

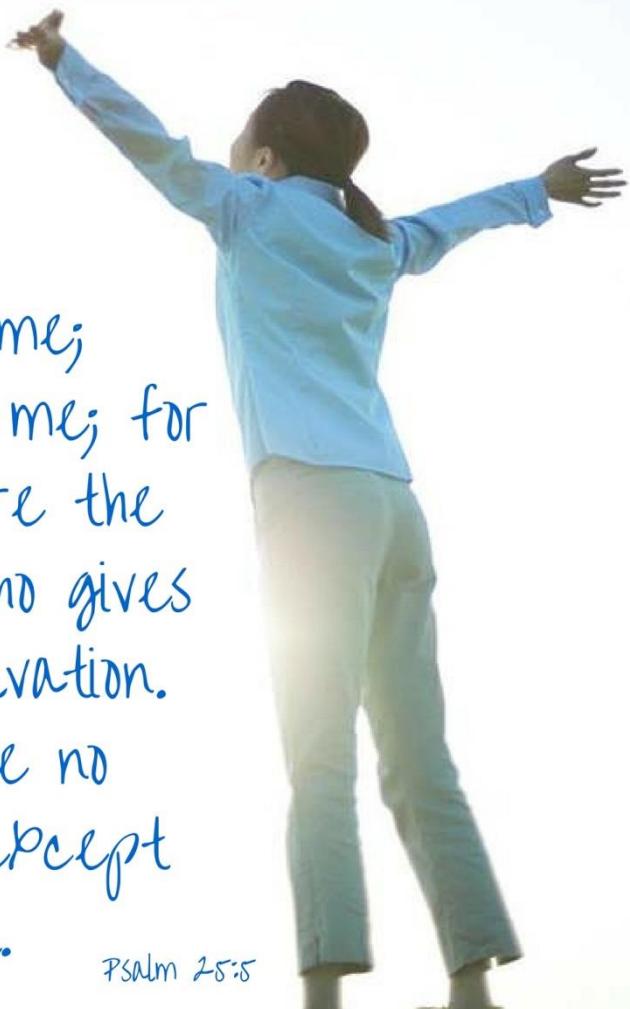
Hope for this Day

14 days of devotion and prayer

Lead me;
teach me; for
you are the
God who gives
me salvation.

I have no
hope except
in you.

PSALM 25:5



Quite Time Challenge

Proverbs 1:7 (MSG) Start with God—the first step in learning is bowing down to God; only fools thumb their noses at such wisdom and learning.

Scripture Reading: Proverbs 1

In the very first chapter of Proverbs we learn the book's purpose is to provide moral instruction and teach people how to apply divine wisdom to daily life.

For real life change to happen it takes commitment on my part to get into God's word and spending time there on a daily basis. If you do not have a regular Bible reading plan, I challenge you to read 1 chapter of Proverbs a day. What is today's date? December 10th? Go to Proverbs 10 and start reading. Is it January 1st? Go to Proverbs 1 and start there. Whatever the date, go to that chapter of Proverbs and read!

You may find it easy to retain the information if you read out loud and from different Bible translations. It's also wise to spend time in prayer and meditation, focusing on what you've read and what you believe God is trying to teach you.

Lastly, write down what you believe God is saying to you. When you journal, you can go back and see how God is working in your life.

I promise, the more you read God's word, the closer you will draw to Him. James 4:8 (NCV) says "Come near to God, and God will come near to you."

To live a life that honors Christ, He must become greater. In order for me to do that, I have to spend time learning what His word says.

Father, help me find a specific time and place to get alone with you. Hide me under the shadows of your wings so that I may learn more about you. It's my desire to have a close and personal relationship with you. Amen

Running on Empty

Isaiah 55:1 - 2 (MSG) “Hey there! All who are thirsty, come to the water! Are you penniless? Come anyway—buy and eat! Come, buy your drinks, buy wine and milk. Buy without money—everything’s free! Why do you spend your money on junk food, your hard-earned cash on cotton candy? Listen to me, listen well: Eat only the best, fill yourself with only the finest. Pay attention, come close now, listen carefully to my life-giving, life-nourishing words.”

Scripture Reading: Psalm 23: 1 – 3; Matthew 11:28 - 30

Have you ever felt like your world is spinning in a thousand different directions? I know I have. At times I feel like my life is a roller coaster full of responsibilities and appointments. At every turn I’m looking for a way to stop the ride for just a few seconds so I can catch my breath.

When my life seems to get out of control it’s usually because I haven’t “fueled” my spirit. I have forgotten the most important part of my day, my quiet time with Jesus. On chaotic days like these, I have been too busy to “come to the water” and drink from the well that doesn’t run dry. Anyone care to admit that with me?

When I finally realize I am running on empty, I head to the comfort of my favorite quiet spot and flip through the scriptures to get back on track.

Truths to ponder:

- God wants to satisfy our need for spiritual nourishment.
- God wants to refresh and renew us.
- God doesn’t want us to be stressed out from the “stuff” of life. He wants us to walk with Him and learn from Him.

Have you ever taken the time to think about your relationship with Jesus? May I encourage you to find a time and a place and let God fill you with His peace and springs of living water.

Father, I am running on empty. My soul is thirsty for your life-giving, life-nourishing word. Please fill me to overflowing as I spend time in your word today. Amen

Wait for the Lord

Lamentations 3:25 - 27 (MSG) God proves to be good to the man who passionately waits, to the woman who diligently seeks. It's a good thing to quietly hope, quietly hope for help from God. It's a good thing when you're young to stick it out through the hard times.

Scripture Reading: Genesis 15: 1 - 6; Genesis 16:1 - 4

Abraham was 75 years old when God told him to leave everything that was comfortable and go to an unknown destination (Genesis 12: 1). I wonder if that promise mulled around in the back of his head as he headed out of town. You see at the time, Abraham and his wife, Sarah, had no biological children.

Fast forward a few years. Abraham, being promised descendants too many to count, looked square in the face of his circumstances. He and Sarah are even more advanced in years and remain childless. He wonders how God will fulfill his promise of making a great nation from his family. Through his limited view, it seems his slave Eliezer will inherit all he has.

Even Sarah had doubts and took matters into her own hands by giving Hagar, her slave girl, to Abraham. Although this was a customary solution in her day, Sarah showed a lack of faith in God to fulfill His promise in her life.

Have you ever gotten ahead of God and taken matters into your own hands? I sure have. Taking action in my own strength and timing shows a complete lack of faith and willingness to allow God to work...in His. God always keeps his promises. They may take a lot longer to come to fruition than we would like, but He is faithful.

Father, please help me to trust in your perfect timing. Instead of focusing on my circumstances, help me to cling to the promises I find in your word. Amen

God's Promises Give Life

Psalm 119:50 (NCV) When I suffer, this comforts me: Your promise gives me life.

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 29:10 - 14

As I reflect on the words of Psalm 119:50, I can't help but think about all the promises God has for us in His word. During my time of reflection, a promise quickly popped into my thoughts "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV)

What a promise! The God who spoke the world into existence has a plan to prosper me...and prosper you. In recent months, this is the promise I have held onto. It reminds me that even though I go through tough times, it doesn't mean that God has forgotten me. He loves me with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3).

Sometimes it's really easy for me to forget this promise, especially when I have neglected to turn to Him when "life happens." After reading this verse I'm reminded all over again that the Lord's promises give me life...not just a plain and ordinary life...but an abundant one (John 10:10 – NIV) full of hope and a future!

Praise you Father for your unconditional love and never-ending kindness. Even when the storms of life rage, help me to be ever mindful of your Presence and your Word. Amen

Hosanna!

John 12:13 (NIV) “Hosanna! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel!’”

Scripture Reading: John 12:12 – 19

People are gathered, many holding palm branches and shouting “Hosanna! Praise God!” Can you picture yourself at the scene? Is your heart pumping with excitement to see the Messiah that has been foretold in Old Testament scriptures? You’ve seen or perhaps heard about the miracles he’s performed over the past three years. Now here he is entering the city on a donkey. You’re on your tiptoes trying to see over everyone’s head. Finally you see him clearly... it’s Jesus!

The word Hosanna, from the Hebrew word Hoshiah Na, means Save now. The people who were shouting “Hosanna!” at Christ’s triumphal entry understood something. They knew that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Now close your eyes and go back to the scene.

Look briefly at the crowd around you. Leaders in the crowd that day believed in Jesus; but, didn’t have palm leaves in their hands. Sadly their fear of being kicked out of the synagogue by the Pharisees kept them from acknowledging Jesus. They chose acceptance of people over God (John 12:43).

Now take a look at your present day life. Do you find it hard to believe that Jesus is who he says he is? If you believe in Jesus and have given him your life you can trust him with the intimate details. What would happen if Jesus were to ride into your town today? What would you do? Would you be singing Hosanna and waving a palm branch or would you be too afraid of what your neighbors might say?

Father, help me to have the type of faith that isn’t afraid of what others may think. I want faith that pleases and brings honor to you. Amen

Inside Out

1 Samuel 16:7b (NCV) “God does not see the same way people see. People look at the outside of a person, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

Scripture Reading: 1 Samuel 16:1 - 13

Each spring, I feel like the task of cleaning up my back yard gets to be more and more of a challenge because it's usually the last area we work on. My husband typically heads out to the front yard and makes sure the beds are nice and clean and all unwanted growth is cleared away. This process typically takes a few weekends to accomplish so, by the time we get to the back yard, the weeds have taken over and it seems to take forever to see actual progress.

One day, as I started to work in one flower beds in the backyard the words of 1 Samuel 16:7 popped into my head. “God doesn’t look at what people can see... God looks at the heart.”

Just like my yard, many more people see the front as they drive or walk by, but only a few see the back. As I worked the beds, I pondered the verse in 1 Samuel. What do see when they looked at me? Truthfully, they only see who I am on the outside. But God doesn’t look at that, He looks at my heart.

I had to ask myself a tough question. “What does my inside look like?” Since God looks at the condition of my heart, does it match my actions (outside appearances)? When people look at me, can they see a reflection of Jesus? I certainly hope so. Just like the flower beds each spring, there will always be “weeds to pull” in my life. Being shaped by Jesus is a continual process. The more weeds He pulls in my life, the more like Him I become.

Praise you Father that you are continually at work in us, weeding out the bad so the beauty of your handiwork can be revealed. Amen.

Tigers and Boys

Isaiah 65:25 (NIV) The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the Lord.

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 11: 6 - 9

Isaiah prophesied about the Messiah (Jesus) who would establish a kingdom of peace and prosperity. In these verses we are told that one day, the hunter and the hunted will eat from the same trough, graze in the same pasture and grow up with each other and humans.

I really wonder what that will be like. This story reminds me of a family trip to Disney's Animal Kingdom. While visiting the tiger exhibit, my son looked through the glass window and made a comment about petting the "pretty kitty." To him the tiger was just a big cat. In reality, the tiger was a wild animal and for our safety we needed to keep our distance.

Our conversation must have stirred the tiger's curiosity because he got up and made his way around to the glass area where we were standing. When my son turned around, he saw the tiger standing on his hind legs on the other side of the glass looking down while licking his lips.

No doubt the "big kitty" saw my son as an afternoon snack. This scenario made a great point. In our world, wild animals see humans as a meal. Isaiah tells us that one day, we won't have to worry about being inside a glass enclosure. There will be a time when my son will be able to play with tigers without fear of being their lunch because when Christ comes to setup his kingdom, there will be everlasting peace.

Can you imagine a world with no killing, no famine, no poverty, no hunger, no abuse, no hatred, no racism, no disease?

Father, help me to see things through eternal eyes. You are my peace in this chaotic world. Amen

Shopping Cart Madness

Leviticus 20:7-8 (MSG) Set yourselves apart for a holy life. Live a holy life, because I am God, your God. Do what I tell you; live the way I tell you. I am the God who makes you holy.

Scripture Reading: Proverbs 3:5 - 6

Today, I believe God wants me to understand that HE is God and I am not. (Simple truth right? So why can't I get that through my THICK head sometimes?) I have a tendency to "control" things that are completely and totally out of my control. Like grabbing a hold of the shopping cart at a grocery store and "steering" it up and down desired isles, I grab a hold of a "shopping cart" in my life and won't let go. I fail miserably trying to control the outcome of circumstances that I have no business trying to control in the first place.

When I try to hold onto control, things don't get better, they get worse. Why? God doesn't want me calling the shots of my own life. He wants my total surrender. He wants me to hold back NOTHING from Him. He wants my life, my spouse, my child, my finances, my job/vocation, my talents, my time, etc.

When I surrender fully to Christ and allow him to "steer the shopping cart of my life" amazing things begin to happen. I see Him instead of the circumstance. I feel His peace instead of the chaos that surrounds. I find deep joy that carries me through the most emotionally gut-wrenching blow. I see abundance in the midst of despair and poverty.

This process of "giving up control" or "total surrender to Christ and his lordship" never ends. When I decide to release control of my life over to Christ, He will show up in ways I would have never dared to dream or imagine.

Father, help me to remember that I can't control one single thing that happens. I trust you with my life and right now I relinquish all control to you. Amen

The Eternal Well

Zechariah 13:1 (GW) The Lord declares, “On that day a fountain will be opened for David’s family and for those who live in Jerusalem to wash away their sin and stain.

Scripture Reading: Zechariah 13, John 4: 7 - 14

God’s fountain of forgiveness and mercy is never-ending. The reference to a never-ending fountain reminded me of the Samaritan woman at the well. Going about the activity of her daily life, she carried her empty bucket to the well to draw water. When she arrived, she bumped into Jesus who offered her so much more than just ordinary water. He offered to fill her with soul-quenching water that would bring hope, healing and eternal satisfaction. With the water Jesus gave, she’d never thirst again.

As I continued to think about the different places in the Bible that refer to water, I got a mental image of the river flowing from the very throne of God (Ezekiel 47:1-12 and Revelation 22:1-2). The river mentioned in these two passages of scripture refer to a life-giving body of water offering fullness of life and bringing eternal satisfaction of our spiritual thirst.

Because of current circumstances in my life, I have become spiritually thirsty because I didn't have my quiet time nor did I draw close to the Lord in my time of prayer. Today, as I read over the words in Zechariah, John, Ezekiel, and Revelation my thirst is quenched as I draw in a big gulp from God's life-giving river. Its waters wash over me and renew/refresh my thirsty spirit.

Are you “thirsty” today? Step into the river of the Spirit and drink deeply. There you will find refreshment and renewal for your soul.

Father, thank you for providing eternal, life-giving water for my dry and thirsty soul. Amen

Spoken Words

Proverbs 25:11 (NCV) The right word spoken at the right time is as beautiful as gold apples in a silver bowl.

Scripture Reading: James 3:2 - 12

Sometimes words roll out of my mouth and I do everything humanly possible to “shove” them back in. But once they’re out there...there is no way of putting them back. Now sometimes this is a good thing and at other times, not so much. Solomon reminds us in Proverbs 25 that “the right word spoken at the right time is beautiful.” I didn’t get too far away from this verse before I had to ask myself a question, “Are my words spoken at the right time, or am I careless with what comes out of my mouth?” As I pondered this truth, Paul’s words to the church at Ephesus came to mind:

Ephesians 4:29 (NCV) When you talk, do not say harmful things, but say what people need—words that will help others become stronger. Then what you say will do good to those who listen to you.

An honest look at the things I say and the way I say them tells me I can be careless at times and really “zap” the people around me. I become the worst version of myself when careless words spring from my mouth and this helps no one.

I want the words that come out of my mouth to be honoring to God and used to intentionally build people up. As I take another look at Proverbs 25:11, I know the right word spoken at the right time will be beautiful...as beautiful as a golden apple sparkling in a nicely polished silver bowl.

Father, help me to use my words to build people up and not tear them down.
Amen

God's Sovereignty

1 Corinthians 1: 7-9 (MSG) Just think—you don't need a thing, you've got it all! All God's gifts are right in front of you as you wait expectantly for our Master Jesus to arrive on the scene for the Finale. And not only that, but God himself is right alongside to keep you steady and on track until things are all wrapped up by Jesus. God, who got you started in this spiritual adventure, shares with us the life of his Son and our Master Jesus. He will never give up on you. Never forget that.

Scripture Reading 1 Corinthians 1

Paul wrote the book of Corinthians not only to the church at Corinth but for those of us who have heard God's voice and have fallen prey to the "lies" this world can dish out. Paul gently and patiently teaches us the truth about living as Christ called us to live and not by the standards of this world.

Writers of both the Old and New Testament told us that in this life we would have troubles. But as I read these three verses I was reminded of God's sovereignty. He is right by our side all day, every day. He is faithful to the promises found in His word and will NEVER give up on us.

It is so easy to forget this simple truth when we feel like we're being burned alive by the fire of current circumstances. I know I have lost sight of God's sovereignty a time or two. We must remember that through it all, God is there and He cares. It is up to us to keep Him in our focus and not the overwhelming presence of our circumstances.

God is with us no matter where we are. He sees the tears that fall from our eyes and hears us when we call on Him. Are you going through tough times? Call on Christ (Psalm 23:4, 1 Peter 1:6-7, 1 Peter 4:12-13, John 16: 31 – 33), He will guide your path.

Jesus, thank you for being right beside me as I face the circumstances of this day. Help me feel your presence more and more as I commit to draw closer to you.
Amen

Remaining Obedient

Isaiah 55:8 (NIV) “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord.

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 35

I grew up in a Christian home where my sister and I were encouraged to live our lives based on biblical truth. As a young teenager, I fell hard into peer pressure and allowed the words of a “friend” to change the way I thought, felt and acted. Looking back now, I sometimes wonder what pain I would have avoided if only I had remained obedient to what I knew to be the truth.

Jeremiah, the last prophet before the fall of Judah, served God for 40 years. During this time, he urged God’s people (the Israelites) to turn from their sin and return to God or face the consequences of their disobedience. Those consequences? Complete destruction of the nation and the exile of the Israelites. Do you think the Israelites listened? Nope... they ignored, rejected and persecuted Jeremiah.

Even though the entire nation turned a deaf ear to Jeremiah, he still tried to reach them before it was too late. He used the Recabite clan as an example of obedience even when “being obedient” wasn’t the coolest thing to do. For over 200 years the Recabites kept the commands passed down by their forefathers. While the rest of the nation of Israel was breaking its covenant with God, the Recabites held tight to their commitment. In the end, their obedience would lead to eternal rewards while Israel faced the consequences of their disobedience.

I think this story speaks volumes, especially in this day and age. God desires to have a relationship with us but our disobedience gets in the way. Will you be obedient, turn from your sin and listen for his guiding voice? Or, will you “go your own way” because it’s “what’s best for you” and face eternal consequences?

Father, help me to remain obedient to you even when it’s not comfortable or popular. Bring to mind your promises, so I can stand firm on them. Amen

Search Lights...On!

1 John 1:9 (NCV) But if we confess our sins, he will forgive our sins, because we can trust God to do what is right. He will cleanse us from all the wrongs we have done.

Scripture Reading: 1 John

The book of 1 John is one of my favorite books of the Bible. Often called the assurance of salvation book, John gives testimony about what he knows to be true about Jesus because he walked this earth with Jesus. John pens us this letter that says “Hey, Jesus is the Word and He gives life. Believe me I know – I walked with him and saw everything first hand. You can trust him... you can believe everything He says.”

John wrote this book so that we can be in fellowship with God, with his Son and with fellow believers. He also wrote it so we can be filled with joy just as the early disciples were filled with joy.

Yet there is something we need to do first. John encourages us not to live in darkness; and if we do we are liars and do not follow the truth. Whoa! This means if we continue to live in our sin (sin is darkness) we are liars.

Is there any sin in your life that you’re not confessing? The “big” ones are easy to detect but keep looking. Is there greed, envy, anger, bitterness, gossip?

If we confess our sins, Jesus will forgive our sins and cleanse us from ALL the WRONGS we have done. It’s time to point the search light on ourselves and see if we are living in darkness in any area of our lives. Then bring whatever that is in to the Light, the One who forgives all confessed sin.

Go ahead... turn those search lights on!

Father, you know me inside and out. If there is anything in my life that is not of you, please show me so I can bring it into your marvelous light. Amen

Strong and Courageous

Joshua 1:6-9 (HCSB)"Be strong and courageous, for you will distribute the land I swore to their fathers to give them as an inheritance. Above all, be strong and very courageous to carefully observe the whole instruction My servant Moses commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right or the left, so that you will have success wherever you go. This book of instruction must not depart from your mouth; you are to recite it day and night, so that you may carefully observe everything written in it. For then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do. Haven't I commanded you: be strong and courageous? Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 31

Have you ever been afraid to step out into “uncharted” territory? By that I mean doing something new. Perhaps it’s an opportunity to serve in a ministry at church, or to take on a new position outside of your current employer, or perhaps stay where you are when everything in you wants to throw in the towel and leave. I have. There have been many times that I’ve been afraid to “move” because I didn’t know what was coming next. For me, the safety of “where I was” at the time was just simply “good enough.”

But God doesn’t call us based on who we are or what WE think we can do. He calls us based on who He is and what He wants to do through us. The verses in Joshua 1: 6 – 8 are a reminder to me that God can use us to fulfill His purposes if we are obedient, consistently study His word, and remain strong and courageous.

God tells Joshua to be strong and courageous three times in four verses of scripture. What does that say to you? For me, it’s reassurance. I know that God is with me wherever I go. When I do my part by stepping out in faith, with courage, consistently seeking guidance from His word, I know I will succeed because He will be there. How awesome is that?

Father, help me to remember that you are with me even though I may not feel you. You are faithful and will never leave me nor forsake me. Amen.

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