

Words TO LIVE BY

Dear Reader,

Thank you for taking the time to go on another journey with me of choosing to live by these simple words in your every day life. When my husband told me last May that I should start writing a second devotional, I thought he was crazy. I was amazed to watch that small, simple devotional of I Choose, when given to God, multiplied in ways I never imagined. Every time I think of it, I'm reminded of Jesus feeding the 5000+ men and women with the small, simple lunch that a boy willingly offered to Him. I was blessed and encouraged by the response of those who chose to go on that journey with me and strive to honor our Savior in greater ways.

In this devotional, Words To Live By, one of the main themes I want you to see, is that *you can't, but Jesus can*. What I mean, is that in and of yourself you don't have the strength or ability to live out these truths. It is only because Jesus was victorious over sin on your behalf once and for all that you can have strength from the Holy Spirit to live out these words.

The motivation for living these words are given to you because of what 1 John 4:19 says, "*We love because He first loved us.*" It is because of Jesus love, first for you, that should motivate you to want to live out His truth. Not out of duty, habit or begrudgingly, but in response to all He has done for you.

This time in my writing I wanted Jesus to be seen and known every day. Without Him, you and I are nothing. The purpose for which you were created was to have a relationship with Him and bring Him glory. I also wanted to use more scripture as I believe my words don't have the power to change anyone, but God's alone. Check out all these verses that tell of the life giving power behind the truth of God's Word.

"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." Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)

"So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it." Isaiah 55:11 (ESV)

"But he answered, 'It is written,' 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Matthew 4:4 (ESV)

Each day you will focus on one Bible character and learn from their story. On several of the days you will see how Jesus lived out that word in His life here on earth and be challenged to do the same.

My prayer for you is one that the Apostle Paul wrote and prayed over the church in Ephesus. Ephesians 1:18-19, 3:14-21,

"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. . .

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."

Thank you for building this community of, Words To Live By. I enjoy having interaction thru messages and comments as I believe it helps the writer and the reader to go further in their knowledge of, and love for Jesus. Know you are deeply loved and have been prayed for much as you begin this next journey. May God take His words and transform you more into His image.

"He must increase, I must decrease."

Precious

*Words To Live By was inspired first and foremost by the love of my life, Jesus and secondly by my best friend and husband. Jonathan, I am forever grateful for many late nights, digging deeper into scripture with you as you constantly challenged me in my writing. Many times your critiques, though hard to hear at the time, were what pushed me further and deeper in my search for truth and love for my Savior. You never let me settle for second best. Thank you for calling out a gifting from the Holy Spirit within me that I kept wanting to bury and hide. I can't wait to keep looking deeper into God's truth with you in the days and years to come. You are my favorite and I will always love you!

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Words TO LIVE BY

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Day 1

SEEK

"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

Matthew 6:33 (NIV)

"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

Colossians 3:1-4 (ESV)

"I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me."

Proverbs 8:17 (NIV)

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

Jeremiah 29:13 (NIV)

SEEK: to go in search of, look for, to try to discover.

Do you remember that favorite childhood game of hide and seek? There were several different versions I played as a child. I couldn't wait until the counting would finish so I could race off to seek for the person hiding because I wanted to be the first one to find them.

Relate that concept over to your spiritual life. Are you as excited to seek for the truth of God's Word as you were to play a silly game of hide and seek as a child? As much as there is similarity between the two ideas, there is one contrast. When you played that game of hide and seek you were never guaranteed that you would find the person, but when it comes to seeking for truth and God Himself, you ARE guaranteed that you will find Him if you search with all your heart. Praise God, He can be found and known, you just have to seek.

If you have never found Jesus for yourself and are still seeking for truth in this world, He is the answer. Jesus can be found and known. He wants a relationship with you. There is only one barrier between you and Him and that is your sin. Your sin separates you from a Holy God, but because of His great love for you, God sent His only perfect Son, Jesus, down here to this earth to take the punishment that you deserve. Did you know Jesus came seeking for you? Luke 19:10 (NIV), "*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.*" Jesus provided a way for you to be forgiven of your sin by dying on the cross in your place. He didn't stay dead, three days later He rose again, conquering sin once and for all. Romans 5:8 (NIV) says, "*But God*

demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” If you have never repented of your sin and put your trust in Jesus alone to secure your eternity in heaven, don’t wait any longer. He is waiting for you.

If you are a follower of Jesus, sometimes seeking can feel lonely when you’re trying to do it all on your own. It is important that you surround yourself with others who are playing the same spiritual game of seeking Christ that you are. Grab a community of people who want to seek Jesus with you. There are many things to seek after in this world, many that try to draw your attention away from God and His Word. Scripture says if you have been raised to new life in Christ, you are to seek the things from above. *“Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”*

How are you doing in seeking God and His truth? Does it make you excited to dig into scripture knowing that He can be found?

Even though I’m older, I never grew out of playing the game hide and seek because now I play it with my own kids. Seeking God and His truth is another one of those things you won’t ever grow out of. There is always more to be known about Him and He longs for you to seek Him each day.

RESPOND TO THE WORD

What do you spend time seeking for during your day?
Seek for truth in God’s Word.

STUDY DEEPER

1 Chronicles 16:11, Acts 17:22-34 & Deuteronomy 4:29.

Day 2

REST

“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested (He’s our example) from all his work that he had done in creation.”

Genesis 2:1-3 (ESV)

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

Exodus 20:8-11 (ESV)

REST: cease work or movement in order to relax, refresh oneself, or recover strength.

This last year as I was listening to more studies done on this word, rest, I learned that at the beginning of creation, after Adam was made, his first day of existing was resting with God. Check it out in Genesis 1 & 2. Adam was created on the sixth day and on the 7th day God rested from all the work He had done. God was showing you at the beginning of creation how important this word lived out would be for your life. He is your example in this way.

I don’t want to downplay the importance of work because God tells you in whatever you do to work heartily as to the Lord and not to man, Colossians 3:23 (NIV), *“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.”* This word rest actually falls under the 10 commandments. You are told to work 6 days and then rest on the 7th day and trust God to fully provide for your needs. Exodus 20:11 even says that God blessed the Sabbath and made it holy. In other words, He set it apart from the other days.

From the Old Testament to the New Testament, Jesus reiterated the importance of the Sabbath. In Mark 2:27 He said, *“The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”* A day of rest is God’s gift to you.

It is so easy to feel the need to go, go, go all the time and do more, more, more which often leads to stress, anxiety, burnout, etc. Jesus’ invitation to you in Matthew 11:28 (ESV) is to simply come.

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Coming is an action word that requires movement on your end. Jesus says that when you come, He is waiting there to give you rest. Many people feel like they need to *do* enough to earn their way to heaven. This could not be farther from the truth. There is nothing you can do to get to heaven because it's already been done for you by Jesus. You see the contrast between those two words? *Do* versus *Done*. He left heaven and came to this sinful earth to live and then die, taking the punishment that you deserve for your sin. He did this all because of His love for you. You just need to recognize that it has been done and receive the free gift of forgiveness that Jesus is offering to you. Romans 6:23 (ESV) says, *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* When you accept this gift, it is then that you can experience complete rest.

Do you want that gift? If so, take your action step today and come to Jesus.

RESPOND TO THE WORD

How can you practice the gift of rest today?

When you choose to rest, don't think of yourself as being lazy, instead remember the gift that it is from God.

STUDY DEEPER

Mark 2:23-28, Psalm 23, Psalm 4.

Day 3

FISH

“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. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.”

Matthew 4:18-22 (ESV)

“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, And he who is wise wins souls.”

Proverbs 11:30 (NASB)

FISH: catch or try to catch fish, typically by using a net or hook and line.

You may be thinking, *this is an odd word to live by today*, but I want you to think of this word the way Jesus did, in the spiritual sense. Jesus called His disciples to follow Him so that He could make them fishers of men. He calls you and I to do the same...fish for people.

I specifically want you to look at the disciple Andrew in the verses above and then in this passage from John 1:35-42 (NIV). According to the gospel of John Jesus calls Andrew first to Himself before his brother, Peter.

“The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God!’ When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, ‘What do you want?’ They said, ‘Rabbi’ (which means ‘Teacher’), ‘where are you staying?’ ‘Come,’ he replied, ‘and you will see.’

So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon. Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas’ (which, when translated, is Peter).”

Andrew found his brother Peter and brought him to Jesus. If you finish reading the passages below under the Study Deeper section, you will see that every time Andrew is mentioned in scripture, he is bringing someone to Jesus.

First it was his own brother, Peter, then it was the little boy with the 5 loaves and 2 fish that Jesus used to feed over 5000 people and lastly you find Andrew bringing the Greeks to Jesus.

What I want you to notice is that Andrew took this fishing for men seriously and because of it many people came and believed on Jesus. Andrew was just an ordinary man. We're never told that he preached a sermon like his brother Peter and yet, if it weren't for Andrew bringing his brother to Jesus, Peter would never have preached the sermons that he did. Andrew fished quietly in the background bringing whoever he could to know their Savior.

Andrew is an example of a successful soul winner. He never told Peter to come to Jesus, he simply *brought* him to the Lord and made the introduction. Most believers today were brought to Jesus by someone. There are people all around you waiting to be brought to Jesus. If the only thing you ever do is bring people to Jesus, that is enough. Will you be an Andrew and fish for lost souls, bringing them to their Savior, Jesus?

RESPOND TO THE WORD

Who do you need to "fish" for (bring to Jesus) today?

STUDY DEEPER

John 12:20-26, John 6:1-14.

Day 4

WAIT

“But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine. We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love be with us, Lord, even as we put our hope in you.”

Psalms 33:18-22 (NIV)

“Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, “The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.” The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.”

Lamentations 3:21-26 (NIV)

“For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him.”

Psalms 62:5 (ESV)

“Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.”

Psalms 25:4-5 (ESV)

WAIT: stay where one is or delay action until a particular time or until something else happens.

I remember as a child the different things I would anxiously wait for. Whether it was waiting for my birthday to come each year, Christmas, sleepovers with friends, my wedding day, the birth of my children, special events, there was always something I was waiting for. During those times of waiting, two other things always accompanied the waiting process, patience and hope. Patience, while I waited for the time to go by, and hopeful expectation of what was to come.

The Bible talks about this word wait so much that I had a hard time figuring out which scripture passages to use. The word wait is all throughout the Bible. Often the waiting in scripture referred to the first coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who would once and for all provide the atonement for your sin on the cross. Believers are now waiting for the second coming of Jesus. If this word is talked about that much in scripture, it must be an important word to live by.

Today I want to share with you the story of two people found in Luke 2:22-35 (NIV). Their names are Simeon & Anna. You pick up their story after the birth of Jesus, when Mary & Joseph bring Him to the temple in Jerusalem.

“When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him (Jesus) to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord’), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: ‘a pair of doves or two young pigeons.’

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: ‘Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.’

The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: ‘This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.’

Here you meet Simeon, an old man who was waiting for the arrival of His Messiah. He had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he saw Jesus. When Simeon sees Jesus with his own eyes, he picks him up in his arms and praises God. Here you see a promise that God made to Simeon fulfilled. As Simeon concludes his praise and worship, he tells God he is ready to leave this earth because his eyes have seen Jesus. Can you imagine being Simeon and seeing Jesus, the Messiah, with your own eyes? I can’t wait for the day I will see Jesus face to face. Until that time comes I am always encouraged by what Jesus said to the disciple Thomas in John 20:29 (NIV), *“Then Jesus told him, ‘Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’”*

Continue with me in Luke 2 starting at verses 36-38 (NIV) and meet a woman named, Anna. She was also waiting for her Messiah.

“There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.”

There is much told about Anna in these few verses. She was a prophet, a daughter, belonged to the lost tribe of Asher, she was very old, was only married for 7 years before her husband died and now she lived and served at the temple. It says that Anna worshipped day and night

while fasting and praying for the coming Messiah. She was consumed with her God. I can't say for you, but I know for myself if my husband died after a few years of marriage, I'm not sure the thing I would think of pursuing right away is full time service to God. I love how this article in Zondervan publishing summed up who Anna was, *"When as a young, motherless wife, God withdrew from her the earthly love she rejoiced in, she did not bury her hope in a grave. In the place of what God took, He gave her more of Himself, and she became devoted to Him who had promised to be as a Husband to the widow, and through her long widowhood was unwearying in devotion to Him."*¹

When Anna realized who Mary, Joseph and Jesus were, she immediately worshipped with thankfulness, but she didn't stop there. It says that Anna then spoke about the child, Jesus, to all who were looking forward to the Messiah. All this time of prayerful waiting led Anna to a new job of telling everyone that the Messiah had come. Both Simeon and Anna waited patiently and prayerfully for the first coming of Jesus. Are you waiting patiently and prayerfully for Jesus second coming? Read this encouraging verse from Hebrews 9:28 (NIV),

"So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him."

Did you notice that in almost all of the verses at the beginning of the devotional, hope is mentioned as well? Waiting can be very difficult and yet you can have so much hope during those times. For the believer, Charles Spurgeon wrote three ways you can learn to wait,

*"Wait in obedience as a servant, in hope as an heir, in expectation as a believer."*²

I don't know currently what you are waiting on the Lord for, but I do know that if you are His child, He hears your prayers and will answer them according to His perfect plan and in His perfect timing. He might be teaching you during this season to learn to wait on Him.

If there is one thing you should not wait for any longer, it is to receive Jesus as your Savior from sin. Choose today to receive the grace, mercy and forgiveness for your sin that He offers you thru His death and resurrection. John 1:12 says, *"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."*

RESPOND TO THE WORD

What do you need to wait on the Lord for today?

Remember that patience, hope and expectation accompany the waiting process.

STUDY DEEPER

1 Samuel 1&2, Psalm 27, Psalm 130.

Day 5

WORK

“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.”
Genesis 2:15 (NIV)

“Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense.”
Proverbs 12:11 (ESV)

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”
Colossians 3:23-24 (NIV)

WORK: activity involving mental or physical effort done in order to achieve a purpose or result, a task or tasks to be undertaken; something a person or thing has to do.

Think back to all the jobs you have had in your lifetime. For me it was being a waitress at an A&W and Pizza Hut, working in the laundry room at a resort, being a receptionist and custodian at a hair salon, catering events in downtown Chicago, working at my college’s athletic center and being an administrative assistant at a church. That’s a lot of different jobs.

When you think of work, sometimes it’s easy to think that it was part of the fall from Adam & Eve, but actually it was totally the opposite. The very first verse for today tells us that work was God’s idea from the beginning of creation. He gave Adam the job of taking care of the Garden of Eden which included giving names to all the animals that He created. Work helps give you a feeling of purpose.

As a follower of Jesus, you are told from Colossians 3 that whatever you do, you are to work at it with all your heart as if you were working for the Lord. In whatever work you are given to do, is that your mindset? Are you ultimately working and serving the Lord in a job or task? The world is watching how you honor God in your every day work. What does your attitude look like? Is it pleasing to God? Would others be drawn to Him because of how you view your work?

Your work may not be a paid position, but that doesn’t give you the right to do it half heartedly. As a follower of Jesus, in every job or task you are given, make it your aim to give your all and very best.

Remember, Jesus completed the work God sent Him to accomplish down here on earth when He came and died on the cross for your sin. Have you recognized the work that has been finished on your behalf thru Jesus? He paid the ultimate sacrifice so you could spend eternity in heaven with Him. He's just waiting for you to repent of your sin and receive Him. Don't wait any longer.

RESPOND TO THE WORD

How can you honor God in your work today?

STUDY DEEPER

Proverbs 12:24 & 14:23, Psalm 90.

Day 6

GIVE

"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."

John 3:16 (NASB)

"Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything, all she had to live on.'"

Mark 12:41-44 (NIV)

"In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Acts 20:35 (ESV)

GIVE: freely transfer the possession of something to someone; hand over to. Cause or allow someone to have something, especially something abstract; provide or supply with.

The most well known Bible verse of all time, John 3:16 sums up this word, give, perfectly. The greatest example of generosity was shown to you by God the Father in giving His only Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for your sin. If you have been given the greatest gift of all time, your salvation, should you not strive to imitate God in this way by choosing to give as well?

Why is giving so difficult for many of us? Probably because we tend to be selfish and want to keep and hold onto things for ourself. Scripture talks much of the blessing it is when you choose to give to others and practice generosity.

What a beautiful example Jesus made of the widow in the temple when He pointed out to His disciples those who were giving out of obligation, surplus or to look good. This was in stark contrast with the widow who literally gave everything she had, two small coins that amounted to a few cents. Jesus said this woman gave more than everyone else because of her generous heart. This story reminds me also of the Rich Young Ruler in Luke 18,

"A certain ruler asked him, 'Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' 'Why do you call me good?' Jesus answered. 'No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you

shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.' 'All these I have kept since I was a boy,' he said. When Jesus heard this, he said to him, 'You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.' When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy. Jesus looked at him and said, 'How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.'"

This story gets me every time. It always leads me to do a self check on my heart and where I am storing up my treasure, on this earth or in heaven for eternity? How hard it is for the rich to enter God's kingdom unless they learn to have a generous heart thru giving. All you have belongs to God anyway. When you give it shows you trust in the Lord and your mind is set on the spiritual, not the material possessions of this world. Remember, Jesus is your example in this way when He chose to die on the cross and give His life for you.

Generosity is contagious because it can spread from your money, to your time, to your talents and abilities. Choose to give and show a generous heart that reflects your Savior.

RESPOND TO THE WORD

Who can you give to or be generous with today? Practice radical generosity in your life.

STUDY DEEPER

Proverbs 11:24-25, 2 Corinthians 9.

Day 7

SUPPORT

“The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. Moses said to Joshua, “Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.” So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses’ hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up one on one side, one on the other so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.”
Exodus 17:8-13 (NIV)

“Don’t just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God’s people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.”
Romans 12:9-13 (NLT)

SUPPORT: bear all or part of the weight of; hold up.

I remember the first remodel project my husband and I did in our first home. It was to tear down a wall from the kitchen to the dining room to give it a more open concept. After we started taking down the wall, we soon realized that it was a supporting wall for our home which meant it couldn’t be totally removed or the house would collapse. In order for us to have the more open concept we wanted, we had to put in a support beam. This process took longer because it meant supporting the wall first with a jack until we could get the beam in place.

Think about your life as a believer and ask yourself how you are doing supporting those around you? Do you take time to notice when there is a need and then seek to fulfill it by providing the support someone needs?

Moses supported the battle behind the scenes thru prayer. In this story of Moses and the Israelites, Aaron and Hur saw the need to help Moses when he was weak and be the physical support that he needed in order for the Israelites to prevail in battle and be victorious in the end. Aaron and Hur literally held up Moses’ hands in prayer. They partnered with him in intercession before God and their help was successful. Moses alone could not win the battle, he needed others to come and strengthen him in prayer.

If Moses, Aaron and Hur did not do the work of prayer together, Israel would have been defeated. Each of these men had a specific role to play in Israel's victory. Joshua had to lead Israel into battle and fight, Moses had to pray and Aaron and Hur had to support Moses in prayer.

You may wonder how this relates to Jesus and if He lived out this word. I couldn't be more excited to share with you. When you reread the definition for support it perfectly sums up what Jesus did for you on the cross. He bore the weight of your sin in His body on the cross. 1 Peter 2:24 (NIV),

"He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."

Did you see the reason for why Jesus took your sin upon Himself? It was so that you might die to sin and live for righteousness. All the work and support of bearing your sin has been done and completed by Jesus. It is thru *His* wounds that you are healed. Stop trying to support the weight of your sin yourself. You can't. Recognize and admit that you need Jesus forgiveness.

If you've already given your life to Jesus, I challenge you to look at those around you and take the time to see the needs that you can physically meet. Spiritual needs are met thru Jesus and taking the time to read His truths, but you have the opportunity each day to practically meet the needs of others and give your support.

RESPOND TO THE WORD

Write down the name of 1 person that you could support today. Then live that out by showing that support in a practical way.

STUDY DEEPER

Exodus 17, Galatians 6:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, Psalm 105, Romans 12:13, Proverbs 3:27, Philippians 2:4, Hebrews 6:10, Proverbs 11:25.

Day 8

SPEAK

“When Esther’s words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer: ‘Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?’ Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: ‘Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.’ So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther’s instructions.”

Esther 4:12-17 (NIV)

“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”

Colossians 4:2-6 (NIV)

“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

Proverbs 31:8-9 (NIV)

SPEAK: say something in order to convey information, an opinion, or a feeling; talk to in order to reprove or advise.

How often am I choosing to speak when it is difficult to speak? This is a question I ask myself often. Do I justify not speaking because I think I may offend someone and in doing so dishonor my Lord who would want me to speak His words of truth? Sadly, if I’m honest, I often find the answer to this question to be yes.

Fear of how people will respond is what often keeps you and I silent when we should be choosing to speak. This was the case for Queen Esther. Her own life was at stake if she chose to speak. One wrong word or move on her end could cost her life. I love how her Uncle Mordecai was her greatest encourager thru this challenging time. He was not about to let his niece cower under the circumstances of what people may think about her or her fear of the unknown. Mordecai instead pushed her to stand up for God’s people and speak on their behalf. His

famous words, *“And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this,”* have gone thru my mind on several occasions. God has put each of you in the place or position that you are for such a time as this.

Notice as well that Esther didn't jump right in and speak immediately what was on her heart, first she gathered her people to fast and pray with her and then she even took time to build her relationship with the King to gain his trust. You and I are told in Colossians 4 to be wise in how we act toward outsiders, making the most of the time and always letting our words be full of grace and seasoned with salt. Esther seemed to have gotten all of those right.

What does it mean to let your conversation be seasoned with salt? I for one love salt on my food. I find food not as good when it is bland. So what would it look like for you and I to have our conversations seasoned with salt? When you speak you don't want your conversations to be bland, but instead have a good, seasoned flavor. I believe that the more time you spend with Jesus, your conversations will naturally become flavorful and draw others closer to Him.

Esther chose to speak the truth to the King. How are you using that place or position you're in to speak God's truth, even when it may be unpopular and even scary?

Several times in the New Testament you find Jesus speaking bold truth. In the end it did cost Him His life. People didn't like what Jesus had to say because it was offensive to them and they didn't want to be told that what they were doing was wrong. Isn't that the same with you and I? I know I don't like it when people tell me that I'm wrong. But by the grace of God, I'm so thankful for the work of the Holy Spirit in my life revealing how real my sin is. I'm also thankful for those in my life who chose to speak bold truth to me even when it wasn't easy to hear. In a loving way I want to speak God's truth and show you something you probably already know about yourself. You and I are not perfect. In fact Romans 3:10 (NIV) says, *“There is no one righteous, not even one.”* We all fall short. This was the same message Jesus spoke in the New Testament that people did not want to hear.

I'm choosing to speak this message to you because I care about you and your eternity. I long, more than anything else, for you to know your need for a Savior. You can't get to heaven on your own and that is why God sent Jesus to die and take the punishment you deserve. Because He rose again on the third day, He proved Himself victorious over sin and death. If you repent of your sin and trust in Him, you will be guaranteed a home in heaven with Him. Acts 16:31 (NIV) says, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”* If you haven't made that decision yet, will you do it today?

RESPOND TO THE WORD

As Jesus follower, what is holding you back from speaking the truth? Pray these words over your life today,

*“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in
your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.”
Psalm 19:14 (ESV)*

STUDY DEEPER

Esther 7&8, Ephesians 4. Psalm 19:14.

Day 9

TRUST

"You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord himself, is the Rock eternal."

Isaiah 26:3-4 (NIV)

"This is what the LORD says: 'Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the Lord. That person will be like a bush in the wastelands; they will not see prosperity when it comes. They will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. 'But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They 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."

Jeremiah 17:5-8 (NIV)

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)

"Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe."

Proverbs 29:25 (NIV)

TRUST: firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something.

The word trust is one that most often you think of in relation to people. As I thought of a biblical character that displayed complete trust in someone, Job came to mind instantly.

Job was a man of God who was incredibly blessed, not just with material things but also when it came to his family. He was so blessed that Satan himself recognized those blessings and in a conversation with God said, *if you let me take all of Job's things and children away, surely he will curse you to your face.* God allows Satan to do whatever he pleases except he is not allowed to touch Job. Within a matter of one day, Satan destroys and takes away all of Job's possessions, including his children. Read what Job's response was in Job 1:20-22,

"At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.' In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing."

I don't know about you, but I'm not sure I would have the same response as Job, although I would certainly hope too. Did you notice one of the first things Job does is worship? He recognizes who he is before a holy God. This could only be possible because of Job's firm belief and trust in knowing who God was. Despite Job's circumstances, he still chose to trust and believe that his God, "Yaweh" (the Hebrews name for God) was good.

Satan doesn't give up and you find another conversation between God and himself. God points out Job again and how he displays this firm trust in God. Satan's response found in Job 2:4 is, *"skin for skin."* He tells God that if he is allowed to harm Job physically, then Job will surely curse God to his face. So, God agrees, except Satan is not allowed to kill him. Satan smites Job with sore boils from the top of his head down to the bottom of his feet and you find Job scraping his skin with a broken piece of pottery, sitting in a pile of ashes. His wife, of all people, comes and tells him in Job 2:9, *"Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die."* FYI, this is not the response to give your spouse to encourage them to keep trusting in God. Job responds back, *"You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips."*

Next you find Job getting a visit from his 3 friends. Their first response was to grieve with Job and sit in silence for 7 days and nights. In chapter 3 Job broke the silence by cursing the day he was born, but notice that he never cursed God. Then each of his friends gave Job a speech, trying to help him figure out how he had sinned before God. I love Job's response to them in chapter 13 verse 15, *"Though He (God) slay me, I will hope in Him."* Did Job have questions for God? Yes, but Job's trust in God never wavered.

At the very end of Job in chapter 42 you find God speaking to Job's friends telling them that His wrath is kindled against them because they have not spoken of Him what is right as His servant Job had. In verse 9 scripture reads, *"...and the Lord accepted Job."* The chapter finishes out with God blessing Job twofold and increasing his fortunes. The last words of verse 17 say, *"And Job died, an old man and full of days."*

When you look back on Job's story, do you see the amount of trust he placed in God? Because of that, God restores Job to greater blessings than he had in the beginning, along with a full, long life of 140 years old. Job didn't always understand the why behind everything that happened to him, but he put his trust firmly in God. Romans 8:28 sums his story up well, *"And we know that God causes ALL things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."*

The last words Jesus said on the cross before he died were, *"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.* Luke 23:46 (NIV) Do you see how even Jesus had complete trust in God the Father's plan to save you from your sin? If Jesus can fully trust the Father with His life, then what's stopping you from trusting Him with your life?

Who or what are you placing your trust in today? Jesus is the only person you should put your complete trust in for salvation. He is the one that has the power to save you from your punishment for sin. He went to the cross on your behalf and when you fully trust in His death and resurrection from the dead, then you can have peace. Isaiah 53:5, *"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."*

How are you doing as one of Jesus followers? When the storms of life come, will your trust in Him remain firm? Do you honestly believe that God causes ALL things to work together for your good and His glory? Will you choose to keep trusting even when you don't understand?

RESPOND TO THE WORD

Place your trust in Jesus Christ today. Look up the song, "Though You Slay Me" by Shane and Shane on YouTube. You can follow along with the lyrics below.

STUDY DEEPER

Romans 8:28-39, Psalm 13 & Psalm 56.

Though You Slay Me
Shane & Shane

*I come, God, I come
I return to the Lord
The one who's broken
The one who's torn me apart
You struck down to bind me up
You say You do it all in love
That I might know You in Your suffering*

*Though You slay me
Yet I will praise You
Though You take from me
I will bless Your name
Though You ruin me
Still I will worship
Sing a song to the one who's all I need
My heart and flesh may fail
The earth below give way
But with my eyes, with my eyes I'll see the Lord*

*Lifted high on that day
Behold, the Lamb that was slain
And I'll know every tear was worth it all*

*Though You slay me
Yet I will praise You
Though You take from me
I will bless Your name
Though You ruin me
Still I will worship
Sing a song to the one who's all I need*

*Though tonight I'm crying out
Let this cup pass from me now
You're still all that I need
You're enough for me
You're enough for me*

Day 10

CAST

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”

1 Peter 5:6-9 (NIV)

“Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous be shaken.”

Psalms 55:22 (NIV)

“Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will do it.”

Psalms 37:5 (NASB)

CAST: throw (something) forcefully in a specified direction.

How often do you let stress, anxiety or fear of the unknown overwhelm you, even to the point of letting it affect your physical health? For many today this is a major struggle in their day to day living. When you think more deeply about the meaning of the word cast, these verses take it to a whole new level.

Every time I hear the word cast I think of my son who loves to fish. One of the things you have to do in order to catch a fish is to cast your line into the water. But there’s a big difference between casting for fish and the casting Jesus is talking about. Somehow we usually apply the wrong casting into our stressful lives. You see, when you cast for fishing you reel the line back in once you get a bite. But when it comes to the casting Jesus is talking about He never tells you to reel your line back in, and yet this is where so many of us get it wrong. You cast your anxiety and cares to Him and then you don’t fully trust that He will take care of it, so you reel it back to yourself again. And you play this silly game over and over.

Look closely at 1 Peter 5:6 and notice that it first talks about humbling yourself under God’s mighty hand before it tells you to cast your anxieties to Him. I believe this is so important because often our biggest problem of sin is that of pride. We’re often too prideful to admit that we can’t handle all the anxiety of this world. Even though we want help, we just keep trying to carry it all on our own and end up living miserable lives. Remember how Jesus said in John 10:10, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” Jesus does not want you to live a miserable life full of panic, anxiety,

stress or fear. His desire for you is to live an abundant life, free from all the stresses of this world. He's just waiting for you to humble yourself before Him, admit that you need His grace and forgiveness and then choose to cast all your cares over to Him.

When scripture tells you to cast (throw it forcefully to Jesus) all your anxiety, cares, fears and the stress of life, it is because He is the one who ultimately cares and He will be your sustainer who will see you thru whatever it is you're facing. Jesus gives the peace and calmness that your heart longs for.

RESPOND TO THE WORD

What do you need to cast to Jesus today? Remember, once you give it to Him, don't try to take it back.

STUDY DEEPER

Compare Matthew 6:25-34 & Luke 12:22-34. Write down all the similarities.

Read Philippians 4:6-8 and insert your name in the blank spaces.

" _____, do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard _____ heart and _____ mind in Christ Jesus."

Day 11

INTEGRITY

“Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out.”

Proverbs 10:09 (ESV)

“The integrity of the upright guides them, but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them.”

Proverbs 11:3 (ESV)

“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.”

Proverbs 4:25-27 (ESV)

“Having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.”

1 Peter 3:16 (ESV)

INTEGRITY: the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles; moral uprightness. The state of being whole and undivided.

“Any time there is a human relationship, there is an opportunity for integrity, or a lack thereof. In its most basic sense, integrity means to live out your life in private in the same way you live (or talk about) your life in public.”¹ Ryan Hamm (Christianity Today)

This word integrity stood out to me several times while having my quiet time this past summer. It was not a word I was originally going to include, but the more I read about it and studied its definition, the more I realized how important this word is for believers to live by. As I reflected on this word, the Bible character Daniel came to mind. Reading thru the book of Daniel I see a man who lived a life of integrity even when it almost cost him his life on several occasions.

From the very beginning in Daniel chapter 1 you see from how he responded to all of life, that his parents taught him the ways of God and how to live a life of integrity from a very young age. After he was captured as a teenager and brought to Babylon to be indoctrinated, Daniel was faced with his first test. How would he respond when given food that was offered first to idols?

*“But Daniel **made up his mind** that he would not defile himself with the king’s choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself. Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials”*

Daniel 1:8-9 (NASB)

As you read on, you can see that others started to become jealous of Daniel because God was with him. They knew they could find no ground for accusation unless they found it against him in regard to the law of his God. So they decided to set a trap for Daniel to be caught in disobedience to a law they helped to create, stating that no one could make a petition to any god except the King. Daniel was never scared to take a stand and live out publicly what he believed and practiced in private.

*“Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. **Three times a day** he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.”*

Daniel 6:10 (NIV)

Not only do you see Daniel living with integrity, but you also see him being faithful to his God no matter the cost, especially when it came to his prayer life. Persistent prayer trains you for when trials come. When Daniel was caught disobeying this manmade law, he was taken to what everyone thought was his death...the lions den.

*“So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions’ den. The king said to Daniel, “May your God, whom you **serve continually**, rescue you!”*

Daniel 6:16 (NIV)

Notice what the King said at the very end of that verse. The King believed that because of Daniel’s faithfulness and integrity of heart, his God would rescue and save him. Even the King saw Daniel’s relationship and devotion to God. The next morning check out what happens when the King comes to check on Daniel to see if he is still alive,

“Daniel answered, ‘May the king live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight.

Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty.’”

Daniel 6:21-22 (NIV)

First off, the way Daniel responds to the King at the very beginning is something to notice. He always showed much respect to those in authority over him, but always without denying who God was. Daniel chose to live and speak the truth over and over during his life and always gave the glory back to God. A theme I see lived out by Daniel thru this book is that obedience to God in the small things really matter. Choosing to live with integrity of heart invites God’s blessing into your life.

Jesus entire life on this earth was lived with integrity. He was the same person in public as He was in private. Can that be said of you? Too often it is easy to live a different life when no one is watching you and that is usually when sin creeps in. There is one person who always sees you and that is God. You can't hide anything from Him. The sin that you think no one sees done in secret is what puts a separation between you and God. Isaiah 59:2 (NIV),

"But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear."

Jesus cared about you so much that He willingly gave His life by dying on the cross to pay the debt for your sin. He proved that He conquered sin once and for all when He rose again on the third day. For some of you, the only part of the story missing is for you to repent of your sin, and choose to believe in His death and resurrection. Know today that the payment for your sin has been paid in full by Jesus. The one prayer He will always hear and answer yes to is your prayer to receive Him as your Savior. Jesus said in John 5:24 (NIV),

"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life."

Will you accept Jesus as your Savior today?

RESPOND TO THE WORD

As Jesus follower, how do you need to change your life to live with more integrity? Integrity goes right along with honesty. Does what you do in private match up with how you live in public?

STUDY DEEPER

Proverbs 19:1, Proverbs 20:7, Proverbs 28:26, Psalm 26.

Day 12

TRANSFORM

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.”
Romans 12:1-2 (NIV)

“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”
Colossians 3:1-4 (ESV)

TRANSFORM: make a thorough or dramatic change in the form, appearance, or character of.

The first and most important transformation that needs to happen in your life is one from death to life. Your sin separates you from a Holy God which sounds like you have no hope. But, God in His great love for you made a way for you to move from your sin that leads to death, to eternal life found in His Son, Jesus. Ephesians 2:1-5 (NIV) says,

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions, it is by grace you have been saved.”

It was thru Jesus death and resurrection that He made a way for you to have eternal life because He *is* life. He did all the work for you, there is nothing left for you to do except to acknowledge that you need Him. Let Jesus transform you today, taking you from death to life. When He does it will affect how you live every day. 2 Corinthians 5:17, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”*

Notice Paul’s word choice in the first verses of the devotional in Romans 12:1-2, he *urges* the church, which shows the strong desire he has for them to earnestly and persistently put this into practice. For the believer, transformation happens by first renewing your mind.

Jen Wilkin states, *“The heart cannot love what the mind does not know. To know God is to love Him.”*¹ Do you know the God you say you love? The following words are repeated in three of the Gospels, Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30 and Luke 10:27.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”

Why does it seem that loving God with your mind often comes last or is even forgotten? Learning to love God with your mind takes time and work on your end. You need to study His word for yourself and letting His words of truth transform the way you think about and know Him.

What do you find yourself thinking most often about through your day? Is it set on earthly things or eternity? Do you have a desire to transform the way you think? If so, set aside time each day to allow God’s words of truth to transform and renew your mind.

Now let’s talk about your greatest enemy, Satan, and how he loves to attack your mind above all else. He is known as the greatest deceiver. If he can capture your mind, then he’s got a great hold on you. Think back to the first person he got a hold of, Eve, at the beginning of creation in Genesis 3. He made her think she could be like God, knowing good and evil. Eve let Satan get a hold of her mind and it twisted her thinking, leading her to fall into the trap of sin which totally changed the course of her life.

Don’t let Satan get a hold of your mind. Renew your mind daily and let the truth of God’s word transform you.

RESPOND TO THE WORD

How are you doing with renewing your mind in God’s truth? You must daily be seeking His truth in order to fight against the lies of the enemy. Take some time to memorize Romans 12:2 today,

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

STUDY DEEPER

Colossians 3:1-17, Ephesians 4:17-24, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, Philippians 3:20-21.

Day 13

RESPOND

"But God shows His love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more than, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him."

Romans 5:8-9 (ESV)

"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. **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."

Ephesians 2:1-5 (ESV)

RESPOND: to say something in return, make an answer.

Around the time my son turned 7 years old, he went thru another difficult season for parents known as defiance and much disrespect. It was one of those days when as a Mom I had had enough by dinner time. We sat down outside on the porch to enjoy our family dinner together when our son started being very disrespectful towards me. To avoid a quick reaction, I gave him a warning, hoping that it would improve his attitude. A few minutes later another disrespectful comment was made and I had reached my limit for the day. I told him to go into our bedroom and wait for me. Leaving the rest of the family on the porch I came inside ready to punish him quickly and just be over and done with it, hoping it would be a quick fix to his disrespectful attitude.

In those few short moments of walking to my room I knew that I had over reacted being tired from a long day and I knew I could make a choice right then and there to teach my son a lesson I never had planned. This was one of those moments I totally attribute to the Holy Spirit and am so thankful that I was willing to listen and let go, allowing Him to control the situation. I started talking with my son and asked him if he knew what he was doing was wrong, to which he rightfully admitted yes. I then told him that I was going to give him a choice. The first choice was to receive his rightful punishment and hope that he would learn to stop this attitude. The second choice however; was one that I have never offered to any of my children before. I told him he could choose mercy. He looked at me with a confused face and said, "*what's mercy?*" I didn't even realize what the Holy Spirit in that moment was allowing me to do...simply share the Gospel with my son. I started to tell him how even in the midst of our sin, God sent His only

Son, Jesus down here to this sinful earth to die on the cross, offering us forgiveness and eternal life with Him.

Your sin deserves a punishment, but God loved you so much that He gave you a choice, to either repent of your sin and receive mercy from the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus or instead choose to go your own way and try to pay the penalty for your sin, which no one can do because of our problem of sin. Romans 5:10-11 say,

“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”

Think about this...you see two opposites here in these verses, death and life. Jesus conquered one (death) to provide the other (life) to anyone who will repent and believe. As a Christian you are saved through BOTH Jesus' death (cross) and His life (empty tomb). God gave you the choice to repent from your sin and believe in Jesus' death and resurrection which gives you eternal life forever with Him.

This, my friends, was the message that the Holy Spirit allowed me to share with my son in a moment when I was ready to react to the situation. Gently guiding me in those few short steps to my room, the Holy Spirit led me to change my reaction to a response for my son and provided me with the best gift a Mom could ask for, an opportunity to clearly explain the Gospel. And so the choice was given. What would he choose? With a little smile and twinkle in his eye he said, *“I choose mercy.”* In that moment I saw a beautiful picture of the choice God had given to me many years ago when I made the decision to choose His mercy for my sin. I freely gave that gift of mercy to my son that night with joy and pray that he understood what it really meant.

How about you? Do you find yourself reacting or responding to situations you face each day? The easier choice by far is reacting because you can quickly say or do what you want to. Reacting seems to be rampant in our world and can often end up doing more harm than good. The harder and more difficult choice is one of responding because it often takes more time. I recently listened to some teaching on the book of James and was so blessed by the take away from James 1:19-20 (NIV),

“My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.”

The reason for having you read those verses is because I wanted you to think about the fact that God didn't react to your problem of sin. Instead He was slow to become angry and responded to your sin by sending His only Son, Jesus down here to pay the punishment that you deserve. This was so convicting for me. If God responded to my problem of sin, the least I

can do is learn to listen, be slow to speak, slow to get angry and ultimately respond to a situation instead of react.

RESPOND TO THE WORD

How do you find yourself in the day to day situations of life? Are you reacting or responding? I challenge you the next time you're tired and at the end of your day like I was, choose to respond and maybe even in your situation choose to show mercy? Remember the mercy that God showed you when you didn't deserve it.

STUDY DEEPER

Romans 5, Ephesians 2, Psalm 86.

Day 14

PERSEVERANCE

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything...Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.”

James 1:2-4 & 12 (NIV)

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

Hebrews 12:1-3 (NIV)

PERSEVERANCE: persistence in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success.

Physical fitness and exercise come to mind when I think of this word, perseverance. You choose to make your body go thru difficulty to eventually achieve success. As women, many of you have chosen to persevere thru the pain of childbirth because you know what the outcome will be. Now move that word into your spiritual life. Do you care as much about your spiritual health as you do your physical health? Are you willing to let God take you thru trials to achieve success, ie. maturity in your faith?

Scripture speaks much of this word, perseverance. As with all of these words, the only way you can live them out is by looking to the only one, Jesus, who successfully practiced them here on this earth. Remember Hebrews 12:2 says to, “*fix your eyes on Jesus.*” The only way you can persevere in your trials of life is by looking to Him. He will give the strength you need to keep going.

Often it is easy to think you’ve got it all under control. Maybe you even think you don’t need help when everything seems to be going well, but what happens when trials come? I know too often for myself I can think, *I’ve got this Lord. I don’t want to bother You with this one.* And so I try in my own strength to persevere and every time I realize I can’t do it on my own. I need Him. After all, perseverance of the saints is about the perseverance of Christ. You can’t leave Him out of the equation.

Remember, He always remains faithful. In 2 Thessalonians you find Paul writing a letter to the Thessalonians encouraging them to stand firm in their faith and persevere despite the false teachings all around them. Paul reminded them of Christ's future return, motivating them to live responsibly for Him.

"But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one. We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command.

May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance."

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5 (NIV)

Did you notice that there is always a reward that comes with perseverance? Physically it may be that you get healthier, in childbirth the reward is your baby, but the reward is even better for your spiritual life. James talks of the reward being a crown of life for the believer who perseveres and Hebrews tells of it being a joy that Jesus received after all He endured for you.

Jesus persevered for you. Have you taken the time to know just how much He went thru on your behalf? Read the account from Isaiah 53:3-7 (NIV),

"He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."

It is heart wrenching every time I read all He went thru for me. Do you see and recognize Jesus great love for you? Do you see your need for a Savior from your sin? He did all of that for YOU. Confess your sin before Him today and call on His name to save you. Romans 10:13 (NIV), *"For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

As a follower of Jesus, will you choose to persevere when the hard times come? Jesus told you in John 16:33 that, *"in this world you will have tribulation, but take heart because He has overcome the world."* Don't try and run this spiritual race and persevere alone. You'll never make it. Ask Jesus to walk thru each day with you, knowing that you can only persevere in this life because of His perseverance for you on the cross.

RESPOND TO THE WORD

Have you been trying to persevere in your own strength? Write a simple, one sentence prayer that you can pray each day, asking God to help you persevere in your faith with Him by your side.

STUDY DEEPER

Romans 5:1-5, Philippians 1:3-11, Hebrews 10:32-39.

Day 15

WEAK

"Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (NASB)

"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

Philippians 4:13 (NASB)

WEAKNESS: the state or condition of lacking strength.

Do you consider yourself a strong person? Mentally, physically, spiritually? I'm sure at different points in your life you would answer, yes. No one wants to be considered weak. It's not a very flattering word and definitely does not build your confidence. So, you're probably thinking, *this is an interesting word to live by*, and I would agree. But as I thought more about this word weakness, it seemed like the perfect word to include with this devotional. Read the two passages below, compare them and see if you find one little word written in both.

"For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'"

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 (ESV)

"Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers."

1 Peter 3:7 (NIV)

The word I was hoping you would notice was weak. This last spring I started reading and studying thru the book of John. Something that seemed to come up over and over in the book

was just how much Jesus valued woman, even to the point of going against all Jewish customs and traditions that often practiced ignoring woman. Remember in John 4 when Jesus specifically met the Samaritan woman at the well and in response to her conversation with Him, she practically witnessed to her entire city, causing many to believe on Jesus? He chose to use the “weak” (as Jews would have thought about woman in that time) to shame the wise (Jewish religious leaders.) And not just her, but so many other woman in scripture. So actually what in the past I might have viewed as a negative insult, I see being weak as a beautiful compliment.

No matter how strong of a person you think you are, you will always have weak points in your spiritual life and that is actually a beautiful thing. You were never meant to go on your spiritual journey alone or in your own strength. You need the strength of the Jesus every moment of the day. Your weakness is an indicator that you need to humble yourself before Jesus and ask Him for His strength.

If you are going to boast about anything in this life, scripture says to boast in the fact that you are weak and cannot achieve what is needed to get to heaven on your own. You need the power of Jesus that you receive from repenting of your sin and placing your faith and trust in Him alone for your salvation. You cannot accomplish things in your own strength. This is another one of those areas that you need to stop trying to do things in your own strength and look to Jesus for His power that is perfected in your weakness. Admit today that you are weak, but your Savior is strong!

RESPOND TO THE WORD

What have you been trying to accomplish in your own strength? Choose today to boast in the fact that you are weak and then humbly ask Jesus for His strength.

STUDY DEEPER

Psalm 73:26, Isaiah 40:28-31 & 41:10, Hebrews 4:14-16.

Day 16

HONESTY

“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. My son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake not your mother's teaching.”

Proverbs 6:16-20 (ESV)

“Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight.”

Proverbs 12:22 (ESV)

“Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”

Colossians 3:9-10 (ESV)

“For ‘Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.’”

1 Peter 3:10-12 (ESV)

HONESTY: the quality or fact of being honest; uprightness and fairness, truthfulness, sincerity, or frankness, freedom from deceit or fraud.

Have you ever used the phrase, *“it was just a little white lie?”* How many of you have believed this to be true? Let's just be honest and say there is no such thing to God as a little white lie. As a follower of Jesus you are called to live and speak the truth, even when it may be hard.

You can trace this word, honesty, all the way back to Adam & Eve. Right after creation in the garden of Eden, you find Satan actively being the great deceiver and the father of lies? Check out John 8:44 when Jesus is talking to the Jews and what he called Satan.

“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

If you believe the Bible is absolute truth, then when you are caught lying or deceiving you are actually imitating Satan. This should concern you. Scripture uses strong words in regards to lying and deception. Did you notice in the first verses of Proverbs 6 that it is mentioned two

times how much God hates a lying tongue? They are called an abomination to Him. That is because they are in total contrast with who God is. He is the opposite. God is absolute truth.

I know for myself learning to control my tongue is one of the hardest battles I face. Our tongue is often where lying comes from. Are you letting truth and honesty be heard from the words you say?

Now let's talk about deception. This sin can be a sneaky one. Often you think you can hide it from others, but always know you can never hide anything from God. He sees it all. I think sometimes this can be the greater sin out of the two. Maybe you don't outright lie, but you are being deceptive when it comes to other things in your life? I've had to check myself and my heart and motives on several occasions. When you lie or deceive, you break and lose the trust of those around you, often of those you love most. Honesty and truth is always best, even when it may be difficult. They lead to living a life of freedom.

You are told to put off the old self and the sin of lying and deception. Think of your closet and the clothes you have. You choose to put new, fresh, clean clothes on each day. You don't usually put on dirty clothes (unless maybe when you're doing yard work). This is what scripture is telling you to do. Each morning as your putting on your new, clean clothes, choose to do the same in your spiritual life. Put on the *new self* that is being renewed daily into the knowledge and image of your Creator.

The first way that you can be completely honest is in your relationship with God. Truthfully admit that you have no good in and of yourself. Scripture speaks clearly when it says in Ecclesiastes 7:20 (NIV), *"Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins."* If you're doing an honest heart check, you know that you are guilty of this. I know I am. The desire to do good is there, but deep down my struggle with giving in to sin and its temptations is so real for me. I'm so thankful for a God who knows I can't do it on my own and that is why He sent His Son, Jesus to do it for me. 2 Corinthians 5:21, *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* Choose honesty first and foremost by acknowledging that you need Jesus and ask Him to save you.

RESPOND TO THE WORD

In what areas do you struggle with lying and deception? Ask God for forgiveness in those areas and if you've broken the trust of someone in your life, choose to be honest and go speak the truth to them today.

STUDY DEEPER

Leviticus 19:11, Psalm 51:6, Proverbs 12:17, Proverbs 14:1-7.

Day 17

REMEMBER

"...be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

Deuteronomy 6:12 (NIV)

"Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands."

Deuteronomy 8:2 (NIV)

"Remember the wondrous works that he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered."

1 Chronicles 16:12 & Psalm 105:5 (ESV)

"Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.'"

Isaiah 46:9-10 (NIV)

"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."

John 14:26 (ESV)

"...The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (NIV)

REMEMBER: have in or be able to bring to one's mind an awareness of someone or something that one has seen, known, or experienced in the past.

Remember the good ole days? How many of you have said these words? I'm sure most of you have at least heard them. Remembering is often positive. There are times when you should choose not to remember, but today I want to encourage you to remember the right things. Be careful in how you speak that you don't wish to go backwards in life. Instead, remember where God has brought you from and remember to look ahead at where He wants to take you.

Most of us like to remember times in our life by capturing them either in a photo, on camera or through journaling. I remember starting baby books for each of my children. They included pictures, their dried out umbilical cord, hair from their first haircut, baby dedication certificates and all kinds of “firsts” that I wanted to remember. Every Christmas since my children were born, I compile pictures in an online scrapbook that I have printed and give to them recalling all the highlights of the last year. It’s always a fun part of Christmas morning to look at those photo books together.

Remembering can be a wonderful thing. Scripture encourages it because you often see more clearly the faithfulness and goodness of God. There are several times in the Bible from beginning to end where you are told to remember who your God is. Here are a few,

Remember...

- When He lead Israel out of slavery
- His faithfulness to Israel
- He has kept every promise that He’s ever made
- His miracles
- His greatest gift in sending Jesus for your sacrifice
- To memorize His words of truth
- Your greatest teacher is the Holy Spirit
- His promise to return for those who are His own.
- The best is yet to come! Jesus will return for His own.

Remember, you are a sinner in need of a Savior. Jesus wants to be your Savior from sin. Repent today and ask Him for forgiveness, He is patiently waiting for you with open arms. I love the desire Jesus has for you to come to repentance in 2 Peter 3:9 (NIV), *“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”*

If I could ask you to remember one thing above the rest, it is to thank Jesus daily for saving you from sins punishment.

RESPOND TO THE WORD

You need: a notebook or piece of paper and a pen.

Take some time to remember back over your life to when you were a child and then up until now and write down God’s faithfulness to you and your family. Put that notebook or paper in a special place and as the days, weeks, months and years continue, keep on taking the time to remember how good your God is.

STUDY DEEPER

Psalm 77, Psalm 119:49-56, Psalm 143:5.

Day 18

CONVICTION

“And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

John 3:19-21 (ESV)

“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

2 Timothy 3:12-17 (NIV)

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

Hebrews 11:1 (ESV)

CONVICTION: a firmly held belief or opinion.

Conviction is something all believers should have. If you are truly a follower of Christ Jesus, then you should be holding firmly to what you believe. Look with me at a character in the Bible, Joseph, who showed great conviction when put under immense pressure to give in to the ways of the world.

After much persecution from his brothers, Joseph is sold into slavery in Egypt. What I love through Joseph’s whole story is that God was always with him and it is very evident. Joseph comes to Egypt and is made a slave in the house of Potiphar, the Egyptian officer of the Pharaoh. Pick up the story with me in Genesis 39:6-23 (NIV). You find Joseph alone in a conversation with Potiphar’s wife.

*“Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master’s wife took notice of Joseph and said, ‘Come to bed with me!’ **But he refused.** ‘With me in charge,’ he told her, ‘my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked*

thing and sin against God?’ And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, **he refused** to go to bed with her or even be with her.

One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. She caught him by his cloak and said, ‘Come to bed with me!’ **But he left his cloak in her hand and ran** out of the house. When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, she called her household servants. ‘Look,’ she said to them, ‘this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.’

She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. Then she told him this story: ‘That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.’ When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, ‘This is how your slave treated me,’ he burned with anger. Joseph’s master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined. But while Joseph was there in the prison, **the Lord was with him**; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph’s care, because **the Lord was with Joseph** and gave him success in whatever he did.”

Do you see how strong of a conviction Joseph had when it came to honoring God and living according to God’s truth? He stood firm in his conviction especially when it would have been hard being a man in this story. Notice the two times scripture says **he refused**, which means to indicate that one is not willing to accept or grant something offered or requested. Not only would he not give in to the temptation because of honoring God, but also because he was honoring his master, Potiphar. Potiphar trusted Joseph.

When Potiphar’s wife kept coming after him, the third time it says that Joseph literally **ran** out of the house. Have you ever found yourself in a situation that calls for standing up for the truth and living with conviction? Sometimes it’s easy to think you can stay in that situation because you will remain strong, but other times you physically need to **run** from it. Don’t let temptations lead you into a trap that you could eventually end up giving in to. That is exactly what Potiphar’s wife was trying to do with Joseph, set a trap him. Joseph believed in God’s view of marriage as one man and one woman and would not defile the marriage bed like it talks about in Hebrews 13:4, “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.”

You find Joseph at the end of this story in prison, which seems so unfair right? If I’m being honest, sometimes that is where your convictions for God’s truth can take you. Notice that Joseph was never alone, even in prison. God made him to prosper and have success even there.

The devotional for today is not meant to discourage you by any means. Instead my hope is that it will encourage you to take a stand for God's truth even when it goes against what the world says. Joseph chose to believe that God was always working things out for his good and God's glory. God will always be with you when you are standing for His truth.

Do you know that the ultimate truth is found in Jesus Christ? Jesus said in John 14:6 (NIV), *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* Have you accepted the truth, Jesus, for yourself?

RESPOND TO THE WORD

In what areas of your life do you need to have stronger convictions? Write them down and ask God to help you take a stand for HIS truth.

STUDY DEEPER

Romans 8:1, Ephesians 5:11-16, Galatians 5:1,16-26.

Day 19

SURRENDER

“And he said to all, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?’”

Luke 9:23-25 & Matthew 16:24-26 (ESV)

“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.”

Galatians 2:20 (ESV)

SURRENDER: to yield to the power, control, or possession of another upon compulsion or demand, to give up completely or agree to forgo especially in favor of another.

Imagine with me that you had to wait and wait and wait to receive something in your life and then after getting it you had to give it away. This sounds awful right? Who in their right mind would do something like that? I want to look at a man in Scripture who had that exact thing happen to him.

Meet Abraham, the man who God chose to be the father of many nations and His chosen people, Israel. You can start reading about Abraham in Genesis 12. He was married to a woman named, Sarah. Some of you may know their story well. For those of you who don't know them, the one main problem in their life was that God promised Abraham he would be the father of many nations. However, Abraham and Sarah didn't have children. This was not because they had not tried. God had promised them a son, but Sarah was not getting pregnant. Finally, when Abraham and Sarah were in their 90's, God gave them a baby boy named, Isaac.

Some years go by and in chapter 22:1-2 (NIV) of Genesis you find God giving Abraham the test of total surrender. God asks Abraham to take his only son, Isaac, on a journey and offer him as a burnt offering.

“Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, ‘Abraham!’ ‘Here I am,’ he replied. Then God said, ‘Take your son, your only son, whom you love Isaac and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.’”

What? This sounds absolutely crazy. Remember how in the beginning I told you to imagine waiting and waiting for something, only to be asked once it arrived to give it away? This is

exactly what God was asking Abraham to do with Isaac. But why? Read on with me to find the real meaning behind this test.

“Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, ‘Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.’”

Genesis 22:3-5 (NIV)

First off, notice the obedience of Abraham. He didn’t question God at all, he just simply obeyed. Secondly, Abraham had his servants stay behind when they got to a certain point. This could have been because if they found out what Abraham was going to do, they may have tried to stop him. Continue on with me in verses 6-8,

“Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, ‘Father?’ ‘Yes, my son?’ Abraham replied. ‘The fire and wood are here,’ Isaac said, ‘but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?’ Abraham answered, ‘God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.’ And the two of them went on together.”

Now you see Isaac questioning his Dad about the burnt offering by asking where the lamb was. I love Abraham’s response, *the Lord will provide*. Abraham didn’t have to know all the details, but He knew his God well enough to know that even in this test, he believed God would provide if he obeyed. Finish reading the story with me in verses 9-18,

“When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, ‘Abraham! Abraham!’ ‘Here I am,’ he replied. ‘Do not lay a hand on the boy,’ he said. ‘Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.’ Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.

So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, ‘On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.’ The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, ‘I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.’”

There is so much to unpack in this last section. I wanted to use this story of Abraham because it clearly shows what it means to live a life fully surrendered to the Lord. This is what you see

Abraham doing, but not only him. Did you see also that just as Abraham could have refused to obey in the first place, so could have Isaac? But he didn't. Isaac could have ran from his father, but he trusted him, just like you see Abraham trusting his heavenly Father. Isaac willingly surrendered to what God was telling his father to do. Because of the surrendered hearts you see in Abraham and Isaac, God sends His angel to stop Abraham from sacrificing Isaac. Not only did God stop Abraham, but God also provides a ram to be sacrificed in Isaac's place. The angel calls a second time and says because of Abraham's fully surrendered and obedient heart, God will bless him in abundant ways.

This test of surrender seems absolutely crazy to you and I today. It was how God knew that Abraham totally feared Him because he was willing to surrender everything that he had hoped and waited for, his only son. I also believe that Abraham recognized all he had belonged to God in the first place.

Jesus is your example when it comes to living a surrendered life. Jesus had to practice surrender before his crucifixion. Mark 14:35-36 (ESV) reads, *"And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.'"* Jesus asked for God to remove this cup from Him (his death on the cross), but at the end you see Him completely surrender to the Father's will.

God the Father sacrificed His only Son for YOU? He sacrificed, Jesus, to take the punishment that you deserve for your sin. Why? Because He loves you and longs for you to be in heaven with Him someday. But, there is a problem. You can't get to heaven on your own, because we all are born into sin. You want your own way instead of God's way. And so you struggle thru this life, often trying to do enough good so that you can somehow earn your way to heaven. That will never get you there. Scripture tells us in Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV),

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast."

It is only by God's saving grace thru His Son Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection from the dead that you are saved. It is nothing that you can earn or take credit for, it is simply a gift to receive. In order to receive this gift you need to repent of your sin, turning to Jesus to save you from your sins punishment. Will you do that today if you haven't already?

Sometimes you and I can be stubborn when it comes to surrender. Maybe God is asking you to do something that you don't want to, so you try to ignore Him. I often think of Romans 12:1 (ESV) when I think of surrender,

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, this is your true and proper worship."

I'm always challenged when I read this verse to live exactly what it says, *present my body as a living sacrifice*. In other words, fully surrender ALL of me. That is my spiritual worship. Many times I have tried to surrender all of myself, but then I stick out my hand or a foot just to leave a little bit out there for me. That is not what God is asking for. He doesn't want part of you, He wants ALL of you. Strive today and everyday to live a life fully surrendered to Jesus knowing that it can bring about some of your greatest and unexpected blessings. Remember, all you are and have ultimately belongs to Him, He just wants you to recognize it. Are you living with that mindset today?

RESPOND TO THE WORD

What are you holding tightly onto that you need to surrender to the Lord today? Take a few minutes to pray and ask God to help you fully release and surrender it to Him. Give Him control of your life.

STUDY DEEPER

What contrast do you see in these verses? Matthew 10:38-39.

Day 20

PREPARE

"A voice of one calling: 'In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'"

Isaiah 40:3-5 (NIV)

"'I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,' says the Lord Almighty."

Malachai 3:1 (NIV)

"In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'"

"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,' John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'" Mark 1:1-8 (ESV)

"My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

John 14:2-3 (NIV)

"However, as it is written: 'What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived' the things God has prepared for those who love him."

1 Corinthians 2:9 (NIV) quoting Isaiah 64:4

PREPARE: to make ready beforehand for some purpose, use, or activity. To work out the details of or plan in advance.

What is your favorite thing to prepare for? Do you enjoy preparing dinner? Do you enjoy preparing your home for when guests come to visit? Do you like preparing for holidays? Do you like all the preparations that come with going on vacation? One of my favorite things to prepare for are when guests come to visit our home. I can tend to have a different focus depending on what time of year you come to visit. If it's colder, then I like the inside of my home to be clean, orderly and have a feeling of warmth and coziness to it. But it's very different when people come to visit in the warmer months. Then I like to make sure the outside of my home is beautifully manicured and that there is nice space to hangout outside, even around the campfire. You are usually always preparing for something.

Look with me in scripture at John the Baptist and you will see that he was prophesied about 3 times in the Old Testament. He was given a mission to prepare the way for Jesus the Messiah. John the Baptist was Jesus cousin. His mother Elisabeth was pregnant at the same time that Mary was pregnant with Jesus. In fact Elisabeth had been barren for years, unable to have children. You can read this story in Luke 1 where an angel appears to her husband, Zachariah, telling him that they would have a son. The angel specifically tells Zachariah that he is to name the baby, John and that John will prepare the way for the Messiah.

Whenever you read about John the Baptist in the 4 gospels, you can see that John was always preaching a message of repentance from sin. John was also known as a baptizer. Notice his name, John the Baptist. As he preached the message of repentance and prepared the way for the Messiah, many people came to believe on Jesus as the true Messiah and Savior of the world. John would then follow thru with baptisms in the Jordan River. I found it interesting that he chose a river to baptize people in. It makes me wonder if it is symbolic of the fact that he was showing them just as water *flows and washes* away, so does our sin, once you believe and are baptized.

I have quoted some of John's famous words from John 3:30 multiple times as the reason and focus for writing these devotionals in the first place, *"He must increase, I must decrease."* See how John was never threatened by his cousin, Jesus? He never got annoyed by Him or tried to make a bigger name for Himself. His life was always about preparing the way for Jesus and making His name greater. May that be our desire in all things as well.

Jesus lived out this word, prepare in a few ways. He had to prepare to leave heaven and come down to this sinful earth to take on human form. He then ultimately prepared for His death and resurrection. The greatest truth is that Jesus is currently preparing a place for those who love Him up in heaven for eternity. Will you be going there? John 14:1-3 (NIV) tells you,

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a

place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

If you still have not chosen to place your faith and trust in Jesus alone to be saved from your sins punishment, I beg you to make that choice today. Confess with your mouth that you are a sinner in need of repentance. Believe that Jesus died on the cross, taking your punishment and that He rose again from the dead 3 days later. Ask Jesus to save you.

RESPOND TO THE WORD

When others look at you do they see you preparing for the things of this earth or for eternity? As Jesus follower, how are you preparing for Jesus second coming? Scripture tells you that He will come again and receive you to Himself. Will you choose to be like John the Baptist and share the good news of Jesus with those around you?

STUDY DEEPER

John 1:19-34.

Day 21

LEAD

"Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Matthew 20:26-28 (NIV)

"Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'"

Mark 10:42-45 (NIV)

"Then they began to argue among themselves about who would be the greatest among them. Jesus told them, 'In this world the kings and great men lord it over their people, yet they are called 'friends of the people.' But among you it will be different. Those who are the greatest among you should take the lowest rank, and the leader should be like a servant. Who is more important, the one who sits at the table or the one who serves? The one who sits at the table, of course. But not here! For I am among you as one who serves.'"

Luke 22:24-27 (NLT)

"After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, 'Do you understand what I was doing? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because that's what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.'"

John 13:12-15 (NLT)

LEAD: to guide someone or something along a way, to direct on a course or in a direction, to direct the operations, activity, or performance of.

Perhaps one of the greatest leaders you know in scripture is Moses. Moses was chosen by God to lead His people Israel out of slavery in Egypt. You can read about his story starting in Exodus chapter 1. One of the more popular stories of Moses is his encounter with God at the burning bush. This is where God calls him to lead Israel out of Egypt. Read part of their conversation with me in Exodus 3:10-14 & 4:10-17(NIV),

"...I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.' But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' And God

said, 'I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.' Moses said to God, 'Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?' God said to Moses, 'I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you...''"

"...Moses said to the Lord, 'Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.'

The Lord said to him, 'Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.' But Moses said, 'Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else.' Then the Lord's anger burned against Moses and he said, 'What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and he will be glad to see you. You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him. But take this staff in your hand so you can perform the signs with it.'"

Here you see what God was asking Moses to do and do you see his response? Lots of questions and eventually some excuses on Moses' end. Notice how he tries to disqualify himself to God? This leads to God getting angry with Moses. Now think about that for yourself. Do you ever try to disqualify yourself when God is telling you to step up into a role of leadership? God made it very clear to Moses that He would be with him the entire time. The same is true for you. If God calls you to it, He's not going to abandon you. He will be with you every step of the way.

I have to admit, if I was Moses I probably would have been making up plenty of excuses. After all do you realize how big of a job God was giving him to do? I think it is very easy to minimize and forget just how many Israelites Moses would be leading. In Exodus 12:37 it tells us that there were 600,000 men alone. This does not include women, children or older men and women. Scholars believe the actual number of Israelites Moses led out of Egypt was more like 2.4 million. That is a LOT of people. I would definitely want to disqualify myself. Moses along with his brother, Aaron and sister Miriam did step into the roles God had for them and led Israel out of their slavery.

Do you wonder if God chose Moses because He knew that Moses would feel inadequate and unqualified? Several times when you read the exodus of Israel you see them getting mad at Moses and taking it out on him because he was their visible leader. God often had to remind Moses that Israel was really mad at Him.

Moses was not the only one in scripture that would seem unqualified to be in a leadership role. Look at the following people and notice how God met them right where they were at and then put them in places of leadership for His glory.

- Gideon in Judges 6. He came from a family who was not well known and he was the youngest. God tells Gideon that he will defeat Midian in battle because He would be with him.
- David in 1 Samuel 16. David was also the youngest in his family and he was known as a simple shepherd boy. He was who God chose to be the second king over Israel.
- Josiah in 2 Kings 22. Josiah was 8 years old when he became king. He did what was right in God's eyes and walked in the ways of king David. God used Josiah to restore the house of the Lord. God also used a prophetess named Huldah to bring Josiah words of promise and encouragement.
- Timothy in 1&2 Timothy. God used a young leader named Timothy to pastor His church in Ephesus.

When God put each of these people into positions of leadership, He was always with them. They knew that God was their leader. The encouragement that Paul gave Timothy as a leader is good for you to be reminded of, *"For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."* 2 Timothy 1:7 (ESV)

As followers of Christ you're all called to lead in some way. Don't disqualify yourself. A good leader should always teach you to submit to God and not to themselves. *"Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith."* Hebrews 13:7

When it comes to leadership the only kind of leader God wants is a servant leader. You can't be a God honoring leader if your not known as a servant.

One of the greatest leaders that I met and served under was a man by the name of Reese Kaufman. Mr. Kaufman is currently President of the ministry, Child Evangelism Fellowship. I worked for this ministry several years from Junior High all thru my college years. Mr. Kaufman would tell how in his younger years starting out in jobs, he always did what you and I would consider the gross or low end jobs of cleaning toilets and public restrooms. He learned much from those years of serving and working those jobs. Because of his faithfulness to honor God in those ways, he now is the President of this global ministry to children. When you are faithfully serving in the small areas, God will in His time, put you in positions of greater leadership.

How did Jesus live out servant leadership here on this earth? If you look back to the beginning of the devotional you will find several passages where Jesus taught His disciples what a great leader looked like. The greatest leaders were those who were known as servants. Jesus was the greatest example of servant leadership. As He led and taught His disciples, He was serving them as well. Jesus was sent on a specific mission to this earth as Matthew 20:28 (NIV) says, *"...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

He gave His life for you. Not because He had to, but because He wanted to show you the love He has for you. You have this problem of sin, wanting to choose your own way instead of God's

way. Because of that your sin has to be punished and Jesus is the one who took the punishment that you deserve. All you need to do is repent of your sin, believe that He died and rose again and ask Him to save you. If you have never made that decision, will you do it today?

Being a servant leader is not always easy. Often you can selfishly seek great positions of leadership that can earn you a name, but it's not about you. Remember John 3:30, *"He must increase, I must decrease."*

RESPOND TO THE WORD

Maybe you fall into the category of disqualifying yourself from positions of leadership because of your past. Let God redeem your past to use for His glory. If you are currently in a position of leadership, are you known as a servant leader? Ask God to help you lead in any area of your life with a servant leader mindset.

STUDY DEEPER

Read the song of Moses & Israel after God led them out of slavery in Egypt in Exodus 15. Notice that even though God gave Moses as their physical leader, God Himself was their ultimate leader. Lastly, read 1 Chronicles 16:11 and be encouraged today.

Day 22

TEACH

“I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.”

2 Timothy 1:5-7 (NIV)

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV)

“Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.”

Matthew 4:23 (NASB)

TEACH: to cause to know something, to guide the studies of, to impart the knowledge of, to instruct by precept, example, or experience.

You’re all teaching someone in your life whether you realize it or not. Many people are watching and listening to you every day. I’m excited to study deeper this word within scripture as we look at different examples of people who were known for their teaching.

The first people I want to look at are the Mother and Grandmother of Timothy. Timothy was Paul’s traveling companion and assistant on his missionary journeys. Paul appointed him as leader over the church in Ephesus. Timothy had much to deal with when it came to false teachers rising up there. Paul reminds him in 2 Timothy 1 of the strong faith that was taught and instilled in him from his mother and grandmother. This should challenge and remind you and I of the importance it is to teach those in our life. Especially when it comes to our own children and grandchildren. Timothy’s Mother and Grandmother took the time to *teach* him of Jesus.

Those were not the only teachers Timothy had. Paul was another one. We don’t know how old Timothy was, but from the way Paul spoke to him, he seemed young for the ministry he was leading. However; Paul encouraged Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12, *“Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.”* As much as it is easy to think that the younger should always be

learning from the older (which is totally biblical and important), I also believe that the older can learn from the younger. This is what Paul seemed to be teaching Timothy.

Paul goes on to teach Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:1-3, *"You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others."* Here you see Paul telling Timothy to teach other reliable people to teach. It's kind of like a chain or domino reaction. As you teach someone, they in turn should teach someone else. Paul goes on to say a few verses later, *"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."* 2 Timothy 2:15 (ESV) Here, Paul is saying the importance of teaching scripture is to always handle it with accuracy.

When you think about teaching in your own life, you need to remember first who is teaching you. There may be several people in your life, even godly mentors who are coming alongside you and teaching you. That is wonderful, but I want to remind you not to forget your most important teacher and that is the Holy Spirit. John 14:26 reads, *"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 said to you."*

Jesus loved to teach and often that is what you find him doing in scripture. Remember when his parents couldn't find him as a boy and He was in the temple teaching the religious leaders? Jesus was always teaching His truth, which was to live against the ways of this world and live with an eternal mindset. One of His greatest teachings is, The Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5-7. Read the first few verses 1-12 (NIV),

"Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. He said: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.'"

One thing I would like to point out is that Jesus taught His disciples much of what was going to happen to Him. He taught them that He would die to pay for sins punishment and then rise again on the third day. The sad part about all of this teaching is that His disciples often were not paying attention to what Jesus was saying. They seemed so confused by Jesus death and yet He had taught them over and over again what was going to happen to Him. Make sure that as you are being taught by others, first that it is absolute truth and not just someone else's

idea, and then secondly that you are listening. If you have been reading and listening to all this teaching from Words To Live By, but still have not chosen to receive Jesus as your Savior from sin, don't wait any longer. Repent of your sin, believe in His death and resurrection and ask Him to save you today. THAT is the greatest teaching you can listen to and choose to accept for yourself.

RESPOND TO THE WORD

Who are you teaching? When you study and teach, do you remind yourself to do it with accuracy? Remember as a Mother, Grandmother or whatever position God has you in, to teach the children in your life as well as the adults of Jesus and His truth.

STUDY DEEPER

2 John 1:9.

Day 23

LEARN

“Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.”

Psalm 25:5 (ESV)

“Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments.”

Psalm 119:66 (ESV)

“Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance.”

Proverbs 1:5 (ESV)

“Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.”

Proverbs 9:9 (ESV)

“An intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.”

Proverbs 18:15 (ESV)

LEARN: to gain or acquire knowledge of or skill in something by study, experience, or being taught.

“I’ve heard it said that to be a great man or woman, you must first be around great men or woman. Walk where they walked, talk with who they talk and live as they live.” Author unknown

Has there ever been someone in your life that you wanted to learn from? Probably for most of you the answer is yes. I know for myself it wasn’t always just one person I was learning from, but often many different people depending on where I was at in life. Learning is something that every follower of Jesus should be doing on a daily basis. This is how you grow in your relationship with Christ. It is very important that you make time daily to dwell on God’s truth as you learn and apply it. Alongside the study and learning of scripture is to surround yourself with people that are ahead of you spiritually so that you can learn from them. I know many times in life I would find certain people who were older and more mature in their faith to learn from.

Growing up I was very active in Theatre whether it was dramas, musicals or human videos. I remember learning about the understudy in a play. The understudy was the person who was the back up usually for the main character. Their job was to learn another’s role in order to be able to act as a replacement at short notice.

Take a look with me at two men who were prophets in the Old Testament, Elijah & Elisha. The first thing I want you to know about being a prophet is that it was not a glamorous job. These were the men and women who God chose to serve Him by speaking on His behalf. Often times it involved speaking about the judgement that was to come. Prophets were so unliked that often they could be compared to a homeless person who at times was running for their life because people wanted to kill them and in some cases they literally were even sawn in two. Check out Hebrews 11:36-40 (NIV),

“Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated - the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.”

Does this sound like a job you would want? Probably not. Maybe you are familiar with the prophet, Elijah as he was known for the great victory on Mount Carmel. It was there that Elijah had a contest with the prophets of Baal as to who worshipped the one true God. This story can be found in 1 Kings 18. I want to take you to the end of the following chapter 19:15-21 (NIV) and introduce you to Elijah’s successor, Elisha.

“The Lord said to him (Elijah), ‘Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.’”

“So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. ‘Let me kiss my father and mother goodbye,’ he said, ‘and then I will come with you.’ ‘Go back,’ Elijah replied. ‘What have I done to you?’ So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his servant.”

Here you meet Elisha. He was plowing the fields with his herd of oxen. God gave Elijah specific instructions to anoint Elisha to succeed him as prophet. From reading the first paragraph it shows how God was sovereign and in control of all that was about to happen. He told Elijah exactly what to do.

I’ve always found it interesting that Elisha asked to return to his Father and mother to say goodbye. After all aren’t you supposed to forsake everything when God calls? Studying deeper it shows by Elijah’s response he was making it clear that it was God who was calling Elisha, *“what have I done to you?”* Notice when Elisha returned home, it was not to stay, but instead to tie up all the loose ends so he could fully commit to serving God. If things didn’t turn out for

him being a prophet he wouldn't have anything to fall back on. Elisha was fully committing to what God was calling him to do. He returns home and has a sort of going away party. He slaughters his yoke of oxen (which would have made him pretty wealthy in the world eyes back then) and burns his plowing equipment and then cooks the meat for the people. Then it says, "he set out to follow Elijah and become his servant." Elisha got rid of all distractions and was ready to learn from Elijah. In the next few chapters you read the ministry of Elijah start to come to an end. Pick it up with me in 2 Kings 2:1-15 (NIV)

"When the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, 'Stay here; the Lord has sent me to Bethel.' But Elisha said, 'As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you.' So they went down to Bethel. The company of the prophets at Bethel came out to Elisha and asked, 'Do you know that the Lord is going to take your master from you today?' 'Yes, I know,' Elisha replied, 'so be quiet.' Then Elijah said to him, 'Stay here, Elisha; the Lord has sent me to Jericho.' And he replied, 'As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you.' So they went to Jericho. The company of the prophets at Jericho went up to Elisha and asked him, "Do you know that the Lord is going to take your master from you today?" 'Yes, I know,' he replied, 'so be quiet.' Then Elijah said to him, 'Stay here; the Lord has sent me to the Jordan.' And he replied, 'As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you.' So the two of them walked on. Fifty men from the company of the prophets went and stood at a distance, facing the place where Elijah and Elisha had stopped at the Jordan. Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it. The water divided to the right and to the left, and the two of them crossed over on dry ground. When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, 'Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?' 'Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit, Elisha replied. 'You have asked a difficult thing,' Elijah said, 'yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours otherwise, it will not.'

As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha saw this and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his garment and tore it in two. Elisha then picked up Elijah's cloak that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. He took the cloak that had fallen from Elijah and struck the water with it. 'Where now is the Lord, the God of Elijah?' he asked. When he struck the water, it divided to the right and to the left, and he crossed over. The company of the prophets from Jericho, who were watching, said, 'The spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha.'"

Three times Elisha insisted on staying with Elijah so that he could get all the time he could to learn from his mentor. Elijah gives Elisha one last request before he goes to heaven and Elisha's response is, "let me inherit a double portion of your spirit." Recognizing the big request Elisha made, Elijah tells him if he sees Elijah when he is taken from there, it will be granted. Then God takes Elijah home to heaven in a whirlwind. Now it was time for Elisha to take all that he had learned from Elijah and put it into practice with God's help. The first thing Elisha does is to pick up Elijah's cloak that was left behind and use the power within it to strike the Jordan river so it

would clear a path for him to walk back across. Lastly, see how Elisha had an audience of all the prophets from Jericho watching? They recognized the power that God had now given to him.

How long are you willing to learn from scripture or possibly another mature follower of Christ? Will you take the time and devote yourself to learning all that you can so that when the time comes and God calls you into a specific place or position you will be ready? This makes me smile when I think of all the learning I did as a child in the scriptures as well as learning from those more mature in their faith. I had no clue what God would be preparing me for in the future.

One thing I was never planning to be was a Pastor's wife, let alone be teaching God's Word and yet look at where God has me. If it wasn't for all those years of learning and maturing as I read and studied God's Word, I wouldn't be able to effectively live my life to the full for God's glory. Was the learning process always easy? No. In fact there were countless times I wanted to *throw in the towel* and quit. However, I do know that maturity is a product of struggle. In order for you to grow, you have to struggle. Sometimes you need people in your life who continually push you to keep learning. For me that is my husband. I can't tell you the number of times when I have felt like giving up or slacking off in my learning and he always speaks words of truth, encouraging and pushing me to keep on learning.

If I could ask you to learn one new thing and apply it to your life today, it would be that if you have not learned of your need for a Savior and forgiveness from your sin, *that* is the first thing you should learn. You were born with a sinful nature, wanting your own way instead of God's and because of that, your sin put a separation between you and God. But, God in His love for you, sent His only perfect Son, Jesus down to this earth to live and die on the cross, taking the punishment that you deserve. The reason you can place your trust in Him alone for salvation is because He didn't stay dead. Three days later He came back to life. Learn today about your risen Savior, repent of your sin and ask Him to save you.

RESPOND TO THE WORD

I challenge you to learn something new every day in your quiet time with the Lord as you study His Word and put it into practice.

Don't stop there, try learning something new in your everyday life as well. It could be as simple as trying out a new recipe, learning the meaning of a new word, learning to play an instrument, or maybe it is stepping out into the unknown of a hobby you always wanted to learn. Push yourself to always be a learner and encourage those around you to do the same.

STUDY DEEPER

Psalm 32:8, Psalm 143:8-10, Proverbs 1:7.

Day 24

FOLLOW

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.’”

Matthew 16:24-28 (NIV)

“Then he said to them all: ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.’”

Luke 9:23-26 (NIV)

“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.’”

John 8:12 (ESV)

FOLLOW: to go or come after a person or thing proceeding ahead; to move or travel behind.

Put yourself in the shoes of Jesus’ first disciples and ask yourself, “*would I be willing to stop what I was doing and leave the familiar life I knew behind, all to follow Jesus?*”

Read the following verses and notice that **following involves leaving**.

“As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.’ At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.”

Matthew 4:18-22 (NIV)

“When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, ‘Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.’ Jesus replied, ‘Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to

lay his head.' Another disciple said to him, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' But Jesus told him, 'Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.'"

Matthew 8:18-22 (NIV)

"As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. 'Follow me,' he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him."

Matthew 9:9 (NIV)

"Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, 'Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?' 'Why do you ask me about what is good?' Jesus replied. 'There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.' 'Which ones?' he inquired. Jesus replied, 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.' 'All these I have kept,' the young man said. 'What do I still lack?' Jesus answered, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.' When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.' When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, 'Who then can be saved?' Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.' Peter answered him, 'We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?' Jesus said to them, 'Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.'"

Matthew 19:16-30 (NIV)

Peter and Andrew left their nets, James and John left their boat, Jesus told another disciple to leave the dead to bury the dead, Matthew left the tax collector's booth and Jesus told the rich young ruler to leave all of his earthly possessions and give them to the poor and come follow Him. This may sound kind of extreme to some of you, but that is the cost of discipleship. If you truly want to follow Jesus, you must be willing to leave your former way of life and commit to following Him with your whole heart. He is not interested in half hearted followers, Jesus wants ALL of you.

As a child I grew up on a small farm with many different animals. I remember training our goats, sheep and dog how to follow us. It was always fun to have the baby goats bounding along behind us as we ran thru the yard or having our dogs follow us when we went for walks. However, it was quite a different story when it came to the sheep. Sheep are a very stubborn animal. It took months of training and work to teach our sheep to walk and follow. Do you find it unique that often in scripture, people are referred to as sheep? It wasn't a compliment. It makes sense when I think of how stubborn I can be. Think of how patient God is with you. Even

though He knows how hard it is to leave behind the familiar way of life, He doesn't let you settle for half heartedly following Him. If you are truly His child, read what Jesus says about you in John 10:27-29 (NIV),

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."

There are three things I want to point out in those verses. First as His sheep you listen, second you follow, and third you have eternal life and no one can snatch you out of His hand. The reward for listening and following Jesus are greater than anything this life has to offer. Your eternity is secure.

A big message you hear in the world today is to, *follow your heart*. I remember being a young Mom shopping for my oldest daughter as she was beginning to start school for the first time. As I walked thru the stores, over and over again the majority of the shirts and outfits had those 3 words, *follow your heart* written on them. I couldn't bring myself to ever buy her clothes with those words because I remembered what Jeremiah 17:9-10 (ESV) says,

"The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? 'I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds.'"

This may seem like a small, silly conviction, but for me it was something I wanted my children to be aware of. All human hearts are deceitful because we are born into a sinful nature. I instead want to teach my children their need for Jesus and to live a life that follows Him. If I am ever asked to give advice to a graduating Senior, I usually will say *don't follow your heart, follow Jesus*.

The world tells you to *follow your heart and your dreams*, but that is not what scripture teaches. Jesus told His disciples to follow Him and following Him would be going against what the world teaches. If you love your life on this earth you will lose it, but if you hate your life in this world you will keep it for eternal life.

"Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me."

John 12:25-26 (NIV)

Remember that old hymn, *I Have Decided To Follow Jesus*? Are you willing to follow Him no matter the cost? It is often easy to notice when others are not following Jesus, but don't focus on them. You worry about you. Can you say or sing these words honestly?

1. I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
No turning back, no turning back.

2. Tho' none go with me, I still will follow,
Tho' none go with me I still will follow,
Tho' none go with me, I still will follow;
No turning back, no turning back.

3. The world behind me, the cross before me,
The world behind me, the cross before me;
The world behind me, the cross before me;
No turning back, no turning back.

How did Jesus live out this word? He left you an example to follow when He was on this earth. 1 Peter 2:21-25 (NIV) says,

"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.' When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. 'He himself bore our sins' in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; 'by his wounds you have been healed.' For 'you were like sheep going astray,' but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."

So, who are you following? If you choose to follow this world and your own heart and desires, you will never get to Jesus. There has to be a leaving or denying of yourself and your ways in order to follow Jesus. Each of you has entered this world with a sinful nature of always wanting your own way instead of God's. Your way will never get you to heaven. You must repent of your old, sinful ways and turn to Jesus recognizing your need for His forgiveness. Believe in His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. Have you placed your faith and trust in Him alone? Don't wait any longer, do it today.

RESPOND TO THE WORD

What do you need to leave behind in order to completely follow Jesus?

STUDY DEEPER

Read the selected verses from Psalm 119 and notice how they go along with the idea of following Jesus. Psalm 119:2-3, 10, 32, 35, 45, 51, 59, 67, 101, 102, 105, 133, 157.

Day 25

WITNESS

“A truthful witness saves lives, but one who breathes out lies is deceitful.”

Proverbs 14:25 (ESV)

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”

Romans 1:16-17 (NIV)

“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.”

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 (ESV)

WITNESS: a person who sees an event take place, evidence, proof.

You were probably taught as a child not to talk to strangers, right? This is a very important thing to teach children. It reminds me of one of my all time favorite Bible characters. You are not given her name just a title, The Samaritan Woman, or as others know her, The Women At The Well. What I love about this woman is her honesty, inquisitiveness and curiosity with Jesus. Jesus was definitely a stranger to her and not only that, He was a Jew and she was not only a Samaritan, but a woman. Two things back in that time that were not highly looked upon. After Jesus starts up a conversation with her, she doesn't hold anything back with Him. Join with me in John 4:1-30 (NIV) to hear her story,

“Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

If you haven't noticed yet in my writing, I like to stop and reflect upon a few verses at a time to more deeply understand what this passage is saying. Halfway thru the paragraph read how it says, “He had to go thru Samaria.” Now technically Jesus did not have to go thru Samaria to

get to Galilee, in fact many Jews purposely would take the long way to get to Galilee just to avoid Samaria because they viewed Samaritans as very unimportant. However, in Jesus case He did have to go thru Samaria because He had a divine appointment with this Samaritan woman. Did you catch also that it said Jesus was tired from the journey? This is another way that Jesus related to you as a human being, even *He* would get tired. Continue on with me in verse 7,

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Will you give me a drink?' (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?' (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.' 'Sir,' the woman said, 'you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?' Jesus answered, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.' He told her, 'Go, call your husband and come back.' 'I have no husband,' she replied. Jesus said to her, 'You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.' 'Sir,' the woman said, 'I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.' 'Woman,' Jesus replied, 'believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.' The woman said, 'I know that Messiah' (called Christ) 'is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.' Then Jesus declared, 'I, the one speaking to you I am he.'

Let's unpack this together. First off, the women of that time had to walk outside the city, with large water pots that they would fill up from the well and then walk back and use for their cooking and cleaning. This was not an easy job. Usually the women would go early in the day to get water before the heat from the sun was fully out. But this woman came out alone when no other women were there and eventually you will get an idea of the reason for that. Jesus starts the conversation with a simple question, "*will you give me a drink?*"

At this time it was only Jesus and the woman as his disciples had gone into the city to buy food. You can get somewhat of a surprised feeling from the woman as she responds by pretty much saying, *why are you asking me for a drink when you are a Jew and I am a Samaritan?* She obviously figured that she would be totally ignored by Jesus and planned on minding her own business. Jesus had different plans for this woman. He then turns the conversation into a

spiritual one, referring to Himself as living water. The woman totally misunderstands and is still thinking with the physical mindset and seems to get very excited thinking she may not have to daily come and do this exhausting task.

Jesus turns the conversation again, but this time to a more personal place within this woman's life. Because He is God the Son, He knows all things and He knew exactly what was going on in her life. This is why He tells her to go and get her husband and bring him back. The woman, seeming to try and deceive Jesus by not telling Him the full truth, says that she has no husband, which was partially correct. Jesus affirms what she says, but then lovingly speaks the full truth of this woman's life to her. In that moment Jesus helped her to see her problem of sin. Here is the answer as to why this woman probably came out in the middle of the day to get her water, because people in her town knew the life she was living. They knew how many husbands she had. She may have been spoken harshly towards because of her lifestyle and even called a harlot.

How would you feel if you randomly met a stranger and they told you all about your life? Surprisingly this woman didn't leave the conversation. Her curiosity with Jesus seemed to keep growing. After taking a guess by asking Jesus if He is a prophet, the conversation moves again to the location of where people worshipped. Jesus speaks the truth plainly that salvation is coming from the Jews, meaning Himself, and that the true worshippers will worship in Spirit and in truth.

The woman then tries to sound smart saying she knows that the Christ is coming, and Jesus stops her there by proclaiming that HE is the Christ. This is so beautiful to me. Jesus reveals who He is to this woman and then it seems as if there is some silence as she soaks in those words. She herself was the only witness to that conversation with Jesus and it changed her life completely. The story starts to close out in verses 27-30,

Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, 'What do you want?' or 'Why are you talking with her?' Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 'Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?' They came out of the town and made their way toward him."

The disciples return and find Jesus in conversation with this woman and their reaction is one of surprise. Why? For those same two reasons, because she was a Samaritan and also a woman. None of the disciples said a word or questioned Jesus. Then you see the woman take off in such a hurry that she leaves her water jar at the well. Why was she in such a hurry? Because she had a message that needed to be told not just to one or two people but to her entire town, "come, see a man who told me everything I ever did." The Samaritan woman was the only witness to her conversation with Jesus and she left changed because of the truth Jesus spoke to her. She did not let what people thought of her get in the way or stop her from witnessing

and testifying to her Messiah, Jesus Christ. This story starts to come to a close as the disciples beg Jesus to eat something. Continue with me picking up in verse 31,

"Meanwhile his disciples urged him, 'Rabbi, eat something.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you know nothing about.' Then his disciples said to each other, 'Could someone have brought him food?' 'My food,' said Jesus, 'is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.'"

These words are so rich and convicting for me. Jesus tells His disciples the only thing that will satisfy is for Him to do the work of His Father who sent Him. Then He shifts their focus towards everyone who is coming their direction. I never understood this until recently, but Jesus' reference to the fields being ready for harvest was literally as He and the disciples watched all the people from town that the Samaritan woman had witnessed to walking towards them. Jesus says, *'look at the fields, they are ripe for harvest.'* In other words here come many people looking for the gospel, their Messiah Jesus Christ. And all these people swarming towards them were Samaritans. Here Jesus extends salvation to all people, both Jews & Gentiles.

Often I think we can easily cop out of witnessing to others because you and I are waiting for certain people to come along. Maybe ones we think are worthy of hearing the gospel more than others. This is where I have to remind myself daily to simply look around me in my everyday life. The fields truly are ripe for harvest. Many people are just waiting for someone to share Jesus with them. They've tried to follow what the world says will satisfy and it never does. Our world needs, and deep down, I believe longs for the truth. They are just searching for it in all the wrong places. You and I know the Truth. Don't keep it to yourself. If Jesus has changed your life, YOU are a witness to that. Share Him with others. Lastly the story closes out with many of the Samaritans believing on Jesus because of the woman's testimony. Notice her testimony is not all about her, but all about Jesus. Jesus must be known in order for hearts to be won. John 4:39-42 (NIV),

"Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I ever did.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.'"

One woman, a Samaritan, who would have been a downcast in society, witnesses of her conversation with Jesus and almost her entire town is saved. Wow! What a testimony. What will it take for you today to be a witness to the change Jesus made in your life?

Maybe you feel like the outcast in society and unworthy of Jesus free gift of salvation. Maybe you even enjoy and love the sin in your life, because we all know how attractive sin can be. You can overcome your love for sin with a greater love for your Savior. That is what the Samaritan woman did. She overcame her love for sin with a greater love for Jesus. The way to have power over your sin is to love your Savior more. Know this, Jesus came FOR ALL. He came FOR YOU! The very familiar verse from John 3:16 says, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* Jesus gave His life on the cross for you, to pay for your sin and then three days later rose again. All you need to do is confess and repent of your sin, admitting you need Him and His forgiveness. Believe that He died and rose again and when you do, you are promised eternal life in heaven with Him. This is a free gift. Accept Jesus today.

RESPOND TO THE WORD

Who do you need to witness to today? All it takes is telling what Jesus has done in your own life. It's all about Him. Write down the names of 3 people you can share Jesus with and pray for them today.

STUDY DEEPER

Matthew 5:16, Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15, 1 Peter 3:15.

Day 26

ZEAL

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.”
Isaiah 9:6-7 (NIV)

“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.”
Romans 12:11 (NIV)

ZEAL: great energy or enthusiasm in pursuit of a cause or an objective.

What is something that gets your adrenaline pumping? How about your enthusiasm or excitement getting so strong for something or someone you think that it might burst? Today I want to use the word zeal in the place of those strong feelings. What are you zealous for? Thinking thru different Bible characters it didn’t take long for Stephen to come to mind when I thought of someone who was full of zeal for Jesus and His kingdom. You find Stephen in the book of Acts chapter 6 (NIV).

“In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, ‘It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.’ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called) Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia who began to argue with Stephen. But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke. Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, ‘We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.’ So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and

brought him before the Sanhedrin. They produced false witnesses, who testified, 'This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.' All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel."

The first things I noticed about Stephen were that he was a man of faith and of the Holy Spirit. He was full of God's grace and power and he performed wonders and signs among the people. What a testimony! This is how Stephen was known by others. Right from the beginning you can see the zeal he has for Jesus' kingdom. As the story continues you find men in the Synagogue who couldn't stand up to the wisdom the Spirit gave Stephen as he spoke. This frustrated them to the point of secretly gathering men to falsely accuse Stephen of speaking blasphemous words. Look at the very last verse of chapter 6, "...they saw that his face was like the face of an angel." It was very obvious that the Holy Spirit dwelt within Stephen and was with him constantly, always giving him the words to speak.

I encourage you to take some time today to read Acts 7, but for here I will summarize what happens. Stephen is brought before the High Priest falsely accused of speaking blasphemy and he gives his defense in the next 60 verses. The great thing with his defense is that Stephen has the full attention of the Council. He begins by taking them all the way back to the beginning of the Old Testament and works them all the way into the New Testament explaining the gospel, everything he believes. Verse 48 is where we will pick up,

"However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?' 'You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.'"

Stephen calls them out in their sin of rejecting the Holy Spirit and following in the same ways as their fathers. Because of this, they instantly get angry. Acts 7:48-60 (NIV),

"When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul (later converted and renamed as the Apostle Paul).

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he fell on his knees and cried out, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.'
When he had said this, he fell asleep."

Stephen's zeal for the Lord helped him push past the persecution he faced. He continued to speak the truth even when in the end it cost him his life. Now *that* is what I would call being full of zeal for God's kingdom. Check out the last words of Stephen. These were almost exactly the same words that Jesus said shortly before He took His last breath on the cross. *"Lord, do not hold this sin against them."* Jesus' words found in Luke 23:34 were, *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."* You can see that Stephen looked to Jesus as his example in this way.

Jesus was also zealous for the kingdom of God. Remember when Jesus turned over the table of the money changers in the temple? John 2:13-17 (NIV),

"When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, 'Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!' His disciples remembered that it is written: 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'"

Nothing ever stopped Jesus from proclaiming God's kingdom and speaking truth. In both cases with Jesus & Stephen it ended up costing them their lives. I'm not wanting to sound depressing or gruesome, but instead encourage you that when you are persecuted because of your zeal for God's kingdom, consider it an honor to suffer in that way. Remember the words of Matthew 5:10-12 (NIV), *"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*

Did you know God the Father was zealous for you? That is why He sent Jesus like it said in Isaiah 9:6-7 at the very beginning of this devotional. Not only is God the Father zealous for you but Jesus, God the Son is too. He desires more than anything to have a personal relationship with you. The love He has for you took Him all the way to giving His life for you on the cross. Why did He do this? Because you and I have sinned and our sin put a separation between us and God. The only way for you to be forgiven of your sin was for Jesus to die on the cross in your place. The difference with His death is that He didn't stay dead. That is why you can put your hope and trust in Him alone. Repent and turn from your sin today by receiving His free gift of forgiveness. Romans 10:9-10 (NIV),

“If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”

RESPOND TO THE WORD

Who or what are you zealous for in life?

Are you willing to live a zealous life for God’s kingdom?

STUDY DEEPER

Acts 7.

Take a piece of paper and write down the names of people in the Bible that were zealous for the kingdom of God. Share the names that come to mind in the comments below.

Day 27

MERCY

"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."

Lamentations 3:22-23 (ESV)

"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Micah 6:8 (ESV)

"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

Luke 6:36 (NASB)

MERCY: compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm.

To start off I want to make sure that you do not confuse mercy with grace. This has always been something that is easy for me to forget. There is a difference between those two words and it is this; grace is a gift we don't deserve, while mercy is not getting the punishment we do deserve. You have been shown both of these by God but for today we're going to focus on the word, mercy.

We are not given a name for the Bible character I'm going to use for this word, just a title. Their title is The Good Samaritan. In order to help you fully understand the meaning behind this parable Jesus gave, a little history needs to be given. First off, this is a parable that Jesus told to a Lawyer who was trying to test him. A parable is a simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson, as told by Jesus in the gospels. If you know much about Jews & Samaritans in Jesus time, they had little to no dealings with each other. Samaritans were looked down on by the Jews and viewed as half breeds because they were descendants of Jews who had married people from a different ethnic or religious background.

The audience for this parable Jesus told, were all Jewish people. Jesus was Jewish, the Lawyer was Jewish, as well as the listeners. However, the main character in the story was a Samaritan.

Luke 10:25-29 (NIV),

"On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' 'What is written in the Law?' he replied. 'How do you read it?' He answered, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 'You have answered

correctly,' Jesus replied. 'Do this and you will live.' But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'"

This lawyer is putting Jesus to the test by his question. There is only one time in the Bible when God tells Israel to test Him and that was in regards to their tithes and offerings. Malachi 3:10 (NIV), *"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."* When you are tempted to test God, instead ask Him to increase your faith and trust in Him.

The lawyer was trying to trip up Jesus with this question. In response to his question Jesus asks him a question to which he rattles off his reply of scripture that he had probably memorized from a young age. Jesus affirms his answer and tells him if he obeys that command, he will live. The lawyer wanting to justify himself asks, *who is my neighbor?* Three mistakes are made by this teacher of the law. David Guzik in the Enduring Word Commentary says it well,

"1. His first and perhaps greatest mistake was in assuming that he had fulfilled the first commandment. When we really consider what the words mean, then who among us has loved God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind? It is easy for us to be distracted in any one of these areas even when we worship God; even more so in our daily living.

2. His second mistake was in thinking that he could fulfill the commandment to love God with all he had and still possibly not fulfill the command to love his neighbor. If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also. (1 John 4:20-21)

3. His third mistake was in the way that he wanted to narrowly define neighbor. If only our friends and those who are easy to love are our neighbors, then perhaps this man fulfilled it in an imperfect way. It all depends on how broad the definition is. The Jews in Jesus' day did believe that you had to love your neighbor; but it was also taught among them that it was a duty before God to hate your enemy. It all depends on who your neighbor is and who your enemy is."¹

Here begins the parable Jesus tells of The Good Samaritan to further answer this lawyer's question and help explain it to him. Luke 10:30-37 (NIV),

"In reply Jesus said: 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he

put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' 'Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?' The expert in the law replied, 'The one who had mercy on him.' Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise.'"

It's easy to think that if you were in this story you would definitely have been the Good Samaritan, right? But would you have? If I'm being totally honest, too often I can find myself being more like the priest or the Levite. Don't misunderstand me, I want more than anything to be the Good Samaritan, but I know my sinful self that easily looks out more for me and those I love and choose to help. Why did it take the outcast in society to truly live out what it means to, *love your neighbor*? Have you ever noticed that the people in life that show mercy the quickest tend to be the ones you would have written off? Maybe it's because those people who probably don't have much to offer in other ways know that one thing they can offer is mercy and compassion. Sometimes those you least expect to show mercy, show the greatest.

In the end Jesus asks the lawyer which man out of the three was the true neighbor. The lawyer responded quickly with the one who had mercy on him. Jesus says, *go and do likewise*. Right then and there Jesus commissions the lawyer to go and do the same. Are you willing to carry out that same command?

How did Jesus live out this word? Did you know that you have been shown mercy by Jesus? You and I were dead in our sin having no way to get to heaven on our own. There is no way to be good enough to get to heaven because of our problem of sin, but because Jesus is rich in mercy He took the punishment for your sin on the cross. If you have not chosen to receive His mercy, do it today. Repent of your sin, believe in Jesus death and resurrection and ask Him to save you. He is waiting.

"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions it is by grace you have been saved."

Ephesians 2:4-5 (NIV)

"He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."

Titus 3:5-7 (NIV)

"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." 1 Peter 1:3 (ESV)

As a follower of Jesus be encouraged that you can approach God's throne of grace with confidence and receive mercy to help in your time of need. Hebrews 4:14-16 (NIV),

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

RESPOND TO THE WORD

Who do you need to show mercy to today? Write down what it will look like for you to practically live by this word.

STUDY DEEPER

Psalm 25 & 103.

Day 28

SUBMISSION

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”
Ephesians 5:21 (NIV)

SUBMISSION: the action or fact of accepting or yielding to a superior force or to the will or authority of another person.

Submission is a word I always had a hard time with. I had this false idea for years of what true submission really looked like. And so began years in my head of fighting against this word whenever it came to mind. I’m a pretty independent person and sometimes can find it hard and humbling when I’m told to submit to another’s authority. It actually took, guess who of all people, my husband Jonathan to clearly define for me what submission meant and the beauty that comes with living out this word in the right way.

Submission often within the church can be taught with more of a negative feel for some people. But I want to direct your attention today to a beautiful story of submission in the life of Mary, the mother of Jesus. When you first hear of Mary in Luke 1, she is just a simple teenager who loved God.

“In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, ‘Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.’

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.’

Try and put yourself in Mary’s shoes. She was engaged and I’m sure like most women, anxiously awaiting her wedding day. The greeting she receives from the angel tells us a little more about Mary. She was highly favored by the Lord and He was with her. Wouldn’t you like to be known by God in that way? These words were troubling to Mary because she didn’t understand why she was being visited by an angel. She found out quickly though. The angel first commands Mary not to be afraid and then repeats the fact that she has found favor with God. He then proceeds to tell her that she will get pregnant and have a son who she is to name Jesus. What? Could it really be that she was the chosen one to bear the Messiah, *her* Messiah, who would save the world from sins punishment? I can’t even begin to imagine the thoughts that must

have been flying thru Mary's head. *Me? Why me? Don't be afraid. You are the chosen one. You will get pregnant with the Messiah. What about Joseph?* Mary asks one simple question,

'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail.' 'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May your word to me be fulfilled.' Then the angel left her." Luke 1:26-38 (NIV)

Mary knew where she stood in her relationship with Joseph and that she had remained faithful to him, so she was not sure how this was going to happen. I love how you can see the picture of the triune godhead at work in this passage. God the Father sends the angel Gabriel to deliver this message that Jesus, God the Son, was soon to be born and God the Holy Spirit is the one who would cause Mary to conceive. To help Mary see even further that she could fully trust God's words, Gabriel reminds her that Elizabeth, who is her relative, is old and could never conceive, is pregnant and in her sixth month. Gabriel finishes by saying, *no word from God will ever fail*. How can you not believe that this was going to happen when Gabriel closes with that statement? He made Mary realize that in this matter, she was not dealing with the things of men.

Here you see Mary's simple yet profound response of complete submission to all God was about to do. *"I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled."* No other questions were asked by Mary. You and I would assume that there were probably hundreds of questions that people in Mary's life or people who knew her wanted to ask, and yet Mary was obedient and submitted herself to the will of God. Why? I believe because she fully trusted in God's plans even though they didn't make complete sense to her.

You know who else fully trusted and submitted to the plan and will of their father? Jesus. Shortly before Jesus was to be arrested, these are the words He prayed to His Father God,

"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."
Luke 22:42 (NIV)

If Jesus can submit to the will of His Father, then so can you. He is your example. If you do not have a personal relationship with Jesus, then this is the first way that you can act on this word of submission. Submit yourself today to Jesus. Recognize your problem of sin and wanting your own way in life. Repent of your sin and turn to Jesus. He willingly took your place on the cross to pay the punishment that your sin deserves. On the third day He conquered sin once and for all when He rose again and He did this so that you could receive His free gift of salvation when you put your faith and trust in Him alone. Submit to Jesus today.

If you already have given your life to Jesus, this idea of submission is one that you need to live by every single day. Submit to God's plan for your life and even to those He has placed in your

life. For us as women, another area of submission is when it comes to our marriage and our relationship with our husband. When your marriage is one in which you both are mutually submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ, it then becomes a joy to submit yourself to your husband. Marriage is meant to be a picture of Christ's relationship with His bride, the church. When you submit to your husband in your marriage, you are reflecting the gospel to those around you. Reread the verse at the top of the devotional and notice the motivation for your submission? It is to be done out of your reverence and love for Christ. If Jesus submitted to the will of His Father then you and I can practice this word of submission as well.

RESPOND TO THE WORD

In what area of your life is God telling you to submit to Him in?

How will you submit today?

Who in your life do you need to get better at submitting to? God, Spouse, Boss, etc.?

STUDY DEEPER

Romans 8:6-8, James 4:5-10.

Day 29

ADVANCE

“Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.”

Philippians 1:12-14 (NIV)

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 3:12-14 (NIV)

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

Hebrews 12:1-3 (NIV)

ADVANCE: to move forward in a purposeful way, make or cause to make progress.

How many of you enjoy advancing in life? Most of you I'm sure would say yes, but often there are times when you get comfortable with where you're at and so moving forward is not always what you want to do. Think with me for a minute of some of the ways you advance in life. We all advance in age every year, we advanced in school from going to Kindergarten all the way thru 12th grade and maybe even 4 years of college. Maybe you have advanced in your job over the years or you've progressed in your knowledge of Jesus and His Word. If you never advanced you would never learn to grow and be stretched in your life or even in your faith to know Jesus in greater ways. Advancing, progressing and moving forward are all positive things in the life of a believer. As you advance in different ways it is always important to keep Jesus and His truth at the center of it.

Advancement does not require us sitting still and doing nothing. Advancement requires action. As the Holy Spirit is actively working in your life, you need to continue to advance whether that

is in your own spiritual life or helping to advance the gospel in your home and community. Advancement also requires much faith. Often when you are advancing, you can't see the full picture of what lies ahead and where your journey will take you next. That is when your faith in God's perfect plans for your life is of utmost importance.

The passage I have for you to read today is one that involves the nation of Israel. I'm sure most of you have heard about Joshua fighting the battle of Jericho. I want to give you a little history so that you have the context for when and how this took place. God raised up Moses to lead His people Israel out of slavery in Egypt. God's plan is to bring them into the promised land. Twelve spies are sent in to survey the land and all but two return with lack of faith that they will be able to conquer the city. Two men, Joshua and Caleb did have faith and believe that God would go before them and help them to be victorious. Because of the Israelites unbelief and lack of faith to follow God's plan, God has them wander in the desert wilderness for 40 years. At the end of that time and after Moses dies, God raises up Joshua to be the leader of Israel. The very first city God wants them to conquer is Jericho. Jericho was not a crazy big city but it was the largest city in the land of Canaan. It seems that God was showing them that by conquering Jericho first, anything else would be much easier for Israel in comparison. Joshua 6:1-5 (NIV),

"Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in. Then the Lord said to Joshua, 'See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in.'"

The gates of Jericho were shut securely and this tells us that the people of the city were doing everything they could to protect themselves against Israel. I absolutely love God's conversation with Joshua. The very first thing I want you to see is that God says, *I have delivered Jericho into your hands*. The word I want you to notice is the word, *have*. This told Joshua that God had already gone before them and paved the way for them to be victorious because he uses the past tense *have*, meaning it's already been done. All Joshua and Israel had to do was have faith in who their God was and believe everything He said and do exactly as He commanded. The way Israel was to go in to battle and defeat Jericho makes absolutely no sense. I believe this was on purpose so that neither Joshua nor Israel could take any credit for the victory that was about to take place. Walking around a city in silence for seven days and then shouting on the last day sounds ridiculous. Continue reading to find out if Israel obeys and goes along with God's plan. Here we pick up at Joshua 6:6-11 (NIV),

So Joshua son of Nun called the priests and said to them, 'Take up the ark of the covenant of the Lord and have seven priests carry trumpets in front of it.' And he ordered the army, 'Advance! March around the city, with an armed guard going ahead of the ark of the Lord.'

When Joshua had spoken to the people, the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets before the Lord went forward, blowing their trumpets, and the ark of the Lord's covenant followed them. The armed guard marched ahead of the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard followed the ark. All this time the trumpets were sounding. But Joshua had commanded the army, 'Do not give a war cry, do not raise your voices, do not say a word until the day I tell you to shout. Then shout!' So he had the ark of the Lord carried around the city, circling it once. Then the army returned to camp and spent the night there."

You can see from the text that Israel obeys and follows God's plan. Sometimes you are called to simply advance in faith even when it does not all make sense. The people of Jericho probably thought the Israelites had lost their minds. Are you willing to advance in faith even when others may think you are slightly crazy? After completing the first day of walking around the city they could have given up, but they continued to advance, believing that God would indeed be victorious on their behalf. Joshua 6:12-21 (NIV),

"Joshua got up early the next morning and the priests took up the ark of the Lord. The seven priests carrying the seven trumpets went forward, marching before the ark of the Lord and blowing the trumpets. The armed men went ahead of them and the rear guard followed the ark of the Lord, while the trumpets kept sounding. So on the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. They did this for six days.

On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same manner, except that on that day they circled the city seven times. The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the army, 'Shout! For the Lord has given you the city! The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the Lord. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent. But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord and must go into his treasury.'

When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city. They devoted the city to the Lord and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys."

And so you see the destruction of Jericho and finally, after several years, the entrance into the promise land for Israel. Everything in the city was to be fully devoted to the Lord. Remember, God had gone before them and already cleared the way for Israel to be victorious. All that was required of them was to obediently advance in faith.

As I studied this passage I remember well the late Sunday night that my husband Jonathan and I were sipping coffee together while I shared with him all God was teaching me thru this story. As we continued to talk back and forth about that word have (the past tense) that God said in

Joshua 6:2, we both were amazed at how perfectly you can see the gospel woven into this story. God had already gone before Israel in paving the way for their victory over Jericho and the same is true for you and I when it comes to our salvation in Jesus. Jesus has already been victorious over your sin by paying for the punishment that you deserve when He died on the cross in your place. It was not thru His death that He was victorious, it was when He rose again from the dead three days later that He conquered sin once and for all. 1 Corinthians 15:55-57 (NIV) says,

“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

There is nothing that you need to do in order to earn your way into heaven, it has already been done for you. However; the word advance comes into play for you here. If you have not repented of your sin, admitting that you have done wrong and can't get to heaven on your own, and believe that Jesus died and rose again for you, then this is the first place where you need to advance in your life today. Advance forward in faith, believing on Jesus and admitting that you need Him. Recognize today that He has already been victorious in conquering sin on your behalf and accept Him as your Savior and Lord over your life. Romans 10:9 (NIV),

“If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

RESPOND TO THE WORD

If you already have given your life to Jesus and are one of His followers, jump back to the first few verses of this devotional where the Apostle Paul speaks encouraging words for you in regards to the advancement of the gospel. Reread those verses and ask yourself, *in what areas of my life do I need to obediently advance in faith?* Are you willing to keep moving forward in faith, trusting that God knows what He's doing even when you don't understand all the details? Joshua and the Apostle Paul did not understand all the details, but they chose to keep advancing and having faith in God's perfect plan.

STUDY DEEPER

Philippians 3, Psalm 18:29-50.

Day 30

DELIVERANCE

"I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears."

Psalms 34:4 (ESV)

"And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."

Psalms 50:15 (ESV)

"For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey, whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness."

Romans 6:14-19 (NIV)

"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."

Galatians 5:1 (ESV)

DELIVERANCE: the action of being rescued or set free.

What are some other words that come to mind when you read the word deliverance? Freedom? Rescue? Release? Liberation? Saving? All of these words can be used to help define what it means to deliver.

There are numerous stories in the New Testament of Jesus delivering people from all kinds of different situations. The word deliverance was one of the most recent words that God gave me in writing this devotional. As I decided whether or not I should use it, Mary Magdalene came to mind. Mary was one of Jesus' first followers. Some of you probably know a lot about Mary from Jesus' resurrection from the dead. But did you know there was a reason Mary cared so much about her relationship with her Messiah? It was because Jesus had delivered Mary from a problem she had been living with for a while. Luke 8:1-3 (NIV) gives us more of an idea of Mary's background.

“After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod’s household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.” Yt

So what was Mary’s background? Jesus had delivered Mary from seven demons who had been living in her. Can you imagine that? A demon possessed person is not one that you would want to be around. Talk about an outcast in society. Yet, Jesus had compassion for Mary and took the time to deliver her from her demons. Because of Mary’s deliverance do you see how she immediately started living? She follows Jesus and serves Him in His earthly ministry. You don’t really hear of Mary again until Jesus crucifixion. As Jesus is dying on the cross, Matthew 27:55-61 (NIV) tells of what was taking place.

“Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons. As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus’ body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.”

Not to many of Jesus followers actually stayed with Him till His last breath, but Mary was one of the ones who did. She watched from beginning to end as her Messiah was crucified to bring about her ultimate deliverance from sin. The last time Mary is mentioned is the day of Jesus resurrection. This story is recorded in all of the gospels but my favorite one is found in John 20:1-8 (NIV).

“Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!’ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, ‘Woman, why are you crying?’ ‘They have taken my Lord

away,' she said, 'and I don't know where they have put him.' At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

He asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?' Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means 'Teacher'). Jesus said, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!' And she told them that he had said these things to her."

First off, why was Mary going to the tomb? Wasn't she scared of the Roman guards? The other disciples sure seemed to be as they were hiding out together. Had she forgotten that there was a huge stone rolled in front of the tomb? How was she going to get in? When she discovered that the stone was gone she immediately thought that someone had stolen the body. After the two disciples see that Jesus body is gone they leave, but not Mary.

You see Mary's dedication over and over. As she looks back in the tomb thru tear filled eyes, she is asked by an angel why she is crying. When she turns around to leave she sees someone standing there but has no clue that it is Jesus. The next part gives me chills because all it took was for Jesus to say Mary's name and then she recognizes her risen Messiah. She *knew* the voice of her deliverer. Finally, Jesus gave Mary the commission to, *Go and tell His disciples that He is risen*. Jesus appearance first to Mary shows how much He valued women and also considered them worthy of receiving the great commission. Mark 16:9-11 (NIV),

"When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it."

I don't know where each of you are at today in your life or what kinds of battles you face like Mary did, but I *do* know who can deliver you from them. Not only can Jesus deliver you from your earthly struggles or addictions, but He can deliver you from your eternal punishment for your sin. You and I both fall short of getting to heaven on our own because of our problem with sin. Romans 3:23 (NIV) says it plainly, *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* We have all missed the mark of being good enough to get to heaven on our own. There is only one way that God provided thru His perfect Son, Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection from the dead that you can be saved from your sins punishment. Repent and confess to Jesus today that you need His grace and forgiveness. Receive His free gift today by believing and calling on His name. John 1:12 (NIV), *"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."*

If Jesus has already freed you from your sins punishment, remember these words from Jen Wilkin, *"My scars aren't the sign of my deliverance, Jesus scars are the sign of my*

deliverance."¹ You may have earthly scars that are a reminder for you of where you came from, but your ultimate deliverance in this life came from Jesus Himself and His death and resurrection for you. Do you *know*, like Mary, the voice of your deliverer, Jesus?

RESPOND TO THE WORD

Are you choosing to listen to Jesus' above all the other voices in this world?

Are you whole heartedly dedicated to your deliverer like Mary was?

How do you need to follow Him more closely in your life?

STUDY DEEPER

Psalm 34:17, Psalm 107:6.

NOTES

Day 4: WAIT

1. Zondervan publishing, <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/all-women-bible/Anna>
2. Charles H. Spurgeon's Treasury of David, <https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=spur&b=19&c=37>

Day 11: INTEGRITY

1. Ryan Hamm, Christianity Today, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/articles/churchhomeleadership/leading-with-integrity.html>

Day 12: TRANSFORM

1. Jen Wilkin, Flower Mound Women's Bible Study, <https://jenwilkin.podbean.com/>

Day 27: MERCY

1. David Guzik, Enduring Word Bible Commentary, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/luke-10/>

Day 30: DELIVERANCE

- Jen Wilkin, Flower Mound Women's Bible Study, <https://jenwilkin.podbean.com/>

Bible:

- NASB (New American Standard Bible)
- ESV (English Standard Version)
- NIV (New International Version)

Cambridge Dictionary

Oxford Dictionary

Webster, Merriam Dictionary

Words To Live By

30 Day Devotional Plan

9/1/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 1: Seek
9/2/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 2: Rest
9/3/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 3: Fish
9/4/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 4: Wait
9/5/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 5: Work
9/6/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 6: Give
9/7/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 7: Support
9/8/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 8: Speak
9/9/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 9: Trust
9/10/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 10: Cast
9/11/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 11: Integrity
9/12/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 12: Transform
9/13/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 13: Respond
9/14/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 14: Perseverance
9/15/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 15: Weak
9/16/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 16: Honesty
9/17/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 17: Remember
9/18/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 18: Conviction
9/19/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 19: Surrender
9/20/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 20: Prepare
9/21/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 21: Lead
9/22/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 22: Teach
9/23/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 23: Learn
9/24/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 24: Follow
9/25/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 25: Witness
9/26/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 26: Zeal
9/27/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 27: Mercy
9/28/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 28: Submission
9/29/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 29: Advance
9/30/2020 | Words To Live By | Day 30: Deliverance

