I was astounded at the comment.

I can assure you their remarks make us sound better than we really are but that conversation has impacted my life.

Today, God wants you to realise how powerfully your lifestyle impacts your witness. In a world that is so disposable, when you live quietly as a good steward of your house and property, outsiders notice. In a world where people neglect each other and are irresponsible, when you mind your own affairs as a family and as parents, outsiders see a difference. In a world that is out to get as much as it can for itself, when you work with your hands and provide for others rather than being dependent on others, outsiders take note.

Make it personal

What observations do you think your neighbours, your work mates, your friends and family make of the way you live? Does this verse characterise you? What actions do you need to take?

December 30

2 Timothy 2:8-9

"Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!"

You can live with a ministry mindset no matter how bad your circumstances are!

As the apostle Paul wrote this letter to Timothy he was undergoing great suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. Think about that for a minute. Here is Paul—a committed servant of Christ—captured by the authorities, mistreated like a criminal, imprisoned and shackled with chains, suffering physical and emotional torment day and night, because he chose to be obedient to his call as an apostle of Christ Jesus.

But even in circumstances like these, Paul had an other-focused ministry mindset. He understood that while he was physically bound with chains that prevented him from publicly preaching God's word—still, the word of God is not bound. He wasted no time on wallowing in his suffering. He chose to use his suffering as a megaphone to continue proclaiming the good news of his Saviour and Lord. With his mind set on God's agenda he did what he could do—encourage Timothy to remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead—writing letters to the church and teaching the saints from his prison cell.

Remember that God knows what circumstance you are facing. Remember to be his witness to others in that circumstance. Whether you are healthy, sick or in chains, God wants to use you as a witness in the very situation you are facing right now.

Make it personal

Have you been focusing on your circumstance or on the opportunities God is giving you to spread his word? In what ways can God use you to share the good news of your risen Lord Jesus in today's circumstances?

31st December

2 Timothy 2:21

"Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonourable, he will be a vessel for honourable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work."

Clean cloth vs old rag.

Seek the Kingdom of God and live righteously!

Have you ever tried working with an old oily rag? It leaves a dark smear of residue on everything it touches. On the other hand, a clean cloth can soak up a spill, clean down benches, remove grit and grime from the most intricate parts. A clean cloth can even be used to protect sensitive items from contamination. A clean cloth is a simple but essential part of a workman's tool bag.

Would you say your life is like an old oily rag? Do you delight in talking to people about other people that really bug you? Do you find yourself in conflict all the time? Do you chase after the desires of the flesh and have a thirst for more? Or on the other hand, is your life like a clean cloth, pursuing righteousness, faith and love? Are you a peacemaker, treating everyone with gentleness and respect?

God wants you to realise today that it's when you're pursuing his righteousness that you are ready for every good work and able to be used by God to help clean up the mess of sin in the world.

Make it personal

In what areas of your life are you allowing yourself to be contaminated this year? What action do you need to take next year to be a vessel for honourable use?