



NOW IS THE TIME: LUKE

*A 25-day journey through the book of Luke that calls
participants to transform the world by unleashing
God's Word in their community.*

DAY ONE: GOD IS IN CONTROL

Pray

Lord, help me to trust your plan for my life.

Read

LUKE 1:26-56

Can you imagine how Mary must have felt when an angel told her that she was going to have a son who would be the promised Messiah? Here she was a virgin and unmarried. Think of the questions that may have raced through Mary's mind. How would she tell her fiancé Joseph? What would he say? What would her family and neighbours think? When she managed to speak, "Mary asked the angel, 'How can this happen? I'm not even married!'" (v.34).

The angel's answer can be summed up in one word—God! The amazing thing is this answer was enough for Mary. Her strong faith in God caused her to sing praises and worship God. "With all my heart I praise the Lord; and I am glad because of God my Saviour. God cares for me, his humble

servant. From now on, all people will say God has blessed me" (vv. 46-48). Mary knew God was in control and that he would work out all the details. She responded as one who had learned to yield her life completely to God's care. We, too, like Mary, need to put our trust in God. We gain confidence knowing God is in control no matter how many unanswered questions we have.

Reflect

Are you inspired by Mary's faith in God? Does knowing God is in control calm your fears?

Respond

Pray and ask God to give you faith to trust him. Pray for a heart to worship God even when he does not reveal the answers to all your questions.

Father, you are in control of my life. Help me to always remember that when I am faced with situations I cannot understand.

DAY TWO: STAYING CONNECTED

Pray

Lord, help me not to lose sight of you no matter where I go.

Read

LUKE 2:41-50

Have you ever been out with a group of friends or with family members and become separated from them in a crowd? One Sunday afternoon following worship service, I was walking through the crowded church hallways with my youngest son, Jeremiah. He was holding my hand and walking proudly beside his daddy. At some point during our short journey, he let go of me and we became separated. When I discovered he was not with me, I panicked. It was a parent's worst nightmare. I had lost my child. I searched, but I couldn't find my son in any of the logical places. I kept telling myself I should have been more careful. Eventually, I retraced my steps and found little Jeremiah safe and sound.

Jesus' parents, Mary and Joseph, found themselves in a similar situation. They and their family, including Jesus, had journeyed from Nazareth to the annual Passover celebration in Jerusalem. When the festivities ended,

they headed back home. After travelling for a day, the couple realized Jesus was not with them. They assumed he was with their relatives and friends, but he was not. At some point, they had lost track of Jesus; they were separated from him. They had no clue where or at what point they had lost him. Worried, they went back to Jerusalem and found him three days later, listening and asking questions of the teachers in the temple.

Reflect

Have you ever felt like you have lost track of Jesus or that your relationship with him has become strained or distant? Think about how you can rekindle your relationship. Recall a time when you felt close to Jesus. Go back and seek after him as you did back then.

Respond

Ask God to help you be mindful of the times you let go of Jesus' hand.

Pray that you will walk close to Jesus from now on.

Lord, hold me close. Let nothing separate me from you and your love.

DAY THREE: JESUS – MORE THAN AN HISTORICAL FIGURE

Pray

God, open my eyes so I may see your redemptive work through Christ Jesus, your Son.

Read

LUKE 3:1-38

Who is Jesus and how can one verify what we have been told about him? Theologians and religious scholars often wrestle with these questions. Some scholars read Gospel writers like Luke and believe their accounts to be fictitious or larger-than-life stories about a man who lived more than 2,000 years ago. Others view Jesus as a good man or a prophet. Luke, however, wrote his account to tell us what God has done among his people through his Son, Jesus (Luke 1:1-4).

First, Luke provides the historical context surrounding Jesus by describing the work and ministry of John the Baptizer, the forerunner of Jesus. Isaiah, the prophet, prophesied John's role in preparing people's hearts for the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, hundreds of years before it occurred (Luke 3:4-6). Secondly, Luke allows us to see God affirming Jesus as God's Son when John baptizes Jesus and "A voice from heaven said, 'You are my own dear Son, and I am pleased with you'" (v.22).

Further, Luke presents the genealogy of Jesus and traces Jesus' roots "all the way back to Adam and then to God" (v.38). The Gospel writer Luke shows Jesus to be more than a good man or a prophet and even greater than John. Luke's account declares that Jesus is someone who "will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (v.16) because through Jesus "everyone will see the saving power of God" (v.6). We can trust the events.

Reflect

Have you ever been engaged in arguments that question the trustworthiness of the Bible? How do you respond to your detractors? Why do you think it was significant for Luke to include the genealogy of Jesus and to point out the prophecies in the Old Testament Scriptures concerning the coming of the Messiah?

Respond

As you study the Scriptures, ask God to always reveal Christ and to make you confident in the trustworthiness of God's Word.

Father, thank you for the Holy Spirit who inspired men of God to record your Word. Thank you, too, that your Word is forever true.

DAY FOUR: GOD OFFERS YOU MORE

Pray

Lord, let me not be tempted by the riches of this world, but let me hold fast to the treasure I find in your Word.

Read

LUKE 4:1-13

Would any of us settle for one room in a house when we could own a mansion? Or would we accept the sleeve of a shirt rather than have the whole garment? Quite often we are enticed with options that appear to make what we already have seem inadequate. When we succumb to such temptation, we eventually find that we have given up the good we had in our possession and settled for something trifling.

In this passage of Scripture, three times Jesus is tempted by the devil to use the authority God had given him to secure what appeared to be a better offer. At each and every point of temptation, Jesus focused on what the Scriptures taught about God. The devil was dangling before Jesus what seemed like opportunities to bring glory to himself. Yet, Jesus was aware that his Father had already glorified him and given him authority over everything on earth and in heaven.

We are often tempted with less than honourable ways to succeed. We may contemplate cutting corners on homework,

cheating on exams to guarantee a sure "A," entering into promiscuous, intimate relationships with a man or woman who promises to meet our needs, or even compromising our integrity in other areas of our lives simply to get ahead.

A wise man once said, "Don't give away what's in your hand, for something that is promised." Each time we yield to those temptations, we are saying "no" to the abundant life God offers. The Scriptures tell us that we can hardly imagine the good things that God has in store for us if we trust him (1 Corinthians 2:9). Why settle for less when God offers you more?

Reflect

Can you recall times in your life when you have settled for less than God's best? Do you believe that you're worthy of having more? Do you allow pressing short-term needs to cause you to make reckless decisions?

Respond

Ask God to give you the courage to wait on God's best and never to compromise.

Father, you always provide more than enough. Help me to see where I've been blinded by pride to accept less than your very best for me.

DAY FIVE: PRAYER – OUR DIVINE CONNECTION TO GOD

Pray

Lord God, help me to devote time to pray often, just as Jesus did.

Read

LUKE 5:12-16

Despite Jesus' hectic ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing, the Bible tells us that "Jesus would often go to some place where he could be alone and pray" (v.16). Jesus made personal prayer a priority. He took time out from his ministry to speak to God privately, to share his heart with God, and to listen to God's instructions to him.

We also have to do what it takes to spend time alone with God, our Heavenly Father. There will always be distractions that come our way, but the more we are able to spend time in prayer, the better we will be at learning to hear God's promptings and direction for our lives. Through Jesus, we have been given complete access to communicate with God at any time. What a privilege that is! God loves to listen to his people. We need not schedule an appointment to get the ear of God, nor will we find that he is ever too busy to receive us. Yet, sadly many of us find it difficult to devote ourselves to prayer.

What hinders us from drawing close to God? In order to be more consistent in setting aside time for prayer, we must take a closer look at how Jesus, God's Son, handled prayer.

Jesus consistently took time out to pray. He drew strength for his ministry by being in close communion with God. If we follow Jesus' example, we will be guided and directed by God's Spirit. We will not only be sharing our wants and needs with our Father, but we will opening the ears of our hearts as God speaks to us through his Word.

Reflect

How would you describe your prayer life? What things get in the way of you spending time in prayer? Do you often spend time simply listening to what God has to say?

Respond

Beginning next week, carve out daily time when you will meet with God in prayer.

Heavenly Father, help me to set aside time to spend with you in prayer so that I can learn to hear your voice.

DAY SIX: BUILDING A FIRM FOUNDATION

Pray

Lord, thank you for giving me your Word and the ability to listen and obey.

Read

LUKE 6:46-49

In this short parable, Jesus gives us the blueprint for building our lives. He tells us that the best way to stay connected to God is to know God's Word and obey it.

As young people, we often want to do what we want to do, when we want to do it. When we become Christians, however, God gives us a standard to follow. We are no longer living life for ourselves but rather for our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Just think of it like this. You're an architect building a house. You know the house will need a foundation, windows, doors, and a roof, but you have no specific plan on where to put each. What you need is a detailed blueprint to ensure your house is secure and it is built to specification. In the Christian's life, the Bible is that blueprint. It provides directions for us to

live a life that is fulfilled and centred on God's Word. If we are obedient to God's Word, the Holy Spirit promises to guide us in making right decisions, so that we can withstand any storms that come against us.

Reflect

We, as young Christians, have been taught to build our house on the rock. Jesus is that rock. How will our lives be different if we are obedient to God's Word? What are some of the foundational blocks found in God's Word that we will need to use?

Respond

Spend time reflecting on Jesus' teaching in this passage. Ask God to show you areas of your life's foundation that need to be repaired.

Thank you, Lord, for teaching me how to build my life on a firm foundation so that in hard times I will not be shaken. Help me to choose to do what you say is best for me.

DAY SEVEN: FINDING COMPASSION IN YOUR FAITH

Pray

God, so often I wonder why you would listen to my prayer since you know all about me. I love that you are compassionate and welcome me, anyway. Help me to encounter you in your Word today.

Read

LUKE 7:1-10

In this account we meet a man who needs a miracle from Jesus. As a Roman army official, he was part of a select group with orders to keep the Jewish people in control and submissive to the Roman government. The Jewish people despised their oppressors, but this officer was different. Unlike the typical Roman-Jewish relationship, this officer was a compassionate man who showed affection towards the Jews by building a place of worship for them (v.5). It is not surprising, then, that he would care deeply for his servant who was ill. Because of his commitment to others, we can surely understand why the Jewish leaders would implore Jesus saying, "This man deserves your help!" (v.4).

The Roman officer appealed to Jesus based on the authority and power he knew Jesus had and his request got Jesus' attention. The officer confessed he was not worthy to have Jesus come to him as he interceded on behalf of the sick servant, but he believed that with only a word, Jesus could make the servant well. After hearing such a declaration of faith, not only did Jesus heal the servant, but Jesus publicly commended the officer's faith.

Reflect

Do you find yourself acting with compassion in some areas of your life, but being selfish or thoughtless in others? Do you realise that you can still go to Jesus for help because he loves you so very much and is waiting to hear from you?

Respond

Own up to your sins and ask the Lord for forgiveness. Ask God to help you forgive yourself. As you read your Twitter or facebook feed today, pray for those who have shared their concerns with you.

Jesus, let me show compassion to the neediest around me. Give me a heart to intercede on their behalf so you would grant them mercy in their time of trouble.

DAY EIGHT: TRUSTING GOD'S CHARACTER

Pray

God, help me to trust your loving hands even when circumstances threaten to bring fear into my life.

Read

LUKE 8:22-25

Have you ever gone parasailing? I went parasailing for the first time while at a Young Life camp. A parachute attached to a cord pulls you at least 100 miles up into the air to glide as a motorboat carries you around the lake. I watched others who went ahead of me have a great time. But, as my brother and I began to rise in altitude, all I could think about was how long of a drop it would be if I fell from the harness. I thought about my inability to swim as I felt the wind push us back and forth. Fear consumed me the entire time and I was unable to enjoy the beautiful view. I didn't trust that the cord wouldn't break and send me falling. I didn't trust that the instructor was able to keep me safe, although he had taken hundreds of teens and adults on this ride. He was a trained specialist who had provided me with everything I needed to be safe. Based on this knowledge, I should have trusted him.

From this experience, I can certainly empathise with the disciples as they faced what they believed to be a clear and present danger on the lake. Here they were in a boat in the middle of a storm. Jesus was asleep and the boat started to sink. Terrified, they appealed to him for help. "Master, Master!

We are about to drown!" (v.24). Jesus woke up, ordered the storm to stop and chided the disciples for their lack of faith.

Earlier in their relationship, the disciples had witnessed the catch of a lifetime on the lake when, after a fruitless night of fishing, Jesus allowed them to fill their nets and boats with so much fish that their boats were about to sink. Why then did they not trust Jesus in this situation? Jesus always has our best interest in mind. Even when circumstances are chaotic, we can trust the character of God.

Reflect

Have you ever taken a moment to recall your encounters with God? Think of some specific examples. What have you learned about God's character?

Respond

Say out loud what God has been to you. Friend? Protector? Provider? Saviour? However you have experienced God, call him by those names and begin to praise God.

Jesus, help me to trust you. Help me to remember who you've been and what you've done in my life. Let me feel your presence even in my toughest storms, and let it bring me peace.

DAY NINE: GOD'S POWER IN US

Pray

Lord, remind us that you alone are the source of our strength and power.

Read

LUKE 9:1-17

In the opening verses of this passage, Jesus sends his twelve apostles to neighbouring towns and villages to “tell about God’s kingdom” (v.2) and he gives them power over demons and diseases. He equips them with nothing but the power to heal—no food, extra clothes, money, or walking stick. One can just imagine the group being nervous yet thrilled to be entrusted with such an awesome responsibility. When they return, the apostles share testimonies with Jesus and retreat with him to Bethsaida, expecting to get some rest. Instead they are met by more than 5,000 people who come to hear Jesus teach and, perhaps, perform miracles.

As the hours pass, it is obvious the people are hungry. The apostles propose to send the folks away, but Jesus tells them to take charge of the situation. They respond by saying what they have isn’t enough. How ironic that these 12 men who recently exercised power over demons and sickness, now

become confounded when faced with feeding hungry people. Later, when Jesus blesses the apostles’ “not enough” and feeds everybody with food to spare, we learn that God, by his grace, can provide more than enough for all his people. God’s provision has no limits. We need not view ourselves as limited in resources because it is never about our limits, but about God’s power at work in us. When we forget that God is indeed almighty, we place an overwhelming responsibility on our own shoulders. Our responsibility is to rely on God, the true source of our power.

Reflect

Do you move from resting confidently in God about “big issues” to relying on your own ingenuity for the “little things”? Does your faith waver if it appears God is not responding to your request? Do you try to jump in and fix things?

Respond

Carve out time to reminisce on how God cared for you when situations in your life seemed impossible. Spend time praising God for his love and kindness.

Lord, when challenges arise in my life, may the testimony of your goodness and your power always be fresh in my mind.

DAY TEN: LOVE REQUIRES ACTION

Pray

Lord Jesus, let us be guided by your example of selflessness and humility as we engage with those around us.

Read

LUKE 10:25-37

One would readily assume that the two people who held religious offices in the parable Jesus tells would rush to help a fellow Jew who had been badly beaten after falling victim to wayside robbers. Not so. The two turn away from the man, for whatever reason, and go about their normal routine. The Samaritan, who by virtue of his ethnicity is an enemy of the Jews, is moved to compassion to come to the aid of the wounded man. Compassion can be thought of as the felt need to treat someone with love, kindness, and gentleness in response to their pain or suffering. The Samaritan quickly acts to dress the man’s wounds, take him to an inn to recuperate, and pay for the man’s stay there.

Can you relate to this parable? Many of us live in large cities where we pass by hundreds (if not thousands) of people daily, some of whom desperately need our help. We very often empathise with their condition but never really take steps to do anything worthwhile. If we are to become “a real

neighbour” (v.36) to others, we must move beyond compassion to action or it becomes worthless. We must take the way we feel about something and make an effort to actively try to change it (not just post about it on Facebook, and then scroll on to something else). Jesus shows us, through the actions of the Samaritan, that race, ethnicity, religious preference, and other social stigmas should not be barriers when it comes to reaching out to others. We, as Christians, need to go the extra mile, lend a listening ear, skip a meal, if necessary, to provide food for someone else, and put the needs of others above our own needs, however painful it may be. It is at this point that we begin to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Reflect

Would you cross ethnic boundaries to help someone in need? What might someone learn about God from your actions?

Respond

Look for ways to actively serve others in your community. Sign up to be a volunteer in a local soup kitchen or similar facility.

Lord, give me a heart like yours. Fill me with compassion and let me live out the gospel of Christ by actively engaging those who need my help.

DAY ELEVEN: REAL POWER

Pray

All power and honour and glory belong only to you, O Lord.

Read

LUKE 11:14-23

We seem to use the word “power” very loosely—power lunches, power naps, power hungry. What does real power look like? In this passage, in a display of power given to him by God, Jesus casts out a demon from a man who was mute. Immediately the man was able to speak. You would think that there would be an instant prayer and praise service. Instead, Jesus’ critics griped, “He forces out demons by the power of Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons!” (v.15). The people didn’t deny Jesus was powerful; the problem was they thought he was working for the other team. They accused him of having evil powers. Yet, the power that they witnessed, the ability to exorcise a demon and make a mute man speak, was the very power Jesus wanted them to believe in.

Jesus shows them how wrong their argument is. “If Satan fights against himself, how can his kingdom last?” (v.18.) Additionally,

if Jesus was forcing out demons through Satan’s power, then it would be reasonable to assume that others who were also forcing out demons were doing it through evil forces. Jesus’ critics would never admit to that. Jesus was fighting against demons and performing miracles by the empowerment of the Spirit of God. It was a sign that God’s kingdom had come to the people of that generation and that Jesus had real power, the type that can only come from God.

Reflect

How do you use the power God gives you? Do you realise prayer is a powerful tool? How do you use it?

Respond

List and read those Scriptures that speak of the power God has given us. Commit some to memory. When you feel powerless in certain situations, ask God to bring those portions of his Word back to your memory.

God, you have placed your power within me. Help me to use it wisely.

DAY TWELVE: THE PERFECT DAD

Pray

Heavenly Father, help us to banish worry from our minds, and rely on you to meet our needs.

Read

LUKE 12:22-32

In the preceding verses, Jesus teaches about a wealthy man whose barns are bursting with grain. Rather than sharing with the less fortunate, the man worries about where to store the overflow and decides to build bigger barns, but he dies suddenly leaving it all behind. In today’s passage, Jesus reinforces this lesson with his disciples, telling them that they need not worry about material things. Worry accomplishes nothing. It actually hinders faith. Using practical examples, Jesus illustrates how God, our Father, takes good care of nature and suggests that God will be even more generous in meeting the needs of those who are made in his image. In each example, Jesus reiterates how much God values people.

All of us have needs. Jesus was not condemning us for having needs, but when we focus on gratifying those needs over seeking after God, we sacrifice fellowship with our

Heavenly Father. People often worry because they do not see themselves as having much value to God, and therefore feel unworthy of his care. Jesus gently reminds us that we should have faith in God’s ability to take care of us, and believe that God will do as he promises. Despite our failures or shortcomings, our relationship as children of God makes us legitimate heirs of God’s blessings and the recipients of God’s undeserved kindness.

Reflect

You are valuable to God. God loves you and cares about you very much. Visualise God taking care of you. What does that look like?

Respond

Ask God to help you trust in his love for you.

Father, you know all my needs. Help me to surrender them to you and to trust you to lovingly provide for me.

DAY THIRTEEN: NOT BY WORKS

Pray

God, may your Spirit constantly remind me of your grace toward me.

Read

LUKE 13:1-17

Jesus presents the gospel message to an audience of regular folks as well as the religious leaders in the synagogue. The message is the same for both groups: everyone needs to repent so their sins can be forgiven. God loves us deeply and is willing to forgive us and extend mercy if we repent. To reinforce this lesson, Jesus describes a scene in which a tree has not produced any fruit. The vineyard owner is ready to chop the tree down, but the gardener begs for more time so the tree can be fertilised, avoid destruction, and have another chance at bearing fruit. This is very much like God who is merciful and allows us a second chance. But, we are called to bear fruit and to serve God. Our time to do that is now. We can't do it on our own, but through God's undeserved kindness toward us.

Jesus was at odds with the religious leaders who held on to the law tightly, even if it was to the detriment of the people the law was supposed to serve. A woman who had a demonic, crippling disease for 18 years is in the temple on the Sabbath

to worship. She is totally bent over because of her disease. Jesus calls her to him, places his hands on her, and heals her, causing an argument to break out between Jesus and the man who is in charge of the synagogue.

While the man argues, "Each week has six days when we can work. Come and be healed on one of those days, but not on the Sabbath" (v.14), Jesus, the merciful saviour, overrules that and the woman and the people rejoice because of God's goodness. There is no greater joy than knowing God saves by grace and not our works!

Reflect

Jesus says that the religious leaders would untie their animals and give them water on the Sabbath; how ironic that they would keep the sick woman bound another day. Do you see instances where religious rules keep people bound and prevent them from enjoying God's blessings?

Respond

If there is sin in your life that causes you to feel alienated from Jesus, ask God, by his Spirit, to draw you close to him so you can serve God with gladness.

Father, let me use my time wisely that I will bring forth good fruit while there is still time.

DAY FOURTEEN: YOU ARE INVITED

Pray

Jesus, open our ears to hear your invitation, and our hearts to accept it graciously.

Read

LUKE 14:15-24

Jesus tells a parable in response to a dinner guest's declaration that "the greatest blessing of all is to be at the banquet in God's kingdom!" (v.15). In Jesus' parable, we meet people who previously accepted an invitation to a banquet, but at the last minute ask to be excused. It appears these invitees make light of the honour associated with the invitation, and opt to perform routine tasks rather than attend. The host becomes angry and tells his servant, "Go as fast as you can to every street and alley in town! Bring in everyone who is poor or paralysed or blind or lame" (v.21) and he continues to invite people from the back roads until his house is full.

When the host begins to fill those spots with people who would not normally merit an invitation, Jesus seems to be challenging us to redefine our understanding of who is invited to this feast. God, our gracious host, invites everyone to feast with him.

Social status, ethnicity, political correctness, family income, intellectual ability—none of that matters—God simply says, "Come!"

Are we too preoccupied with doing what we think is important that we decline the invitation to commune with God?

Will we miss the opportunity of being with God because we erroneously believe God's invitation will be available forever? Perhaps, as we accept God's invitation, we will graciously open our hearts to embrace those among us who are often excluded and share with them the message of the kingdom of God.

Reflect

What activities often take you away from spending time with God or furthering the work of God's kingdom?

Respond

Reorder your priorities so that you spend time on what matters to God.

Jesus, move my heart with compassion to seek those outcasts around me and invite them to experience the fullness of life you offer.

DAY FIFTEEN: LOST AND FOUND

Pray

Lord God, may we always acknowledge your love and celebrate your acts of kindness toward us.

Read

LUKE 15:1-32

Jesus offers the Pharisees, and other critics, three parables which highlight God's extravagant love and God's willingness to rescue those who are lost. In explaining the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus says that there is much celebration in heaven when one sinner "turns to God" (v.7). In the second parable, Jesus tells about a woman who is eager to celebrate after finding a precious coin she had lost. Yet again, the coin is likened to a sinner who turns to God and who causes the angels in heaven to rejoice. In the final parable, we see a joyous celebration after a wayward son returns penitently to his father's home.

We may look at this last parable and be appalled at all the wrong this young man did. We should take note because it gives us a glimpse into our Father's heart. It lets us know that no matter how grave our wrongdoing, God is willing to throw his arms around us when we acknowledge our mistakes and turn back to him. Some people may be jealous when God pardons us from sin and offers us undeserved kindness. When we are the recipient of such love, we cannot help but celebrate in the presence of such a merciful God.

The Pharisees were short-sighted and could not see beyond the faults of the tax collectors and sinners, so they grumbled at Jesus' welcoming attitude toward them. When we, like the Pharisees, are judgmental, or try to earn God's love only by doing good deeds, we miss out on the incredible gift of God's unmerited favour. We must tell the good news Jesus taught, so that others may be rescued and share in the incomparable celebration and joy that occurs each time a sinner turns to God.

Reflect

Do you know people around you who need to learn of God's great love for them? Are there ways that you might share with them how you have experienced God's love?

Respond

Take time to celebrate God's undeserved love and kindness in your life.

Jesus, thank you for rescuing me. Give me opportunities to tell others about your love and mercy, so that they can turn to you.

DAY SIXTEEN: WHAT'S HIDING IN YOUR HEART

Pray

Search my heart, Lord. Take away greed, selfishness, and malice. Remove whatever is not pleasing to you, and give me a pure heart.

Read

LUKE 16:10-17

Sometimes we justify our actions to rid our conscience of guilt. We borrow a pen from someone and we don't return it. We don't think of it as stealing because we think, "It's only a pen." Or maybe we watch a few seconds of a steamy DVD knowing full well we shouldn't. Although our conscience nags us, we console ourselves that it wasn't wrong because we didn't watch the whole video, just a few seconds.

When we fall into a pattern of justifying the wrong we do, our hearts turn away from God. Our hearts, as it were, become filled with secret compartments in which we try to hide our motives and thoughts from God. Jesus held up the actions of the Pharisees as an example of greed and selfishness. They made themselves look important while disobeying God's commands. They had put much emphasis on worthless, material things instead of what mattered most to God.

Justifying our wrongdoing may make us feel good temporarily, but it doesn't make our hearts pure. God looks beyond what we profess to be, and searches out our motives. A person whose heart is pure can be trusted to do the right thing at all times, even when no one is looking. It is that person who pleases God.

Reflect

Have you ever justified your wrongdoing? How did it make you feel? How do your motives define your character?

Respond

When you are in doubt of doing wrong, check your motives. Do they line up with the Word of God? If not, refrain from that action.

Father, create in me a pure heart. Help me to see things the way you see them, and be unselfish in my motives.

DAY SEVENTEEN: FORGIVE, AGAIN AND AGAIN

Pray

Lord, give us courage to lovingly correct those who sin, and give us the heart to forgive those who sin against us.

Read

LUKE 17:3-5

Often in his sermons, Jesus speaks of relationships between people. Here, Jesus touches on the topic of forgiveness. He commands us to be mindful of ourselves when engaging with others who have committed wrong against us, and to address such wrongdoing in a timely and effective manner. Jesus also commands us to forgive the offender when he or she apologises.

It is interesting how we, as Christians, interact with each other. We laugh together and pray together, yet we also engage in behaviours that keep us apart. When conflict arises, some of us do not take the time to address the offense or grievance. Later, the lingering side effects of that hurt manifest in ugly or unpleasant ways.

When we correct the one who is in error and allow them the opportunity to seek forgiveness, we are strengthening

the body of Christ. However, when we harbour negative feelings towards people who have hurt us and don't address the situation appropriately, we create a cycle of hurt and an avenue for separation.

Forgiveness is a very important lesson we must learn if we desire to serve God. Jesus tells us we must be willing to forgive the wrongdoer as many times as they "say they are sorry" (v.3). It is not easy to adopt such an attitude, but it is a requirement if we profess to love and serve God.

Reflect

Think about wrongs you have committed. Remind yourself of how God has graciously forgiven you.

Respond

If anyone has committed an offense against you that you have yet to forgive, pray daily for that individual and ask God to give you a forgiving heart.

Lord, you have forgiven me countless times for the wrongs I've done. Help me to forgive those who have done me wrong.

DAY EIGHTEEN: A VALUABLE LESSON

Pray

Lord, help me to put following Jesus above all else.

Read

LUKE 18:18-30

A rich man approaches Jesus and asks what he must do to inherit eternal life. When Jesus points him to the commandments, he replies that he has kept them all ever since he was a young man. As we read the rest of the narrative, it appears the man is not just rich, but very wealthy. Why, then, is his life unfulfilled?

Jesus challenges the wealthy man to sell everything he has, donate the proceeds to the poor, and then follow him. Unfortunately, the man is unwilling to carry out Jesus' commands because he has placed more trust in his wealth rather than God. In his response to the man, Jesus teaches us a valuable lesson. Blindly following the letter of the law and not adopting the spirit of the law is not what God expects of us. God expects that we will punctuate our lives with grace and kindness, that we will do what God commands, and that

we will take care of those who are less fortunate than we are. We also learn that having wealth or prestige does not guarantee living a fulfilled life.

Wealth can be a major problem for us, if we are not careful. If we pursue wealth with the wrong motives, we may lose sight of what is most valuable – having a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reflect

Are there things you find difficult to walk away from in order to serve God? In what ways do you need to value your relationship with Jesus more?

Respond

Ask God to help you see the amazing value of a relationship with Jesus.

Father, let me not be caught up in the trap of running after wealth or power. Let me seek after something of greater value – a relationship with your Son, Jesus.

DAY NINETEEN: CHANGED

Pray

Lord, let me stand in your holy presence. Change my heart, Lord, even as you changed Zacchaeus'.

Read

LUKE 19:1-10

Luke's account of the story of Zacchaeus, the curious tax collector, resonates with many of us. Which of us has not been, at some point in our lives, a curiosity seeker? The wily tax collector, being a short man, climbs a tree in order to get a good view of Jesus as he passes along. Jesus looks up and sees the tax man, and tells him, "Zacchaeus, hurry down! I want to stay with you today" (v.5).

Amazing! Would you have been ready to have Jesus as a guest on such short notice? Zacchaeus, however, was not fazed because he "hurried down and gladly welcomed Jesus" (v.6). The onlookers grumble because they know this rich tax man is a cheat, and they wonder why Jesus would even think of going to his house (v.7).

Yet, in the presence of Jesus, hearts are changed, and lives made new. Zacchaeus experiences a radical change. He offers to care for the poor by donating half of his property (v.8) and he promises to restore to those he has cheated, four times as much as he has taken from them. Jesus commends Zacchaeus and tells him that he and his family are saved and that he is "a true son of Abraham" (v.9).

Reflect

Are there times when you have been willing to go to any length to get in the presence of Jesus?

If so, what has it been like? What changes take place in your attitude toward others when you fellowship deeply with Jesus?

Respond

Zacchaeus welcomed Jesus gladly to his house. Are there places in your heart where Jesus is not welcome? Are there places that need a makeover before you are willing to invite Jesus in?

Lord Jesus, I yield my heart to you. Remove anything that would hinder me from welcoming you wholeheartedly.

DAY TWENTY: WHAT REALLY MATTERS

Pray

Lord, help me focus on what really matters, and not be concerned with dead issues that take me away from your life-giving Word.

Read

LUKE 20:27-40

The religious leaders were always trying to trip up Jesus in some theological argument, but they never succeed. Here, the Sadducees, who do not believe in the resurrection of the dead, and who think they are clever, pose a question to Jesus. If a woman marries seven brothers in succession and they all die, when the woman dies, and they are all resurrected, whose wife will she be?

Why would that be important to them if they don't believe in the resurrection? Jesus sees through their deceptiveness and responds that marriage is for this life only, not the afterlife in heaven. To prove there is resurrection of the dead, Jesus points the Sadducees to their ancestor, Moses, who said after his burning bush experience, "The Lord is the God worshiped by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (v.37). If these three patriarchs, who died before Moses was born, are worshiping God, then they must be alive in heaven. Jesus raps up his

argument and says, "So the Lord isn't the God of the dead, but of the living. This means that everyone is alive as far as God is concerned." (v.38).

Jesus wants us to focus on those things that bring life to our lives—whether it's a discussion on Bible study, or the rebuke of a mentor, or the prodding of the Holy Spirit. Let's not waste time on irrelevant stuff that won't bring us closer to God. Let's keep the main thing the main thing and focus on Jesus and his Word. That is what really matters.

Reflect

Have you ever been involved in arguments with unbelievers who don't accept the truth of God's Word? Do you sometimes struggle to explain God's Word even though you know it is true?

Respond

Seek out a good Bible study that teaches you how to defend the truth of God's Word. Study the Scriptures on your own as well, and pray for the help of the Holy Spirit.

Lord, renew my mind so I can boldly say that knowing you and serving you is all that really matters.

DAY TWENTY-ONE: GIVING TO GOD

Pray

Lord, everything I have is yours. Help me to willingly offer it to you.

Read

LUKE 21:1-4, 12:16-23, 34; MATTHEW 6:3, 4

How we handle our finances speaks volumes about us. As Christians, we often praise God for his blessings, but at the same time we are sometimes reluctant about giving back to God in tithes and offerings. We hold on to our money for the proverbial “rainy day,” as if God is not capable of providing for us.

In his sermons, Jesus speaks a lot about money. Jesus warns us about greed (12:16-21), about becoming preoccupied with material things (12:22, 23), and he even tells us how we can bless the poor with our gifts (Matthew 6:3, 4). In this passage, Jesus praises a poor widow who places a few cents into the offering box in the temple. From our vantage point we may wonder why such an offering was noteworthy, especially when there were “rich people tossing their gifts into the

offering box” (21:1). Jesus explains that the rich gave “what they didn’t need” (21:4), while the woman, out of her scarce resources, gave all she had.

Our wealth is never an indictment against us, but Jesus points out that it is the spirit in which we give and our attitude toward money (12:34) that reveals what is truly in our hearts.

Reflect

How do you give? Is giving to God a priority for you? Do you give to God only after you have fully satisfied your own needs? Do you have to be coerced into giving, or do you arrogantly “toss” your gift in the offering box?

Respond

Pray and ask God to help you give generously to him, not just of your finances, but of every area of your life.

Lord God, whatever my resources, let me hold nothing back from you.

DAY TWENTY-TWO: A TIME OF PREPARATION

Pray

God, prepare my heart to trust you more and seek your wisdom above all else.

Read

LUKE 22:1-38

When Jesus shared his final Passover meal with his disciples, Jesus was preparing himself and his disciples for what would become God’s deliverance of his people from sin, through the death and resurrection of Jesus at Calvary. The disciples did not fully understand this. Nor did they understand when Jesus taught them that the greatest among them would be the one who served others. They had no idea that Jesus himself would be the greatest model of this.

Jesus taught us, by example, that to truly prepare for life’s challenges, we need to be in constant communion with God. Several times the Scriptures cite Jesus withdrawing from preaching and teaching to be alone in prayer. On the night of his great anguish and pain, Jesus went out as usual to pray; to spend time with God in order to prepare himself to face betrayal, torture, and, ultimately, death on a cross.

In our own moments of testing, we will find, like Simon Peter did, that we will not be victorious if we rely on our own strength and resolve. If we commit to spending time with God, he will prepare us to successfully handle whatever challenges come our way.

Reflect

Do you seek God’s wisdom and guidance daily to meet life’s challenges? How might you prepare yourself to hear God speak to you?

Respond

Ask God to prepare your heart to trust God no matter what lies ahead. Begin by spending time in prayer, reading God’s Word, and listening to the Holy Spirit.

Father, thank you for allowing me to experience your presence and power as I spend time in communion with you.

DAY TWENTY-THREE: TRADING PLACES

Pray

Lord Jesus, thank you for taking my place on the cross of Calvary.

Read

LUKE 23:13-25

Jesus led a sinless life. He preached the gospel, healed the sick, and spoke words of hope and encouragement to those who were disenfranchised. Jesus offered a different kind of message from the usual temple talk, because Jesus only spoke words which were given to him by God.

Despite the trumped up charges that the religious leaders brought against Jesus, Pilate could not find any just cause to have Jesus killed and wanted to release him. Yet, God's plan of salvation was already in motion. The mob, incited by the religious leaders, screamed for Jesus' execution and the release of Barabbas, a violent prisoner. Imagine trading Jesus, the healer, for Barabbas, the murderer.

When Jesus was nailed to the cross, he was not just trading places with Barabbas, he was dying for a world of sinners who had defied God's laws, and who should justly have been punished. God sent Jesus to earth for this purpose—to be a substitute to receive our punishment—to die so that we might receive eternal life. Jesus lay down his life willingly, according to God's plan. It is through Jesus' obedience to God, and the shedding of his blood, that we see how undeserving we are and how rich God is in love and mercy toward us.

Reflect

Reflect on Jesus' obedience to God. Are there things God has asked you to do? Have you been obedient?

Respond

Ask the Lord to help you live a life that honours God.

Father, I am amazed that you loved me so much that you would send your Son, Jesus, to die in my place. Thank you.

DAY TWENTY-FOUR: WHERE IS GOD WHEN WE HURT?

Pray

Lord God, help us to recognize you are always present with us, even when we hurt.

Read

LUKE 24:13-35

Disappointment, discouragement, and hurt are all seasons in our lives. Quite often, the more we hurt, the more we doubt that God is always present.

The disciples who were walking toward the village of Emmaus were most likely experiencing deep feelings of loss and discouragement as they mourned the death of Jesus, their master and friend, who had been crucified. They were so caught up in their circumstances that they failed to recognize Jesus when he began to walk alongside them. Even when Jesus reminded them that the Scriptures had foretold that those things would happen to the Messiah, the two still did not realise that they were indeed walking and talking with Jesus.

No doubt many of us have experienced the loss of a loved one, the death of a relationship, or the pain of suffering. The struggle to make sense of these experiences is often overwhelming, and we are forced to cry out, "God, where are you?" Has God abandoned us? No, he walks beside us through every difficulty we face. Could it be that, like these two disciples, we fail to recognise God's presence in the

midst of our grief, hurt, and disappointment because we are not expecting God to be there? The psalmist tells us "God is our mighty fortress, always ready to help in times of trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

This is a promise we must remember and believe. God walks very closely to us in the moment of our greatest need, and he is always ready to help us. When we take time out in the midst of our suffering to fellowship with God, we will experience peace in our hearts, and we will recognize that God is there with us all the time.

Reflect

How have you seen God show up during the difficult times in your life? What lessons have you learned from these experiences? How do you handle periods of disappointment now?

Respond

Ask God to help you recognise that he is close to you during times of your greatest need. Find ways to share this thought with others who are experiencing difficulty in their lives.

God, thank you for constantly walking beside me, even when I don't feel you are there. Remind me that no matter how dismal my circumstances may seem, you are always with me.

DAY TWENTY-FIVE: CALLED TO SERVE

Pray

Lord, help me to respond to your call with passion and serve you with all my heart.

Read

LUKE 4:18-19

Jesus stands in the synagogue in Nazareth to deliver a sermon; he is given the book of Isaiah to read. He opens it and reads, "The Lord's Spirit has come to me, because he has chosen me to tell the good news to the poor..." (v.18). He reads the rest of the passage and sits down. While the audience is still looking at Jesus, he tells them that the words he has read have now come true.

Do they get it? This is prophecy being fulfilled. There is no more mystery. Jesus stands up and stakes his claim on what his life's purpose is. Jesus knew why he was called, what he was called to do, what it would require, and what the result of his calling would be. It was a call to service – service that would ultimately cost him his life, but he was anointed by God to do it. He was unveiling his purpose to the people in the synagogue. Yet, they didn't get it because their eyes and ears were closed.

Are our eyes and ears open to God's call on our lives? Will we be bold enough to tell the good news to those who desperately need to hear that God loves them? Will we tell them that this can be the year to receive their deliverance?

Reflect

What has God called you to do? If you are unsure, are you willing to spend time in prayer and God's Word until your calling becomes clear?

Respond

Begin to seek out opportunities where you can use your gifts as you fulfil your calling.

Lord Jesus, just as you were sure about your purpose, let me be sure of what you want me to do. Teach me to do it in obedience and with gladness

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