

# THE STORY OF YOU

*DEVOTIONAL*

# THE STORY OF YOU

*Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*  
~ Romans 12:2 NIV

The only way to truly change your life is to change the way you think. That's why the Bible says in our theme verse, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, *but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*" (Romans 12:2 NIV)

What is the difference between "conforming" and "transforming?" According to the dictionary, to conform means to "make or become the same" or "to behave in a conventional way by accepting without question the customs, traditions and prevailing opinions of others." In other words, to conform is to fit into somebody else's mold; it's to do things the way everybody else does.

On the other hand, to transform means to "change the condition, function, nature, character, or personality" of something.

**CONFORMING** has to do with **BEHAVIOR**.

**TRANSFORMING** has to do with **CHARACTER**.

**CONFORMING** is **FROM THE OUTSIDE IN**.

**TRANSFORMING** is **FROM THE INSIDE OUT**.

Conforming is something we do to ourselves. **Transforming is something God does to us.** He transforms us by renewing our minds. You see, God doesn't just want to change your behavior. He wants to change the way you think. The Bible says, "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." (Proverbs 23:7 NKJV) **Your thoughts control your actions.** So if you want to change the way you act, you must start by changing the way you think. If you want to be like Christ, you must learn to think like Christ.

Over the next 40 days, we are going to study the transforming power of Jesus Christ. Specifically, we'll look at God's plan to transform you in seven key

areas of your life: your **spiritual, physical, mental, emotional, relational, financial, and your vocational health**. We will allow God's Word to renew our minds and change the way we think: about God, ourselves, our relationships, our finances, our careers—about everything. And when you learn to think differently you will begin to live differently. As you learn to think God's way, you will begin to live God's way.

Transformation is about more than just putting information in your head. It's about living out what God is working in you. The Bible says "Be doers of the Word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22 NKJV). To help you apply what you are learning, we strongly encourage you to set a three-month goal for each of the key areas of your life. **Goals turn intentions into actions**. Without a specific goal in mind, you might not get around to applying God's truth to your life. So we have provided instruction in the **Putting It into Practice** section of each session to help you set a three-month goal for the key area you are studying.

Be sure your goal is a **SMART** goal: **Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound**. For example, don't just say, "I want to grow spiritually," or "I want to lose weight." Those are not SMART goals. They're too general. A **SMART goal** for your spiritual health might be, "I will memorize Romans 12 in the next ninety days," or "I will spend fifteen minutes in a quiet time every morning for the next three months." A SMART goal for your physical health might be "I will lose twenty pounds in the next ninety days." Those are **SMART goals**: they are based on a specific action that is measurable and doable, they relate to the particular area of health you are studying, and they have a deadline.

Once you have set your goal, transfer it to the **My Three-Month Goals** list pages of this study guide so that you can have them all in one place for easy reference.

We have also included **seven daily devotions** that relate to the area of health you are focusing on during each week, along with journal pages for each day.

Each journal page gives you four prompts:

- **What did you hear?** *What did God say to you as you read the devotion for the day?*
- **What do you think?** *What does it mean to you, how does it apply to your life, and what difference does it make to you?*
- **What will you do?** *What action step will you take? How will you think differently? How will you live differently?*
- **Now You Pray . . .** *This is where you put your thoughts into prayer. It could be a prayer of gratitude or praise. It could be a prayer of confession or a request for God's help. It's up to you. But take a minute each day to write a prayer response to what you read in the devotion.*

**Are you ready to transform your story?** Then let's begin.

# HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

## MY THREE-MONTH GOALS

Each week you will set a personal goal for the area of health you are studying with your group. Transfer each goal to the My Three-Month Goals page so you can have them all in one place.

## WEEKEND SERMON NOTES

You can use this page to take notes on your pastor's sermon each weekend.

## MEMORY VERSE

Each week you will find a key Bible verse for your group to memorize together. If someone in the group has a different translation, ask them to read it aloud so the group can get a bigger picture of the meaning of the passage.

## PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Each week you will be challenged to commit to one goal in each of the seven key areas of this study. Be sure to transfer these goals to the My Three-Month Goals page.

## DAILY DEVOTIONS AND JOURNAL PAGES

There are seven daily devotions and seven journal pages at the end of each session in your study guide. Use these for your daily quiet times throughout the week.

# MY THREE-MONTH GOALS

## *MY THREE-MONTH SPIRITUAL HEALTH GOAL*

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## *MY THREE-MONTH PHYSICAL HEALTH GOAL*

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# MY THREE-MONTH GOALS

## *MY THREE-MONTH MENTAL HEALTH GOAL*

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## *MY THREE-MONTH EMOTIONAL HEALTH GOAL*

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# MY THREE-MONTH GOALS

## *MY THREE-MONTH FINANCIAL HEALTH GOAL*

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## *MY THREE-MONTH RELATIONAL HEALTH GOAL*

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# MY THREE-MONTH GOALS

*MY THREE-MONTH VOCATIONAL HEALTH GOAL*

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## **PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE**

In this session, we discussed the seven habits that help us grow spiritually. Which of these habits do you need to work on the most? What is one thing you can do to begin to make that habit a reality in your daily life in the next three months? Talk about this with your group and share ideas with each other.

Settle on one thing you will do and make a three-month goal to grow in this area of spiritual health. Write your goal in the space below.

## **MY 40-DAY SPIRITUAL HEALTH GOAL**

When it comes to setting goals, it is important that you make a plan and then check your progress on a regular basis. Goals that are not written down and set in motion are just ideas, and we rarely feel any commitment to following through on all of our ideas.

We recommend that you review the My Three-Month Goals page on a regular basis to remind yourself of your goals and to track your progress. You may even want to set a time in the future as a group to share how each group member is doing with their goals and celebrate what God is doing in each of your lives.

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# **YOUR SPIRITUAL STORY**

## **WEEK 1**

# day 1

*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. ~ John 3:16 (NIV)*

**This is arguably the greatest verse in the entire Bible.** There's a reason it has earned a spot on the bottom of fast food soft drink cups and signs behind goal posts at football games. Why? Because it is Christianity in a nutshell. It simply and clearly tells us the Good News of Jesus Christ in four points.

God is passionate about you. This verse says, "God so loved the world." You are part of the world. God loves you. His love isn't detached and impersonal. It is passionate. Do you know God loves you? He does.

He shows that love by His gift. That's the second point this verse tells us about God, ". . . that He gave His one and only Son." God's love for you cost Him more than we could ever measure. He gave you Jesus. He gave you Jesus to pay for your sins and to provide a bridge between you and God.

The third point we learn from John 3:16 is God's proposal to us, "That whoever believes in Him . . ." We all have the opportunity to turn to Jesus. All it takes is belief. We don't have to earn God's love, all we have to do is accept His love in Jesus Christ.

When we do that we gain the fourth point from this verse, God's promise; ". . . shall not perish; but have eternal life." What a deal! God loves you so much that He gave you Jesus. When you accept His proposal to believe in Christ, you gain the promise of eternal life. That is Good News.

If you haven't yet accepted God's proposal, do it today. If you have, live today in light of this verse. **God loves you, He gave you Jesus, and He promises you eternal life.** That is what spiritual health is all about.

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***WHAT DO YOU THINK?***

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***WHAT WILL YOU DO?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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## day 2

*Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. John 1:12–13 (NIV)*

**We are God's children.** When we believe in Jesus Christ we are brought near to God the Father. So near in fact that He calls us His sons and daughters. We are a part of his family now. Fully received, fully loved, and fully accepted.

What does this mean? It means we get to share in the very same relationship of love and intimacy that Jesus shared with the Father. Romans 8:15 (NIV) tells us, "The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by Him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'"

We should recognize this cry of, "Abba, Father." We have heard it before on the lips of Jesus as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus cried out, "Abba, Father... everything is possible for you" (Mark 14:36a NIV). Incredibly, we address God as "Abba, Father" just as Jesus does. We talk to God like Jesus does. **He has granted us full access** (Ephesians 2:18). No constraints, no caveats, no limitations. We are received. We are accepted. We belong. So much so, that we can boldly pray, "Abba, Father," along with Jesus. We share in the relational intimacy, love, and bond that the Father and Son have known for all eternity.

**Jesus, the divine Son by nature, has invited you, by grace, to participate in his life of love with the Father.** This is how much you have been received in His family. This is how much you belong. This is how much your identity is secured. God the Father has welcomed you into His house. In fact, as you cry out "Abba, Father," He says back, "My beloved child." The Creator of the universe cherishes you and delights in you.

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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## day 3

*Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world. ~ 1 John 4:4 (KJV)*

God's Spirit is the power inside every fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. Jesus promised every disciple, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. . . [who] lives with you and will be in you," (John 14:16–17 NIV). But what does the Holy Spirit do for us?

The Holy Spirit **helps us learn and apply God's truth to life:**

*"The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my [Jesus'] name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26 NIV).*

The Holy Spirit **builds our character through crisis:**

*"We know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Romans 5:3–5 NIV).*

The Holy Spirit **enables us to be more like Jesus:**

*"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22–23 NIV).*

The Holy Spirit **gives us the power to speak the Good News of Jesus:**

*"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8 NIV).*



The Holy Spirit **equips us for ministry:**

*"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work"* (1 Corinthians 12:4-6 NIV).

When we are filled with the Spirit, God's power, peace, presence and purpose are ours. We have stability under stress. We don't cave in, because, *"Greater is he that is in us, than he that is in the world"* (1 John 4:4 NIV).

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## day 4

*Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!*

*~ 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT)*

When you come to Jesus Christ, it's like He writes everything you've ever done wrong on a big blackboard and then says, "We're just going to erase all that. We're going to start over. **You're going to get a fresh new start.**" It's not just turning over a new leaf, but getting a fresh new life. You become a new person. Jesus gives you a new spiritual identity.

Here's the blunt truth of why this is so important. **Every time you sin, it damages your dignity.** When you break God's principles, you don't just hurt other people and God, you hurt yourself. Sin splits your soul. Every time you sin, it replaces a little bit of self-respect with a little bit of shame. This shame begins to pile up in your life, and you try to push it out of the way by staying busy or playing sports or getting drunk or having parties or whatever.

Jesus Christ is in the dignity restoring business. He doesn't just ignore your sin, He wipes it out and makes you a **new person** in His sight.

Hear this carefully. Because you are in Christ, it doesn't matter what you've done. It doesn't matter who you've done it with. It doesn't matter how long you've done it. It doesn't matter where you've been. What matters is what direction your feet are headed today. God says your past is history, your life has sanctity, and your identity has dignity because Jesus died for you. **When you trust Christ, He gives you a brand new identity and makes all things new!**

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## day 5

*The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, He will show you a way out so that you can endure.*  
~ I Corinthians 10:13 (NLT)

**Have you ever been so tempted to do something that you felt it was inevitable?** Maybe a situation presented itself in such a way that something you knew was wrong felt very right. Or, you may have felt such overwhelming temptation that resistance seemed impossible. The truth is, we are all going to face temptation, probably every day.

Will we tell the truth when given a chance to lie and make ourselves look better? Will we be honest about the \$20 bill we found on the ground? Will we give in to the habit that seems like it will never let us go, or will we seek help? We will all be tempted, but there's good news: **we don't have to give in.**

Today's verse promises that any time we are tempted, **God will provide a way out.** The problem too often is that when faced with temptation we forget to look for God's escape route. The way out may be to call a friend who can keep you accountable. It may be to memorize Bible verses to call to mind in the time of temptation. It may be to get up and walk-or-run-out of a tempting situation. The key is to be aware of the way out that God gives you.

Today when you are tempted, stop for a moment and look around. Ask God where the escape route is, then choose to follow it.

## day 6

*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

~ 1 John 1:9 (NIV)

Do people have to tell you things over and over and over again? It's as if somehow they don't think you are listening or taking them seriously... Hmmm. My dad used to tell me, "Keep the engine oil clean in your cars, and they will run forever!" That's great and true advice. When dirt gets in the oil, it starts to wear out all the parts. It slows the car down. Soon, it can grind to a halt as it overheats and melts down in the middle of a busy freeway.

It was not uncommon for him to follow up a couple of months later by asking, "Hey! Are you keeping your oil clean? If you do it now, you won't suffer later! It's easy to do why not just get it done?" I knew it was the right thing to do ...but, I'm sure you can figure out the rest of the story. I can't tell you how many times I have regretted not keeping that oil clean and pure. It cost me plenty over time.

Sometimes we just don't listen. A case in point: When John the Apostle wrote today's verse he must have been well aware that many had forgotten this fundamental truth. Maybe you have too.

"Think of this," he says: "**Confess, and your sins will be forgiven. Confess, and you will be renewed and made pure before God.**" How is all of this possible? Because God is faithful. You can count on him at all times. Because He is just. That means He has every right and the authority to cancel out every debt your sinfulness has cost you, now and forever.

So, if you feel dirty ...**confess**. If you feel worn out ...**confess**. If you feel like you're on the verge of a meltdown on the freeway of life ...**confess**. If you want to experience the blessing and hand of God on your life, **confess**. And God will take care of every thing else.

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## day 7

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. ~ Romans 8:35,37-39 (NIV)*

This challenging, comforting passage assures us of God's profound love for us as His children. And it's a promise for you if you have ever wondered, **"If God loves me, why do I suffer?"**

This text is challenging because it describes our Christian ancestors being persecuted, suffering separation from families, friends, livelihoods, homes, possessions even life itself. Yet Paul comforts them, and us, assuring all that **nothing can ever rip us from the loving embrace of God!**

The passage is also challenging because those suffering are identified as God's children: "For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God ...And by Him we cry, 'Abba, Father '... We are children ... heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ... We share in [Christ's] sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory" (Romans 8:14-17 NIV). God's loving, intimate relationship with His children is not diminished but actually strengthened in suffering.

**Suffering doesn't mean we are unloved by God**, or that we have displeased or disappointed Him. Remember, Jesus encourages those He loves, "I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33 NIV).

When we see that suffering is part of the human journey with our heavenly Father, we ask, "Can you imagine going through suffering without Him?" And



we believe his amazing promise, *“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose”* (Romans 8:28 NIV).

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# **YOUR SPIRITUAL STORY**

## **WEEK 2**

## day 8

*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. ~ 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NIV)*

**Our culture tells us that your body belongs to you.** It is your property to be used however you see fit, as long as you don't hurt anyone else. As a result, our bodies become idols of worship, and we use them to meet our own felt needs for pleasure, happiness, or success. Thus, our culture tells us that our bodies are for the purpose of self-worship.

The Bible radically confronts this kind of thinking about your body. According to God your body is not your own. It belongs to God. "You were bought at a price." He created your body, and He has redeemed your body. He paid a high price for your body by sending His only Son to the cross. Jesus had a bodily death and a bodily resurrection so that you might have bodily redemption.

The fact that your body belongs to God has profound implications. As followers of Christ, we reject our cultural belief that our bodies are for self-worship. However, this doesn't mean that we ignore the importance of caring for our bodies. We may not be owners of our bodies, but we are certainly stewards of our bodies. We steward our bodies because they are temples designed to worship God. This means that the primary function of your body is worship. Paul further develops this temple imagery in Romans 12:1 (NIV) when he says, "*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God this is your spiritual act of worship.*" We are called to offer our bodies to their Owner for His glory and His purpose.

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## day 9

*But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness." ~ 2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV)*

**We all have weaknesses.** Paul uses a great metaphor to remind us how fragile we are, "[We] have this treasure [of the gospel] in jars of clay" (2 Corinthians 4:7 NIV). Like clay jars, we crack under pressure, experience brokenness, and sometimes fail completely. Unbelievably, there are benefits to weakness.

You know Paul's story. He had a persistent, perplexing problem. He asked God three times to take away his pain. Yet God refused, whispering, *"My grace is all you need, for My power is greatest when you are weak"* (2 Corinthians 12:9 GN).

So, here are **three promises to keep in mind about weaknesses:**

First, **God's power is present in your weakness.** Don't repeatedly resist or resent your limitations. Paul became the church's greatest scholar and missionary while experiencing his challenges.

Second, **God works through weakness to accomplish His task.** Let physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual weaknesses become part of God's providential plan for your life. Some speculate that Paul's letters may never have been written if he was not doubly limited—both physically challenged and incarcerated.

And finally, **God allows limitations to become blessings in disguise.** Paul goes on to say, *"For when I am weak, then I am strong the less I have, the more I depend upon him"* (2 Corinthians 12:10 LBT). Paul might never have become a great communicator of the gospel if he had been distracted by other things. **His physical pain made him fully dependent on God.**

Your limitations are opportunities to trust God's promises more and to have a greater dependence on Him. **The more insufficient you are, the more sufficient His grace becomes.**

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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## day 10

*He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.*  
~ Isaiah 40:29-31 (NIV)

Have you ever felt like you've had enough? Have you ever had a day where you felt like you just couldn't go on? Maybe you've been physically worn out by sickness or stress and you've had to make yourself get out of bed in the morning. Or, perhaps you've found yourself hopelessly addicted to something and you feel like you'll never have the strength to overcome it. It could be that you struggle with depression or anxiety and every day feels like a chore. **Maybe you've felt like giving up.**

If that's you, read that verse again. Look at the promise it contains: *"But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."*

Four times the verse tells us that God will do something for us. Not might, or may, or could, or probably will, but **will**. This verse is full of promise for us if we put our hope in the Lord. To hope in the Lord means to trust that God has a plan for your future that will work. **When your situation looks hopeless, you need to put your hope in God and His plan.**

If you are worn out today, put your hope in the Lord. Ask Him to renew your strength. Ask Him to work out His plan for your future the plan that will work. And as you do, He promises to give you the physical strength to rise above the things that are holding you down.



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# day 11

*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.  
~ Philippians 4:13 (NKJV)*

Great people used by God are just ordinary people with an extraordinary amount of determination. They simply don't know how to give up when the going gets tough.

Where do they find this kind of inner strength? Their strength comes from a deeply rooted belief that, "I can do all things through Christ." Their faith propels them past discouragement and fear into the life God wants them to live a life completely reliant on God's power, not their own.

What does it take to discourage you in your commitment to physical health? Is it when things don't go your way? How about not reaching your goals? Maybe it's not having the strength to see things through to completion? We often get discouraged because we are doing life in our own power. Our strength and energy have limitations. Our emotional and mental resolve can only last so long. Willpower can only take you so far before it runs out. But God's power is limitless; always available when you need it. There's only one little catch: this power is not automatic. It requires an act of faith called surrender.

To be infused with God's strength, you must first acknowledge your limitations. You must admit to God that you need Him. Total surrender means complete dependence on Him day by day, moment by moment. Just like a newly born baby is completely dependent on her mother for everything, **God wants you to be completely dependent on Him for all your needs.**

Once you have surrendered and admitted your need, you must ask God for His strength and trust Him to deliver. God will not give you all the energy you're going to need for an entire year all at once, but He will give you energy for tomorrow when you get there. When you feel like you're running on empty and ready to throw in the towel, tap into God's power source. Move past discouragement and step out in faith, trusting God to give you all you need for that day.

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## day 12

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

**Self-discipline doesn't come from yourself.** It comes from God. We all go through moments of doubt, when the things we know are true and believe in seem to leave us with more questions than answers. There are times in our lives when we get afraid. There are times when we look at the future and are filled with worry. Sometimes we look at a sticky situation, and we don't know how we are going to get through it.

But there is a way. When you and I feel powerless over our situations, when we feel afraid of what lies ahead, when our "stick-to-it-iveness" no longer sticks, God is able and willing to give us the power we lack. The courage to face a fear head on doesn't come from within, it comes from God above.

The ability to keep going when times get hard comes from trusting in God, not in ourselves. The power to keep up a new habit like dieting or exercise, or to break a bad habit or addiction, doesn't come from you and me gutting it out, but from turning to God and asking Him for the power to see our convictions through.

If you are going through a tough time today, if you see something in the future that scares you, if there is something on the horizon that is uncertain, **turn to Jesus and ask Him for the power to have faith.** Ask Him to give you courage. Ask Him to give you boldness to face your fears. If you are striving to start a good habit, or break a bad one, ask Him for the self-discipline to see it through.

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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## day 13

*Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.~ Proverbs 3:7-8 (NIV)*

The fear of the Lord is a repeated theme throughout the book of Proverbs. We read in Proverbs 9:10 (NIV), "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Reverence and respect for God are the beginning of wisdom. If you think that somehow you're going to develop wisdom for life's decisions without the fear of the Lord, you're just fooling yourself.

What does it mean to fear God? To fear God means you love what He loves and hate what He hates. It means you appreciate who He is and you do what he says. To fear God means you ask for His advice and don't just depend on yourself. To fear God is to treat Him with reverence, respect, and awe.

The other option is to be "wise in your own eyes." This means that rather than depending on God, revering and respecting Him, you rely upon yourself. It means that you think you know best. Ultimately, this is pride. It is the belief that you are God. Proverbs tells us that this kind of thinking is foolishness.

What this means is that all endeavors must begin with a fear of the Lord rather than trusting in your own wits and resources. In all of life's decisions and actions you must start with God. What does this mean practically? If you desire physical health, start with God rather than your own wisdom. Start by trusting in, listening to, and depending on God for guidance in your pursuit of physical health. Don't begin with your own strategy and resolve.

**Begin with God.**

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***WHAT DO YOU THINK?***

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***WHAT WILL YOU DO?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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# day 14

*I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*

*~ Philippians 1:6 (ESV)*

## **Don't give up!**

I'm pretty sure that most of us have tried to go on a diet from time to time and have failed horribly! The first day goes pretty well up until lunch time! Then, you begin to have second thoughts. Your brain starts talking to you, and it can make a pretty convincing argument as to why you deserve to quit your diet and "go ahead and eat heartily!"

*"You've been working pretty hard! You've got to eat to keep your strength up!"*

*"Look at that beautiful meal! Someone went to a lot of trouble. Don't offend them! Eat up!"*

*"You deserve this treat! People don't realize just how much you do around here. Live a little!"*

It's easy to give up in life. And it's easy to give ourselves a good reason to quit.

We start off in the Christian life with the best of intentions. We say, "I can do this!" That's the first mistake. The passage above tells me that it is God who needs to be at work in me. So... let God work in you!

Next, we throw ourselves into the Christian life with an inhuman fervor. "I can do this if I try hard enough! Nope, wrong again. Our confidence must come from knowing that it's God who is putting forth all the effort. So... put all your trust in Him.

Then, we tell ourselves, "I'm going to make it... I'm going to make it... Pretty soon, we are right back where we started and wondering what went wrong. Well, we forgot that it's God who will complete your life in such a way that you will stand victoriously before the throne one day. So **...give control of your life to God today.**



***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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# **YOUR SPIRITUAL STORY**

## **WEEK 3**

# day 15

*You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. ~ Isaiah 26:3 (NKJV)*

Do you have **perfect peace** today? I know some days my mind has a mind of its own, and it is anything but peaceful. I can't seem to think clearly about anything.

I think about things that could happen. I fret over the consequences of what **has** happened. My imagination runs wild with all kinds of negative possibilities. And no matter what I do, I can't seem to bring my thoughts under control. I don't have the "perfect peace" of God. Sound familiar?

The Bible gives the reason for this condition. We don't have perfect peace because our minds are not "stayed" on God. The Hebrew word for "mind" in this verse is not referring to the logical, rational, problem-solving part of the mind. Instead, it is the word for imagination. It's our imagination that causes us to lose our peace.

The only way to fix it is to fix your mind on God. Get hold of your imagination, grab it by the scruff of the neck, and bring it to God. The Bible says, "Take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5, NIV). Bring your worries to Him in prayer, then change the focus of your attention. Think about God. Lean into God, hold onto Him, put your trust in Him. When you do, He will give you peace of mind. And when you have peace of mind, then the logical, rational, problem solving part of your mind will be able to think clearly.

**When you fix your mind on God, God fixes your mind.**

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***WHAT WILL YOU DO?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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# day 16

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ~ Philippians 4:6-7 (NIV)*

**God wants you to be totally free from anxiety.** He wants you to live without fear. He wants you to experience His peace “at all times and in every situation” (2 Thessalonians 3:16 NLT). God knows that fear and anxiety keep us from living out His purposes for our lives. So He lovingly tells us, “Don’t be anxious about anything.” Anything! Sometimes that’s easier said than done.

What is the antidote to anxiety? This verse tells us to pray “with thanksgiving.” So start with a heart of gratitude. Thank God for His faithfulness and that He has never left your side. Thank Him for His unchanging love for you, for his forgiveness and grace. Thank Him in advance for what He is going to do!

Next, tell God what’s troubling you. Most people pray prayers they think God wants to hear. But God tells us to pray about everything, leaving nothing on the table, and giving it all to Him. **If it’s big enough to worry about, it’s big enough to pray about.**

The result of faithfully bringing your requests to God with thanksgiving and trusting Him with the outcome is that you will experience “the peace of God which transcends all understanding.” God’s peace is so powerful the Bible says it will even “guard your heart and mind” from the anxieties of this world.

When you give your anxieties to God your worries of the future, the guilt of your past, your hurts, heartbreaks, and struggles God in return will give you His peace, which is more powerful than any anxiety or problem. His peace will stand guard over your heart and mind like an army protecting a city, watching and keeping you safe from the outside forces that would steal away your joy.

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***WHAT WILL YOU DO?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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# day 17

*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable if anything is excellent or praiseworthy think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

*~ Philippians 4:8-9 (NIV)*

**You are what you think about.** Proverbs 23:7 (NKJV) tells us, “For as a [man] thinks in his heart, so is he.” You’ve probably heard the phrase about computer processing, “garbage in, garbage out.” The same is true with your mind. Put garbage in the types of movies you watch, the internet sites you visit, the music you listen to, the magazines you browse, the books you read and the output of your life will be garbage too.

So how can you keep the “garbage” out of your mind? You can’t just empty your mind of bad thoughts. You must deliberately replace them with something else. Vacuums do not exist naturally in the world, they are artificially created. If you create a vacuum, something fills it. For instance, your gas tank is never empty; it’s either filled with gas or with air. The gas replaces the air, the air replaces the gas. Something will always fill a void. Our minds will always be filled with something, but we get to choose what fills them. **So what types of thoughts do you fill your mind with?**

Here’s God’s list: “Whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable if anything is excellent or praiseworthy think about such things.” The end result is God’s peace in your heart. The bottom line is that if a thought doesn’t pass this test, don’t allow it in your mind. That’s easier said than done, which is why the end of the verse says, “put it into practice.” God gave you a filter that brings peace of mind. Practice using it every day!

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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# day 18

*Do not conform any longer 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 12:2 (NIV)*

Real transformation starts in your mind, not your behavior. You cannot change your character simply changing your actions. Rather, you change your actions by changing your character. And it all begins with changing the way you think. That's why the Bible says: Don't conform to the ways of the world, "but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

What is the difference between conforming and transforming? To conform something is to change its outward appearance by fitting it into a mold. To transform something is to change its nature. Conforming has to do with behavior. Transforming has to do with character. The Bible is telling us to stop trying to fit in with the ways of the world, but instead, allow God to transform our character into the character of Christ.

Notice that conforming is something you do to yourself you consciously try to fit in or become like everyone else. **But transforming is something that God does to you.** It is God's work in your life, renewing your mind by His grace, through His Word.

God doesn't just want to change what you think, he wants to change how you think your way of thinking. The Bible says, "Be made new in the attitude of your mind" (Ephesians 4:23 NIV).

Then, look at the result of the transformed mind. **God promises that you will be able to discover His will for your life.** Not only will you discover His will, but you will find that it is good, pleasing, and perfect tailor made for you.

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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# day 19

*We have the mind of Christ. ~ 1 Corinthians 2:16 (NIV)*

What does it mean to have the mind of Christ? How can we possibly learn to think like He does? If you want to know how Jesus thinks, then you have to know what Jesus has already said. That's why it is so important for us to be people of the Word. If you want to think like Christ, then you have to know the Word of Christ.

You've often heard the popular question, "What would Jesus do?" If you truly want to know what Jesus would do in your situation, then you need to know what he has already said about similar situations. What has Jesus already said about ethics, morality, business, relationships, and money? If you know what He has said, you'll have a pretty good idea of how He thinks and what He would do in your situation. The Bible says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8NIV).

The mind of Christ is revealed in the Word of Christ by the Spirit of Christ. The Bible makes it clear that it is the Holy Spirit who makes God's Word understandable to us (see 1 Corinthians 2:9-16). The Holy Spirit is the one who teaches us and enables us to think with the mind of Christ. And He does it by "expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words" (verse 13).

You already have the mind of Christ because you have the Spirit of Christ the Holy Spirit living in you. **The more you get into the Word of Christ, the more the Spirit of Christ will teach you to think with the mind of Christ.**

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***WHAT WILL YOU DO?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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## day 20

*If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. ~ James 1:5 (NIV)*

Do you need wisdom today? God has made an amazing offer that you cannot afford to pass up. He says, 'ask me, and I will give you the wisdom you need.' So ask... but be prepared to act on what he tells you. **God doesn't offer His wisdom as an opinion to be considered at your convenience.** God is not a member of your advisory committee. He is your Lord. His wisdom is truth. **You must act on His wisdom if you want Him to give you more.**

You must come to God with a predisposition to obey. Don't ask him what He wants you to do and then decide to say yes. Start with yes, and then He will tell you what to do. If you're asking God for wisdom, but heaven seems silent, then you need to ask yourself, "Am I living by the wisdom God has already given me? Have I been guilty of selective obedience?" After all, why should God tell you something if you are ignoring what He has already told you?

God gives wisdom graciously, "*without finding fault.*" God will not scold you or make you feel stupid for asking. He wants to give you wisdom because He loves you and wants what is best for you. But He wants you to ask in faith. James goes on to say, "*But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt,*" and not be double-minded (verses 6-8). You must ask God for wisdom, believing that He has the wisdom you are looking for. And you must ask with single-minded determination to live by the wisdom He gives you.

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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# day 21

*Those who get wisdom do themselves a favor, and those who love learning will succeed. ~ Proverbs 19:8 (NCV)*

Wisdom is really not hard to find, but it can be hard to look for. It all comes down to the choices we make about how we spend our time. We can spend our time wisely and get more wisdom, or we can spend our time foolishly and miss opportunities to grow. Sometimes it's a difficult choice.

Here's a practical suggestion: Trade one hour of gaming or television for one hour of reading every day. Expand your mind by expanding your interests. Use your time wisely and you will be rewarded.

God wants to fill your mind with wisdom, but he won't force it upon you. You must seek it out. The Bible says, *"Blessed are those who find wisdom"* that means you have to look for it *"those who gain understanding"* that means you have to work for it and actively pursue it (Proverbs 3:13 NIV).

What I love about wisdom is that once found, it can never be lost. In fact, the more wisdom you give away, the more it becomes yours.

So do yourself a favor today. Get some wisdom. And if you will do that, the Bible promises you will succeed.

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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# **YOUR SPIRITUAL STORY**

## **WEEK 4**

## day 22

*Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*

~ Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)

In the Bible, people came to Jesus for many reasons. Some came to be healed. Others needed advice. Many came for eternal life. Jesus gives you another reason to come to Him: rest from your burdens. But here's the catch. Once you have come to Jesus with your burdens, you have to give up control. Jesus says, "Take My yoke upon you."

A yoke is a farming tool. Farmers yoke their plow horses together to keep them going in the same direction and at the same pace. When they are yoked together, one cannot go faster than the other, or slower, for that matter. They are less prone to veer off the path when they are working together. When their burden is cut in half, they can accomplish twice as much.

Jesus is using a yoke as a symbol of partnership with Him. God never intended for you to bear your burdens alone. **Jesus is saying, "I will help carry the load, you don't have to do it alone anymore. When you're weary and worn out, emotionally exhausted, let Me carry your burden with you."**

Jesus' invitation is, "*Learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*" The secret to overcoming an overloaded life is to go to the only One who can truly give you rest for your soul. Jesus is your burden bearer, your model for stress-free living. Accept His invitation today and find the rest you have been searching for.

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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## day 23

*“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” ~ John 14:27 (NIV)*

Someone has calculated that there have been 286 years of peace in the last 3,500 years of human history. That's a horrible track record. The peace of the world is fleeting and fragile.

Where conflict reigns, fear also rules. Fear and hatred are profound influences on you and me. Scientists speculate that prolonged fear, hatred, conflict, and unforgiveness actually alter our DNA. When peace is missing, we are fragmented and flawed.

God's promise is forever-peace. In His last days on earth, Jesus comforted His anxious disciples: *“I leave with you peace. I give you My own peace, and My gift is nothing like the peace of this world. You must not be distressed and you must not be daunted,”* (PH). The Master knew that His disciples were anxiously grappling with twin realities: touching and talking to Him was ending, and His death seemed imminent. Jesus provided forever-peace to return emotional stability to His faltering disciples.

But just what is forever-peace? According to Scripture:

- God's peace is a gift. You don't work for it, earn it, psyche yourself up for it, or try really hard to get it. You just accept it.
- God's peace does not depend on circumstances. His peace is present in terrible, terrifying, torturous times. Know why?
- God's peace, “shalom” in Jesus' language, means more than the absence of conflict, it's the presence of all things good!

The bottom line is that God's promise of forever-peace is fulfilled by His forever-presence! So *“do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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## day 24

*The Lord is my Shepherd ...Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

~ Psalm 23:1,4 (NIV)

**God will always be with you.** You will never have to go through life alone. You won't have any experience that God does not see. He is walking right beside you, even when you walk "through the valley of the shadow of death." The difference for those who follow Christ is not the absence of the shadow of death, but the presence of the Shepherd. In fact, because of the Shepherd, death is now just a shadow of its former self. Not even death can separate you from God's love. In every situation, God is there.

When the Shepherd walks with you, He carries a rod, just in case you need a little prodding to keep moving. The purpose for the rod is not to hurt the sheep, but to lead the sheep. Sometimes we need a good poke! God uses His rod to let you know, "You can do it! Don't quit! Don't stop or give up! I am right here with you!"

The Shepherd also carries His staff as He walks with you. He uses His staff to protect you from your enemy. Your Shepherd can easily deal with any threat by His mighty power. So you do not have to fear evil.

**You are not alone. God is with you.** He'll get you through life. And He'll get you through death. He'll bring you home safely. And you will dwell in the house of the Lord, forever.

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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## day 25

*The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. ~ Deuteronomy 33:27 (NIV)*

Most of us like a hug when we are feeling down. The problem is, there's not always someone there to give us one when we want it. We know this for sure: there will be tough times. There will be circumstances beyond your control, and crises that come out of nowhere. The pain will seem greater than you can bear. It's then, when things look impossible, that you must remember to run to your Heavenly Father. He will be there. He is always there.

**God sees your pain.** He hears your cry. He counts every tear you shed. He stands ready to help. You just need to come to him. He is your shelter in the storm. His everlasting arms are strong and waiting to embrace you. In them you will find peace, protection, and strength. And when you allow Him to hold you close, to wrap His arms around you, He will be with you until the storm passes and joy comes in the morning.

It's hard to imagine that the God who created the universe wants to be there for you, but He does. **His greatest desire is to draw you close to Him.** This is why He created you. So when you feel like no one cares, and your thoughts lead you into a pit.

of despair, call on the Lord to pull you out. His loving kindness never fails. He wants nothing more than to give you that hug you need.



***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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## day 26

*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ~ Romans 8:1 (NIV)*

Imagine that I asked you to write down all of the bad things you have ever done on a 3x5 card. Don't worry, I'm not going to ask you to do that. Besides, if you're at all like me, a 3x5 card wouldn't be nearly enough room for all of that stuff! But just imagine that I did. Now, picture putting that card with every sin, every careless word, every stupid mistake, everything you feel guilty about, inside of a hardback book. Now, close the book.

Can you still see the card? No. It's still there, but you can't see it. It's inside something bigger, something better. That card is still there, but it is in something else. That's what it's like to be in Christ Jesus. It means that once we put our faith in Christ, once we ask Him to forgive us for our sins, God simply doesn't see them anymore. We are declared not guilty. Not because we didn't do the things on that card, but because He chooses to see Jesus instead of our mistakes.

You may be carrying something around that you feel terribly guilty about. You may feel like this guilt comes from God to remind you, or punish you, for what you have done. But that is simply not the case. Jesus forgives us of our sins and takes them from us.

When Jesus went to the cross He paid the price for your sins, once and for all. You don't have to keep paying for your sins through guilt. You don't have to carry them around anymore. You don't have to live with shame anymore.

**If you are in Christ, you are forgiven.**

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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## day 27

*The joy of the Lord is your strength. ~ Nehemiah 8:10 (NIV)*

The secret to strength is joy. It's not your desire or your determination that is your strength. It's your joy. This means that one of the main reasons you feel you can't do something or don't have the strength to face something is a lack of joy. When you have joy, then you are able to find security in the truth that God has a plan, and you have strength for that day.

**Joy gives you strength for the life's greatest challenges.** Mother Teresa's job description for working with the sick from the streets of Calcutta was two simple items: desire to work hard and have a joyful attitude. When you work hard but have no joy, you'll find yourself feeling worn down by life, emotionally, physically, and spiritually exhausted.

How do you experience joy? The Westminster Catechism states, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever." Eternity is going to be filled with the sound of human laughter, people enjoying God. You don't have to wait to get in on that party, you can choose today to enjoy the goodness and greatness of God.

Nehemiah tells us it's the "joy of the Lord" we are choosing. Joy is not a matter of trying to work up good feelings about yourself or the world around you. Sometimes there's little to feel good about there. True joy centers on God. The joy God gives starts by focusing on who God is.

Whatever circumstances you are facing right now, spend a few moments thinking about who God is. **Think about His grace, power, forgiveness, and patience. Think about His comfort and love.** Let the joy that flows from remembering who God is become your strength for what you are facing today.

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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## day 28

*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."*

~ Psalm 91:1-2 (NIV)

I love New York City. It is a huge and important world center where the nations come to meet and exchange ideas and share their cultures. And what a humbling place it is!

You are surrounded by monolithic buildings that are at once both beautifully iconic and gigantic in stature. As you walk through the streets of downtown, even in the daytime, you are engulfed by the shadows of these gargantuan skyscrapers that blot out the sun. The city is enormous in every way.

God is just like that city. The scripture above says that you can dwell in Him. He is a whole life for you. You find food and sustenance and love and beauty and truth in Him. He is a city unto Himself. **Dwell in Him.**

He shelters you. He can protect you from whatever life throws at you. He is so big and absolutely sovereign that nothing can touch you except what He allows. And He only allows exactly what is right for you. **Hide in Him.**

He is so big that you can't go anywhere that He is not in control. His shadow is so vast that it falls on everything, everywhere, and everyone on the earth. No matter where you find yourself in this world and no matter what condition you are in, you can always rest in His shadow and find the help you need. **Rest in Him.**

God is unbeatably strong, preeminently vast, and unstoppable powerful. His truth is a fortress and our refuge. **Trust in Him.**

If life is getting you down, go to the City of the King and take refuge in His greatness, rest in His shadow, and rely upon Him to see you through. **He will never fail you.**

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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# **YOUR SPIRITUAL STORY**

## **WEEK 5**



## day 29

*I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing. ~ John 15:5 (NIV)*

Jesus' invitation to remain in Him is at the very heart of His gospel. **As a branch depends upon a vine to bear fruit, so likewise we must depend upon Jesus to bear fruit in our lives.**

It is only by abiding in relational intimacy with Jesus that we can hope to bear the fruit of the Spirit in our relationships with others.

Jesus emphatically makes this point when He says, "If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing." Notice the strong language. If we abide in loving relationship with Him we will we produce "a little fruit"? No, we will produce "much fruit." We will flourish. On the other hand, if we do not abide in Him we can we still do "something"? No, we can do "nothing." In fact, in the Greek, this sentence is a double negative, and so it really can be read, "you can do nothing, really nothing." Jesus wants to make sure we get His point loud and clear.

**The only way to bear fruit is to abide in relationship with Jesus.** If we want to be the kind of people who love, who are patient, who are kind, who are gentle, who are self-controlled, (Galatians 5:22-23) we must remain in Him. Bearing fruit is not a result of our resolve or determination. It is the result of abiding in a dependent relationship with Jesus by the Holy Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is just that, the fruit of the Spirit. It is a result of God's transforming power, not our willpower. It is produced by the Holy Spirit who now makes our heart His home.

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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# day 30

*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*

~ Matthew 5 :7 (NIV)

**Thank God for His mercy!** In our brokenness and sin, we certainly need it. He has shown us mercy on the cross by taking upon Himself the very punishment we deserved. The Holy Spirit continues to pour out His life-giving, life-sustaining mercy. Like a cascading fountain, “His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning” (Lamentations 3:22-23 ESV).

God calls us to drink deeply of His overflowing mercy. He calls us to return to the fountain day after day that we might become intimately acquainted with His mercy.

As those who personally know the mercy of God, we are to be people of mercy ourselves. As those who have been blessed with the mercy of God, we are to bless others with the same grace, patience, and care that we have received from Him. We are not called to dole out judgment or give people what they deserve, but instead to be gracious and merciful.

Do you want to be a person of mercy? If you drink deeply from God’s fountain of mercy, then the mercy of God will overflow in your life. If you are aware of how much you need God’s mercy, your heart will be softened toward others in need of mercy. **Jesus’ mercy toward sinners and social outcasts was a radical display of God’s love in the culture of His day.** It’s just as powerful and unexpected in our culture of self-centeredness and judgment today. As we extend mercy, grace, compassion, and forgiveness to the forgotten, the marginalized, and the rejected, we will point people to the mercy of Jesus.

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***WHAT DO YOU THINK?***

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***WHAT WILL YOU DO?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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# day 31

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ~ Matthew 5:9 (NIV)*

What does it mean to be blessed? The word for blessing in Greek is “makarios,” which can more literally be translated “happy.” He does not say, “Happy are the peace lovers.” Everybody loves peace. Nor does he say, “Happy are the peaceable,” those who never get disturbed by anything. Rather, he tells us “happy” are those who make peace who actively seek to resolve conflict.

What kind of happiness are we talking about here? Does Jesus mean that all the circumstances of our lives will work out the way we want them to? No, that’s not the point. Jesus does not mean that we will always “feel” happy based on our current life circumstances, but rather that we are in a position of happiness because we have a relationship with God. **To be happy is to be at peace with God.**

**God is a peacemaker.** In fact, he is The Peacemaker. Through the cross of Jesus Christ, God has made peace with us who warred with Him in our sin. We were once enemies of God and now we are called children of God (Colossians 1:21). We must delight in the peace we have with The Peacemaker. It is peace found deep within our souls, peace that passes human understanding. To be at peace with God means we have been reconciled to a right relationship with Him.

**God calls us to follow His lead.** He calls us to share the very peace we have found in Him with the rest of the world. He wants us to be known as peacemakers. He wants us to reflect His redeeming and reconciling love to the world around us. For only His children truly know what real peace, ultimate peace, life-giving peace, is all about. In a world of conflict, strife, and revenge, we can be a profound witness of The Peacemaker by being peacemakers ourselves.

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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## day 32

*But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ~ Luke 6:35 (NIV)*

**Love your enemies.** If ever we missed the radical nature of Jesus' message, here it is, loud and clear. **Jesus calls us to love those who do not love us.** To love those who have wounded us. To love those who slander our name or gossip about us. Just a few verses before to this Jesus says, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" (Luke 6:27-28 NIV). If this isn't radical living, I don't know what is.

We get a clear picture of this radical kind of love in Jesus' life. As He hung upon the cross, wounded, mocked, and ridiculed, Jesus cried out, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34 NIV). **In the midst of His pain and suffering, Jesus extended love to His enemies.** He prayed for their forgiveness. Not only does this scene give us a model for loving our enemies, but it reminds us of the profound truth of God's love for us. As Scripture tells us, it was while we were enemies of God ourselves that Christ Jesus died for us so that we could be reconciled to God (Romans 5:10). In a very real sense, Jesus' prayer for forgiveness extends to us, for in our sin we stand with His accusers, persecutors, and mockers.

We know we do not merit God's favor and yet He has freely and fully poured out His love and grace upon us. It is this kind of love that transforms our hearts and makes us more like Jesus, so that we can display His radical love even to our enemies, or perhaps, especially to them.

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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# day 33

*Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ~ 1 Peter 4:8 (NIV)*

**Love is all you need.** That's pretty simple, isn't it?

The grammar in this passage is very interesting here. Now, don't tune out just because you heard the word "grammar." Listen to this: it is just as acceptable, in the original language, for the verse to be read one of two different ways.

You could say: "When I truly love you in a deep way, I will forgive you completely and tenderly." Or, you could say: "When I love you deeply, God himself will forgive my multitude of sins."

Either way, love is all you need. This means I have been called upon, by God, to love you in such a way that I quickly drop any offense I might have toward you. I live a life of love and accept you, warts and all, just as Jesus accepts you and how He has accepted me too for that matter. It also means that when I learn to love you in this way, God exercises His forgiveness towards me and I live a life that is filled with grace, acceptance, and the favor of God. Love is all you need!

So how do I do it? Here are some ways to love from 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. (Go see for yourself.)

**Be patient with someone today who is a little slower than you when it comes to "getting it."**

**Be kind to someone who needs a little extra help** offer it to them without their having to beg you for it.

**Don't boast about yourself today.** Find someone else to be proud of and let them know it!

**Don't get angry.** Stay cool. Take a deep breath and carefully explain your feelings by building a bridge into someone else's life, rather than a wall.

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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# day 34

*He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.  
~ Psalm 147:3 (NIV)*

Sticks and stones may break your bones... but words can break your heart.

Broken bones heal. But it takes time. When my eight-year-old son broke his arm, we had to go to the doctor and get x-rays. Then the bones were patched up and set in place.

Next came the plaster cast to hold everything together. Finally, it was time to go home. For the next few days there was quite a bit of pain, which required his mother and me to show compassion and care as we addressed all of his needs. He lost the full use of his arm for a month or so, but then he was back to playing, pitching a baseball, and climbing trees.

God's process of healing a broken heart is a lot like healing a broken bone.

**Pray.** Come to God and let Him know that you are in pain. He will listen carefully.

He will know exactly what to do.

**Listen.** Give God a chance to look into your heart and life, just like an x-ray, and make His own assessment of what needs to take place. Trust Him. He can read your charts much better than you can.

**Rest.** God will put His arms of love around you and hold everything that is broken together with the plaster of His kindness and strong compassion. He will comfort you with His promises and surround you with His people, the church, who will hold you up while you heal.

**Trust.** You might find that you are not fully functional for a while. There will be some pain. Share your hurts with others that you can trust people in the Body that understand and will nurse you back to health. But, just like healing a broken bone, you can't do it alone.

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***WHAT WILL YOU DO?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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## day 35

*Cast all your care upon him, for he cares for you.*

*~ 1 Peter 5:7 (NKJV)*

At first glance, this verse is a promising invitation to de-complicate life. Peter apparently counsels us to “dump and run,” casting our problems on God, because He’s somehow obliged to relieve us from difficulties. Is Peter advising us to avoid responsibility for our troubles? Or is this reading naïve, especially as it relates to relationships and their inevitable anxieties and conflicts?

In its context, this verse actually encourages Christians to become mature and to embrace their responsibilities. Peter identifies the key to “casting our cares” as humility: “God gives grace to the humble. Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:5-7 NKJV). Why does Peter connect our cares with humility before God?

**Humility is seeing ourselves in a relationship with God** Father, Son and Holy Spirit “The I AM,” “The ALWAYS.” God is described in Scripture as loving, good, wise, gracious, merciful, never-changing, all-powerful, all-knowing, everywhere-at-once, sovereign, before all, over all, in all, through all, and so much more! Humility stands in rapt attention before God and exclaims, “I’m not worthy!” Humility acknowledges and acts on one profound truth, “You are God, and I am NOT!”

And it is this God who says to the humble, “Do you need My grace in a relationship right now? Cast all of your cares on Me, because I care for you. Bring Me every heartbreak, every disappointment, every conflict. It’s all important to Me because you’re important to me, I care about your relationships. And because you have humbly asked, I will pour out My grace upon your life.”

When you are worried about a relationship, do what Peter says: **humble yourself before God, cast your care upon Him, and receive His grace.**

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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# **YOUR SPIRITUAL STORY**

## **WEEK 6**

# day 36

*He who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.*  
~ Proverbs 11:25 (NIV)

## **It pays to give.**

There is a universal principle at work called “the law of sowing and reaping,” and it is a spiritual reality. We see it in this passage in terms of “refreshment.” You give some refreshment, and you will be refreshed yourself. Give some relief to someone else, and you will be relieved.

When I was a kid, I worked one summer for a family that was pretty well-to-do. They would have parties out on the lake, and it was my job to walk around and serve appetizers and beverages to the guests. Five poor friends and I were living in a guest house on the property, and our usually meager meals were augmented every time there was a party, and we were called upon to serve. I could have rewritten this verse for myself: “He who serves a few refreshments will get to eat a few refreshments himself!”

Later in life, with a somewhat fuller measure of maturity, I began to understand this idea in a deeper way. The Scripture explains, “*Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously*” (2 Corinthians 9:6 NIV).

When God sees generosity that flows from us to others, whether it be in time or money or love, He takes pleasure in us. In a generous heart, God finds a portrait of Himself. When we give like God gives, we become a reflection of His bountiful love for all of us. God rewards us as we give freely by freely giving back to each of us more than we could imagine.

Here’s what this Scriptural promise means to me:

**You want to be blessed? Bless others.** You want to be greatly blessed? Bless others richly!



You want to be loved? Love. You want to be deeply loved? Love a lot!

You want to be prosperous? Give. You want to be very, very prosperous? Give a lot!

Remember this: "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." It's a fact of life. It's the truth. It pays to give.

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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## day 37

*So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

*~ Matthew 6:31-33 (NIV)*

Jesus' words about what we eat, drink, and wear are so practical. He reminds us that behavior reflects belief. If you believe God is your Provider, you will behave that way, obeying Him, serving others, and believing "all these things will be given to you as well." Your focus will be on the kingdom of God. But if you believe you are your own provider, you will behave that way, worrying, and scrambling to make ends meet. Your focus will be on the kingdom of you.

Jesus contrasts attitudes and actions which are either earthbound (a pagan's) or eternal (a disciple's) life investments. Some people's investment is earthbound: running from this to that, moving from relationship to relationship, job to job, hobby to sports to recreation, following fads, taking seminars and therapies, and purchasing the latest self-help books. They are often fiscally challenged, squandering money, and using people to try to get ahead. Unhappy and restless, they look for materialistic fulfillment in all the wrong places because Jesus Christ is not the center of their life. They look to themselves to supply their needs.

**A Christ-follower's investment is eternal:** following Jesus, "seeking His kingdom and His righteousness," building relationships through loving God and serving others, finding meaning and purpose in their work, and regularly dialoguing with God through the Scriptures, worship, prayer, and by listening to the Holy Spirit. They are often fiscally healthy, using money to love God and people. They are satisfied, integrated, and content because Jesus is the center of life. They look to God to supply their needs.

So stop stressing about food, drink, and clothes. Start “seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness,” as the foundation for life investing and your financial health.

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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## day 38

*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 you will not have room enough for it. ~ Malachi 3:10 (NIV)*

There are three words in this verse you must understand to be financially whole: tithe, test, and blessing. The word tithe means 10%. I don't know why God tells us to give 10% He could have said 50% or 30% or 90%. I do know that what we give is an act of trust and worship. Jesus affirmed this in Matthew 23:23 as He taught that we should tithe. When the Father says it and Jesus affirms it, it's a no brainer that we are to do it.

God obviously knew this would be hard for us, so He said, "Put Me to the test." This is the only place in all of Scripture where God tells us to put Him to the test. He knows that as He shows Himself to be faithful, our heart for giving will only increase.

**To be financially healthy you also need to understand God's idea of blessing.** A blessing is not a purchase; it is a gift. If you only give to God to get exactly what you want, you are thinking too small. You are cheating yourself out of all that God wants to give you. God does give material blessings on earth, no doubt. But beyond that, He gives the blessings of being able to give to others, of growth and change in your own life, and of investing your life now in ways that make a difference for eternity. God's blessings will not always be what you expect, they will be more than you could have imagined.

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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## day 39

*Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.*

~ Proverbs 3:9-10 (NIV1984)

**There are more verses in the Bible about giving and tithing than any other topic.** In fact over half of Jesus' parables deal with material possessions. Jesus spoke more about money than He did about heaven or hell. Why? There are plenty of reasons why the Bible has so much to say about finances, but let's look at just two.

**First, God wants you to become like Him, and He is generous.** God's generosity flows out of His love for you and me. The most famous verse in the Bible, John 3:16, is about God's generosity, "God so loved the world that He gave his only Son . . ."

Everything you have is because of God's great generosity and love. And He wants you to honor Him by giving back to Him the "first part" of what you make. He blesses your life so that you can be a blessing to others. Generosity breaks the grip of greed and materialism on your life. A loving heart is a generous heart, and you are most like Jesus when you give.

**Second, God wants you to trust Him with your finances.** Money tends to dominate our lives. So much of our time is spent making it, spending it, saving it, investing it, or giving it. Financial tensions and conflicts are still one of the top five reasons for divorce. God's money management plan is simple: trust Him with your wealth by giving to Him first, "then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim with new wine." In other words, trust God with your finances and he will meet your needs.

In a world of economic uncertainty, God's plan for your finances is the best investment you can make for your future. Ask God to help you overcome any fear or worry you might have about trusting Him and becoming more generous with your finances.



***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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## day 40

*Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will forsake you. ~ Hebrews 13:5 (NIV)*

**What does it mean to love money?** It means worshiping money, and worshiping money is a problem. The Bible makes it clear we are to worship God alone. When you worship something, you give your time, your resources, and your energy to that thing. Whatever you worship consumes your life. How can we avoid worshiping money? What would it look like to have money, use money, and make money without worshiping it? **The answer is contentment.**

What is contentment? Contentment is not saying, "I like where I'm at," as though you should never have any financial goals or you should not try to increase your net worth. In fact, God says, "Those who work hard will prosper" (Proverbs 13:4 NLT). Contentment is saying, **"Regardless of my circumstances, I have Christ in my life."** Contentment isn't based on your financial status. Rather, it relies on your relationship with God. We are content because God has promised no matter what, He is with us and will never forsake us. So, I can be content in my present circumstances because my contentment is not based upon them.

If you are searching for contentment, look beyond your present circumstances. Look beyond the here and now. Look to the promise of God. Have eternal perspective. God says He will always be with you. You have eternal life in him. As a result, you can be content in whatever current financial circumstances you find yourself. Whether you are materially rich or not, you are rich in God.

***WHAT DID YOU HEAR?***

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***WHAT WILL YOU DO?***

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***NOW TALK TO GOD...***

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# **YOUR SPIRITUAL STORY**

## **WEEK 7**

















## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

# 1 | *commit to pray*

There are several opportunities to spend time in prayer...

**MONDAY** corporate prayer at 6:30 am at all campuses.

*Phoenix (Prayer Pavilion), Scottsdale, & Glendale (Main Auditoriums)*

**TUESDAY** night prayer service at 7:00 pm at the Prayer Pavilion

*(Phoenix campus)*

**CREATE** personal times of prayer throughout the week

*(The Prayer Pavilion is open 24/7 at the Phoenix Campus)*

# 2 | *choose a fast*

- **Absolute Fast** - abstaining from solids or liquids but not from water
- **Partial Fast** - abstaining from certain foods (such as meat) or abstaining from all foods for a portion of the day
- **The Daniel Fast** - eating only fruits and vegetables and drinking only water
- **John Wesley Fast** - eating lunch one day, abstaining from dinner and breakfast until lunch the next day
- **Jewish Fast** - abstaining from food only from sunup to sundown
- **Liquid Fast** - abstaining from solid food but allowing for liquids, such as fruit juice
- **Media Fast** - abstaining from exposure to the media , especially TV

# 3 | *assemble as believers*

Commit to one weekend service and one midweek service.

## WEEKEND

Saturday 5:00 pm

*(Phoenix campus)*

Sunday 9:00 am / 11:00 am *(all campuses)*

## MIDWEEK

Wednesday 6:30 pm

*(Phoenix campus)*

## *what we are praying for*

- » **Supernatural Provision** for your family, the church, and those closest to you
- » **Supernatural Power** - freedom from addiction, healing from sickness and disease, broken marriages restored, and miraculous blessings
- » **Supernatural Protection** - protection for your family, for your church, and for the younger generation who are constantly bombarded by the world
- » **The Presence of God** - supernatural guidance, a feeling of peace and security, and a greater awareness for the internal whispers of the Holy Spirit
- » **Revival in our Nation** - for the people of this world to turn away from the things that hold them down and for them to acknowledge a loving God who can heal all hurt



