



**THE
FIRST** **40** **DAYS**

WRITTEN AND PUBLISHED BY MEMBERS OF

TRUE VINE
MINISTRIES

Getting 2019 off to a GOD start

Happy New Year,

Can you believe it, it is 2019? God has been gracious to us and we owe God praise for continuing to be so awesome toward us as a body of believers. I can not wait to see what He has in store for us this year.

I believe the first 40 days of 2019 are important to God's purpose for the entire year. I want to get off to a God start. Yep, you read that right, a God start and not just a good start. To ensure a God start, there is a need that we all must be God focused and thusly this devotion you have in your hands has been produced.

I hope it blesses you. I hope you use it every day. I hope you have encounters with God. Please, do not let this be the only resource you are using to connect with God. This is not intended to replace any disciplines you already have in place, but I do hope this augments what you are already doing.

I would like to thank those who helped me to write these devotionals. I appreciate, in alphabetical order: Christie Gaskins, Natasha Jackson, Veronica Johnson, Jovon McLean, Rose Perry, Terrance Phillips, Elle Roe, and Toni Stewart.

Each day's devotional in this publication has a scripture, some author's insight and a prayer. You have the opportunity to turn each devotional into further study of the word of God. There is plenty of room each day to dig deeper into God's mind on the subjects we were inspired to share with you.

So once again, Happy New Year and happy reading as well.

In His Service,

Ernest W. Jones

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Senior Pastor

Scripture Translation abbreviations key:

NLT = New Living Translation KJV = King James Version

NKJV = New King James Version NASB = New American Standard Bible

Day one

Genesis

Scripture reference: *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*

Genesis 1:1 (KJV)

Every great beginning, every genesis, is dependent upon the presence of God. A genesis is defined as the origin or mode of formation of something. If God is in the formation of anything, He guarantees the sustainment and success of that particular thing. The reason why the earth still spins on its axis and has not fallen into an abyss somewhere is because God Himself is the Creator and Sustainer of the earth and whatever God does, He does well.

As I start out in a new year, a new project, a new venture, or anything new, I want God to be there “in the beginning”. I have heard too many people regret starting something without the blessing of God from the beginning. When the sky starts falling in, that is the wrong time to remember you should have sought the Lord about your endeavors.

Maybe you are beginning something new today, or thinking about starting something new. It is vital to ensure God is engaged in the project with you. How do we go about ensuring God is in it? Well, we should do nothing without seeking His participation. The scripture written in Proverbs 3:6 tells us that in all our ways we should acknowledge Him. To acknowledge Him means to make sure God is in the loop. Let God know what is going on and ask Him if He is with it. If He is not, refuse to proceed. Why is this so important? Well the rest of the Proverb says, if we acknowledge Him, He will direct our path. With God giving us direction, we have every reason to expect success because God does not do failure.

Today is a genesis. A new start. A new beginning. Before we step fully into it, let's use today wisely. Let's ask God to be with us from the very beginning, realizing we will have no success if we proceed on our own.

Prayer: Our heavenly Father, we come to You in the name of Jesus. Let today be a day of a fresh start and a new beginning that You, oh Lord, are fully and actively engaged in. Direct our paths at every point and show us clearly Your will from beginning to the end. We humbly submit to You as Omnipotent and Omniscient in all things. We anticipate great things are coming into our future because You are there with us from the beginning. We boldly give You praise for the best days of our lives are still ahead of us, and with thankfulness we offer You this prayer in Jesus' name, amen.

E. Jones

Day two

Look up first

Scripture reference: *My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.*

Psalm 5:3 (KJV)

It is so easy to start our days without much thought because life can become routine and monotonous. This makes it very difficult sometimes to handle the unexpected things that can occur throughout our day. It becomes so easy to get thrown off by the least of things that can happen, like the coffee pot not working, the car not starting, traffic delays, etc. There is a way, however, for us to be a little more prepared for the unexpected, not just in our day-to-day activities but in our lives as a whole. That is by doing what the psalmist does in today's scripture – looking up.

Starting your day looking to God in prayer has a way of setting the tone for your day. When we acknowledge the Source from which we are even allowed to behold a new day, we have created a consciousness to His presence. Prayer is not just for letting our requests be made known unto God. It is our way of acknowledging the Sovereignty of God and communicating our need for His presence in our lives. God wants to commune with us. The all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-seeing God wants to spend time with us. He actually awaits the opportunity to hear from and speak to us.

Looking to God at the beginning of our day will give us somewhat of an advantage against the unexpected occurrences that come to throw us off and distract us. Since God is the One who made the day (Psalm 118:24), He is fully aware of what is going to occur in and throughout the day. We are all guilty of starting our days with a thoughtless routine, so this is simply an exhortation to give Our Father and Creator the first-fruits of our day by taking the time to look to Him first.

Prayer: Father God, You are more than deserving of my time and attention. Please forgive me for being so busy at times that I don't pause to acknowledge You. I will do as the psalmist and look to You first, not just with a request but to honor You and spend time in Your presence. Thank You, Jesus, for being our example of this powerful practice of God's presence. Thank You, Father, for hearing my prayer, amen.

Veronica Johnson

Day three

Breathe

Scripture reference: *Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."*

I Corinthians 6:19-20 (NKJV)

You cannot pour from an empty vessel. With all the busyness of life it is easy to lose ourselves in the commotion. We care for our families, we throw ourselves into our careers and we commit our talents to serve in the church. In all the chaos and running around we often forget to breathe. We forget that we need to rest and recharge. The world will not stop turning if you take a moment to pause. Eating healthy, exercising regularly, finding a safe space to process your thoughts and emotions and having an active prayer life are all important to an overall healthy lifestyle. Your body should glorify God and therefore should be cherished as a most precious gift.

Scriptures tell us that even Jesus took time away from His ministry and withdrew from the crowd and His disciples to pray (Luke 5:16, Matthew 14:23). Jesus understood the importance of self-care and constant communion with the Father for success in His ministry. Daily devotions, prayer and worship help to keep the heart merry and in alignment with God's will for our lives. Time with God refuels us and keeps the fire of passion for our purpose burning. We cannot hear God clearly if we are muddled by stress, anxiety and unrest.

I challenge you to begin each morning in stillness. Before your feet touch the floor, close your eyes and breathe. Let God's light and grace wash over you. Inhale, letting God's Spirit fill you to the point of overflow. Invite Him into each moment of your day. Keep space for God and He will sustain you. Seek God daily and find clarity, understanding and freedom to exhale.

Prayer: Lord, I know that I have a difficult time stopping to take care of myself. My body and my mind become so encumbered with daily living that I forget to breathe. You said that all who are weary and burdened can come to You and You will give them rest (Matthew 11:28). Here I am Lord, tired and worn. I cast my cares on You and I enter into Your rest. Help me to care for Your temple so that my life may glorify You. Thank You for being so faithful and holding me in Your strength, in Jesus' name, amen.

Christie Gaskins

Day four

What are you doing here?

Scripture reference: *There he came to a cave, where he spent the night. But the LORD said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

1 Kings 19:9 (NLT)

In I Kings chapter 19, Elijah was running from Jezebel's threat to kill him. He believed her and was afraid, so he ran into the wilderness. He traveled all day, and finally sat under a juniper tree and asked God to let him die. He went to sleep there and twice an angel had him get up and eat food that would sustain him enough for him to travel 40 days/nights to Mount Sinai. When he got there he found a cave and spent the night in the cave. The Lord asked Elijah, "What are you doing here?" Elijah offered his reason, but it didn't move God. God asked him again (after having him stand before Him on the mountain): "What are you doing here?" Again, God wasn't stirred by his excuse and told him to go back the way he came and gave him further instructions.

The part in that whole chapter that really jumped out to me was when God asked Elijah: "What are you doing here?" It appeared to be an unlikely place for someone of Elijah's caliber. He was a prophet of God who surely shouldn't have run from the menacing Jezebel. I believe God (rhetorically) wanted to know WHAT was he thinking running from her? I believe God is asking some of us the same question: What are you doing here?

- WHY have you run away from someone who made a threat or declaration contrary to the Word of God over your life?
- WHY have you retreated to the wilderness in fear?
- WHY are you living beneath your privilege?
- WHY are you not understanding and living according to Kingdom principles?
- WHY are you satisfied with where you are?
- WHY believe your enemy (who is a known liar), instead of your Father who cannot lie?

Prayer: Father, thank You for every provision for life and godliness. Thank You for helping us to stand strong in You. For those of us who have been intimidated by "Jezebels", help us to get up, shake ourselves off, get out of the cave, and go back the way we came, in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Rose Perry

Day five

Be still, wait and trust!

Scripture reference: *Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.*

Jeremiah 17:7-8 (KJV)

To be still is not something that is easily done. It takes great patience and intestinal fortitude. One must have the will to do what needs to be done for the greater good and not do what he wants to do for himself. Being still takes great skill to be done without the issue of frustration taking root.

As being still is taking place, we are in a figurative waiting room. Waiting is good as long as we don't have to wait too long. When the time seems to have surpassed what we think is extreme, we begin to get impatient, causing our posture to be compromised. We forget who we are and to Whom we belong.

As we sit still and wait, thoughts may fill our minds that are contrary to the Word of God. We have to take control of what comes into our minds. This is done by asking questions like: What am I filling my mind with as I wait? What am I allowing to filter into my eye gates and get into my ears? What is filling my heart? Who is in my ears?

Finally, trust is a huge thing when we are waiting on God. It is so important to trust Him with every issue, just as you trust the bed that you lay lifeless in at night. How many times have you checked the bed posts and the frame prior to laying down? How many times have you checked the foundation on your home to make sure the foundation would not fall in as you sleep? Just as you trust these worldly things that man made, you must trust that "GOD WILL PROVIDE" just as He says He would. Happy, fortunate, to be envied is the man who trusts in the Lord. Why? Because God will come through and prove He was worth the wait.

Prayer: Dear Lord: We thank You for All that You have done to bring us to the knowledge of who You are God. We want to be ready and obedient when it is time to sit and wait with full trust in You Lord. We love You and want to be pleasing in Your sight. We love and honor You with all of our hearts, in Jesus' matchless name we pray, amen.

Natasha Jackson

Day six

Cultivating a heart toward God, always!

Scripture reference: *And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.*

Jeremiah 29:13 (KJV)

God is asking for people who will set their hearts to seek Him wholeheartedly. God is seeking for people who will not allow distractions, emotions, and the cares of life to stop or even hinder their pursuit of Him. He is looking for people who will allow their hearts to be open completely to Him and give Him Lordship over every area of their hearts.

So, what does a heart for God look like? The only way to find the answer is by searching God's word. From the text Jeremiah was clear that when we search for God with our whole heart, we will find Him. A heart for God is a repenting heart. In Joel 2:13 (Amplified Bible) it says: Rip your heart to pieces [in sorrow and contrition] and not your garments. Now return [in repentance] to the Lord your God, For He is gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness [faithful to His covenant with His people] And He relents [His sentence of] evil [when His people genuinely repent].

A heart for God is a heart full of love for God. In Luke 10:27 (KJV) Jesus says: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.

A heart for God is a heart that is guarded against outside contaminations. In Proverbs 4:23 (NLT) it says: Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.

Finally, we must keep our hearts pliable and not allow hardness or stoniness to creep in. We do these things by continually staying in the Word of God. We give ourselves to prayer continually. We spend time in worship and fellowship with God daily. We stay in fellowship with other believers as often as we can assemble to gain strength from one another. When we do these things we will experience divine encounters with God more frequently than just at a retreat or at church. We will see the power of God manifest in our lives every day.

Prayer: Father, in the name of Jesus, we want to have hearts that are unmovable because we know the God we serve. Amen.

Jovon McLean

Day seven

Staying on track

Scripture reference: *Look straight ahead, and fix your eyes on what lies before you.*

Proverbs 4:25 (NLT)

Just because something is good doesn't make it God's will for you. One of the common devises that the enemy uses to keep us distracted is to keep us busy. Not only does he present us with things that keep us busy, but he will keep us busy with doing good things that may not necessarily be God things...for you.

Staying on track will require that you continuously look straight ahead. Know exactly what your assignments are and stay on that track. Don't get carried away with every good idea or good deed that comes your way. This is not to say that you cannot offer contributions, but you cannot turn completely away from your assignment and move toward the assignment of another.

Your eyes must remain fixed on what lies ahead of you if you are going to stay on track. One whose eyes are fixed is one whose eyes are fastened securely in position. They do not have wondering eyes for the latest new gimmick in the Christian arena or the latest prophet that comes to town, their eyes are completely fixed to the path that God has laid before them and that is what you must do as well, if you want to stay on track.

So, here is the question, are the things that you are currently involved in good things or God things? If your answer to this question is "good things" and not "God things", then I encourage you to get back on track. God is ready to direct you to His divine will for your life.

Prayer: Father, Your wisdom to plan, create and execute is far beyond my understanding, but yet You have so graciously included me in Your plans. You have designed a path for me to take that is graced with provision, wisdom, Your will and those that are assigned to assist me on this path. Thank You for giving me the tenacity to stay fixed on the path that You have carved out for me. It is with Your strength, grace and wisdom that I am able to firmly be planted in the path that was assigned to me. I claim all these things in the name of Jesus, amen.

Toni Stewart

Day eight

Determined to forgive

Scripture reference: *If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you.*

Matthew 6:14(NLT)

Have you ever had to forgive someone who has wronged you? Maybe it was minor and understandable or maybe it was something major and hard to deal with. The minor things we seem to forgive and move on quickly. When it is more serious, we may feel like we have been so wronged that we have a right to not forgive. And because of the wrong that has been done to us, we want revenge. We want them to pay for the wrong they did to us.

Forgiving someone who has hurt you takes time. However, if we truly want to be free of the hurt, the best place for us to turn is to the Word of God. Sure, that may not be our first thought but it is the best place for us to turn.

It is important that we forgive. It does not matter how hurtful the action may have been, if we don't forgive then how can we ask God to forgive us? It will take you having faith in God that He is able and that He will take away the pain of the hurt. There is a common saying of forgive and forget. However, God is not saying we must forget. He is only saying we must forgive. Your focus must change from what your flesh feels and wants to do to what God wants you to do. God wants you to be free. He does not want you to continue in the pain and suffering. Ephesians 4:32 (NLT) says, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you."

It is through our faith in God that we can forgive. It is through our faith in God we are forgiven by God. So, what can we do to help in this process? Pray for your enemies or those who have wronged you (Matthew 5:44). Yes, even this will require you to have faith. You may not know how you will be able to pray for them but if you ask God for help, before you know it, you will be praying for blessings and the wellbeing to be upon those who have caused your hurt.

Prayer: Thank You for Your abundant forgiveness for my many sins! Help me to have the same forgiving heart towards others around me. Cause me to see them through Your loving eyes and not my own. Make me more like You in every way, in Jesus' name, amen.

Terrance Phillips

Day nine

Licensed to carry

Scripture reference: *We are human, but we don't wage war as humans do. We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.*

2 Corinthians 10: 3-5 NLT

As a very irresponsible teenager, I would rush home from school to tell my dad everything except what I had not done, because to a know-it-all adolescent my lack of preparation and inability to utilize my resources was always everyone else's fault. After I would give an elaborate backstory of why my own carelessness had nothing to do with why I received an F in biology, my father would say, "and that's why you don't bring a knife to a gunfight".

It wasn't until later on life, when the challenges became greater and the fight became more intense that I realized that the simple phrase my father used so often, was less about guns and knives, and more about proper preparation. I had the tools, but was I using them when and how I needed to use them?

My father's wisdom has taught me not to show up to any problem, issue, battle, or war without first knowing one, what I am capable of, and two, what I am up against. The scriptures we read today tell us that God has supplied us with some mighty weapons. There has been an entire arsenal issued to us by God. His arsenal guarantees victory against any logic, thought, or doctrine that may try to rise up and declare otherwise.

Paul doesn't specifically identify whether its guns or knives in this case, but he is clear to inform us as fellow believers, that though we are human, we do not wage war as humans do. We have been endorsed and empowered through the authority given to us by The One who lives within us and because of who we are in Him, we have been granted an unfair advantage and even the largest enemies must fall. The tactics of the world don't stand a chance because the truth of who God is fights on its own. Walk obediently in the victory that has been granted to you and wear your win proudly.

Prayer: God, thank You for the power and the authority You have given me. Help me to show up to the fight with right weapons in hand every time. I know that as a result of my obedience to You I walk in victory. I offer this prayer in Jesus' name, amen.

Elle Roe

Day ten

Careful what you say

Scripture reference: *Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.*

Colossians 4:6 (NLT)

The old saying goes and it is recorded in scripture (Proverbs 18:21) that the power of life and death is in our tongue. It is important to watch what we allow to come out of our mouths on a daily basis. Every word we utter is producing either life or death results in our circumstances, in our families, in our bodies, and in every aspect of our daily walk.

The scripture in Colossians takes it even further to tell us to watch our conversation around others. Our conversation should be geared toward using wisdom especially toward unbelievers. Our conversations ought to be gracious. To be gracious means to be courteous, kind, and pleasant. It also means to show divine grace which can only come from God. In other words, the same grace that is provided to us through our Lord Jesus Christ ought to be the same grace we extend to others.

My mother used to say, "It's not always what you say, it's how you say it." The next part of the scripture verifies my mother's wisdom. We are to be gracious in our conversation for it is the right response for everyone. It is important that we respond to one another in an appropriate manner and especially to people who are unbelievers. People need to see us showing Christ in every way but especially in our conversation.

Prayer: Father, in Jesus' name, please help us to have right conversation. Help us to know how to answer everyone that you put in our path. Help us to extend words to others that are gracious, kind and loving. Let the words of our mouth and the meditation of our heart, be acceptable in thy sight. Let our words bring life into every situation. We ask this now and believe it now in the name of Jesus, amen.

Jovon McLean

Day eleven

Committed love

Scripture reference: *The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is His faithfulness; His mercies begin afresh each morning.*

Lamentations 3:22-23 (NLT)

One day I hugged my grandson and told him I loved him. Nothing special had happened; I just wanted him to know that I truly loved him and figured he didn't know unless I told him. I said to him, "Do you KNOW I love you?" He replied, "Yes Mother, I know." I further asked him "HOW do you know I love you?" He shrugged and said, "Because you love me!!!"

I immediately thought about how I know God loves me. How do I know? It's because He loves me. Simple. He just does. That's all. That's it. God loves me! And He loves you too.

We never have to wonder if He loves us. The bible reassures us in the book of Romans that "nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow – not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below – indeed, nothing in all creation will EVER be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39 NLT).

Therefore, rest today in knowing God loves you with a faithful and committed love. His love is unfailing. He is not going anywhere. He loves you today and will love you throughout eternity.

Prayer: Thank You Father for letting us believe Your Word and know that Your love is faithful, and it never, ever ends. No thing and no one can separate us from Your love. There is nothing we can think of that will separate us from Your love. There is nothing that we can do that will separate us from Your love. For this Lord God, we are grateful, in Jesus' name we pray and believe this prayer, amen.

Rose Perry

Day twelve

No reaction necessary

Scripture reference: *When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things.*

1 Corinthians 13:11 (NLT)

We often make the mistake of thinking that maturity comes with age. When in fact, I think that most of us will admit that we have said about someone, “they are too old to be acting like that” or “I’m too old to be acting like this.” Truth of the matter is age has nothing to do with maturity.

Here is what we know, children react on impulse. Children react without considering the consequences to their actions. Children react off of their emotions. Children react out of their flesh.

Once we become believers, it is time to put aside childish reactions and begin to respond rather than react. There is a huge difference between reacting and responding. A reaction is typically quick, without much thought, tense and aggressive. A response is thought out, calm and non-threatening. Responding to a matter promotes spiritual growth, shows maturity, and comes from a place of unity between God and the responder. This will often promote an opportunity for peace, extended mercy and possible healing to the recipient of the responder.

Today, choose to respond and not react. Choose responses that are spiritually sought out and not flesh initiated reactions. Today, choose not to resort to childlike antics, but spiritually mature, God directed and motivated responses that will be for the betterment of all of those that you are assigned to on this day.

Prayer: Father, because of who You are, You embody all that is good and perfect. You are all-knowing, all-merciful and all-powerful. Because of who I am in You, I am able to draw from Your wealth of knowledge and wisdom. Because of You, I am brave enough to grow up and not react. Because of You I am wise enough to seek understanding to how to respond to the cares of this life that attempt to keep me in a childlike state. Thank You that from this day forward, all my reactions are godly responses. I pray this now in Jesus’ name, amen.

Toni Stewart

Day thirteen

Lord, teach us

Scripture reference: *And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.*

1 John 4:21(KJV)

There was a man who had 10 children and He LOVED his children so much. All of his children were gifted and had a phenomenal destiny to reach. However:

- One child - became a good Christian, but still had many private issues.
- One child - professed being Christian but was unwilling to do God's will. The two Christian children couldn't get along because of denominational differences.
- One child - became a racist, prejudiced and discriminatory about everything.
- One child - a party animal.
- One child - a homosexual.
- One child - a murderer.
- One child - was a Buddhist.
- One child - turned to drugs and was promiscuous.
- One child - left the faith to turn to just being spiritual (believing all roads lead to God).

These children lost touch with their Father because of their concern for their own matters and lives.

- One child - was perfect and stayed with his Father.

A man (a robber, a thief, a murderer) came and put out a hit to kill off all of the man's children in order to keep them from their destiny. Word came around that there was a way to save every one. The perfect child had to be sacrificed in order for the others to live. The perfect child tells his daddy that he would go and give his life so his siblings could live and reach their destiny. He fulfills the mission for his siblings.

This short story embodies what God shows us in John 3:16. God has LOVED us from the beginning of time and He wants us to do the same for all of humanity. We should LOVE people past their imperfections and show them the same grace and mercy that Christ extended to us. The answer that this world is longing to see is LOVE. The kind of LOVE only found in Christ and must be seen in us as believers.

Prayer: Father, I pray that You would teach us this LOVE so that we will continue to liberate the world with the love of Christ, in Jesus' name, amen!

Jovon McLean

Day fourteen

Lovingly obey God

Scripture Reference: *And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

Deuteronomy 6:6-9 (NLT)

Here in this sixth chapter of Deuteronomy, Moses is constantly reminding Israel of the importance of God's laws. He admonished them to teach them to their children and to do whatever else they had to do to remember the laws themselves. This was not meant to control them, but it was so they could reap the benefits of being obedient children to the Father God.

As humans we are impressed when our children, or others in our charge, obey us. We set rules and regulations, and we give directives and instructions. We say what to do and what not to do, and when our children or crews comply, we are willing to do just about anything for them simply because they obeyed us without question, reservation, or hesitation. We do that with our limited resources.

Now just imagine how a limitless God, who only has our best interest at heart at all times, will respond to our unrestrained obedience. Just think; envision Him being delighted with us because we lovingly submit to His laws. Keep in mind: the objective is for us to obey God out of love and the further objective is to please God Almighty. He is pleased when we simply, lovingly obey His laws.

Prayer: Father God in the name of Jesus, we bless and love You unconditionally. Lord thank You for availing Your unlimited resources to those of us who will obey You. Thank You most for allowing us to obey You because we love You. Amen.

Rose Perry

Day fifteen

Declaring God's word

Scripture reference: *Most assuredly, I say to you, "So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.*

Isaiah 55:11 (NKJV)

The Bible is not a story book to be read at bed time for entertainment purposes. God's Word is alive and has authoritative power to command miracles to manifest in your life. You can speak the Word of God over your life and claim His promises for yourself. These proclamations are activated through faith. Many believers never experience the full power of the Holy Spirit working in them because they lack the faith necessary to birth miracles.

When I was young my mother taught my sister and I how to pray the Scriptures. We were taught to put our names in the word as we read the bible and claimed God's promises for our lives. Because of my upbringing, scriptures are more than just words on paper. God's word is the key to unlocking supernatural power in my life. When I say, "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under that shadow of the almighty" (Psalm 91:1), I say my name in place of the pronoun and I sow a seed in faith as I speak God's Word over my life. It has made all the difference in my walk with God. I have confidence in my authority through the Holy Spirit because I believe God's Word, I am committed to meditating on it and I use it daily.

Be intentional when you read the Bible and command the promises of God for yourself. Ask God to open your eyes and mind as you read His word with expectation. Expect circumstances to change, expect sickness to be removed, expect the promises of God to fall upon you and hold fast to your faith. The Bible says that faith without works is dead (James 2:17). In what ways are you working your faith? You may be going through a situation but instead of submitting to your circumstance begin declaring God's word over your life and watch mountains move.

Prayer: God, I thank You for Your Word that is living and active (Hebrews 4:12). Help me to establish my confidence in You and to recognize my authority through the Holy Spirit that works in me. Your Word, dear Lord, is a lamp unto my feet and a light to my path (Psalm 119). Show me how to remain steadfast in Your Word. I pray Lord that as I speak Your word over my life that my faith will activate its power and manifest miracles and breakthroughs over all that concerns me. I declare that the Word of God upon my life will not return unto You void, in Jesus' name, amen.

Christie Gaskins

Day sixteen

Dance all night

Scripture reference: *We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation.*

Romans 5:3-4 (NLT)

Back in the year 2000, I wrote in my journal about a church service that I attended the day before. During the service the congregation was singing a song that is familiar to most of us. The words to the song are:

"When I think about what He's done for me;
When I think about how He set me free;
When I think about how He brought me out,
I could dance, dance, dance, dance; dance, dance, dance, dance;
dance, dance, dance, dance, all night."

I sang along for a while, and then I stopped and really thought about what we were singing. I said to myself, "we can't dance ALL night; I know I can't. Most of us can't even pray all night." Almost immediately after I had that thought, the Lord reminded me of what may be determined as 'nighttime' to the dancers.

The "dance all night" concept, I believe, is a time of faithful rejoicing through hard times; believing God for restoration through regrets and wrong decisions. It is a time of worshipping Him through times of disappointment and grief. Dancing through all these situations exhibits our faith that only God can rectify our circumstances. Surely, we have all had some type of night in our lives. If we made it through victoriously, it was because we danced and/or praised, prayed and/or consecrated, or worshipped our way through. We danced all night.

The scripture above tells us that we should and can rejoice when we are in our dark situations in life. The trials of life help us to develop endurance, strength of character, and hope of salvation. Let's Dance!

Prayer: Father God in Jesus' name, thank You for giving us the faith to dance through the night times of our lives, knowing that You will bring us out cheerfully. Amen

Rose Perry

Day seventeen

God can't lie

Scripture Reference: *So God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us.*

Hebrews 6:18 (NLT)

As imperfect people we sometimes are unable to fulfill our commitments, obligations or fulfill our promises. Life happens, emergencies come up, sickness gets in the way or 100 other things may keep us from doing what we say. On the other hand, there are those that have no intentions on keeping their word. Nothing happened, nothing got in the way, they simply have no desire or intention on keeping their word.

Then there is God. God is full of promises. When the preacher preaches the word, he can make the promises sound easily obtainable. So why is it so difficult to believe and obtain the promises of God when we are all alone and there is no preacher around? The truth of the matter is that we subconsciously put our perfect God in the same category as we put imperfect people... as being unable to fulfill the promise.

No matter what happens in life, God cannot lie. There is nothing that catches Him off guard. There are no decisions that we make that throws Him for a loop. There are no challenges that present themselves that He has not already prepared for. No matter what may come, His word is secured by His promise and His oath. It is that promise and oath that anchors our hope in this life.

We may ask ourselves, what is keeping us from completely having hope in the promises of God? Just remember this scripture: God is not a man, so he does not lie. He is not human, so he does not change his mind. (Numbers 23:19a) Whatever God said He will do, He will do, simply because He cannot lie.

Prayer: Father, You are faithful, honorable and trustworthy. You do all things strategically and purposefully. Your word is so valuable and sure that You have secured it with an oath. It is because of this that I am able to have confidence and hope in Your promises. Thank You for not allowing my inconsistencies to change Your mind. Thank You for giving me another opportunity to take You at Your word and watch Your word come to pass. These things I pray, in Jesus' name, amen.

Toni Stewart

Day eighteen

God sized strength

Scripture reference: *Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, The Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall, But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.*

Isaiah 40:28-31 (KJV)

We buy into the concept of fear because we have allowed the enemy to convince us that we are weak. We have become captive to our own perceived limitations. We fear the dark forgetting that we are the light. We fear defeat when we have already won because we are more than conquerors. We fear the things of this world when instead this world should fear the God who resides in us.

Jerusalem had lost sight of God and had forgotten who they were and Whose they were. Instead of remaining faithful they placed their hopes and prayers in idols. Because of their actions, God allowed them to go through a period of suffering in servitude to the Babylonians. However, God also showed compassion and sent His people a message of hope. God wanted the children of Israel to know that despite their current circumstance He was still God. God wanted them to know that as long as they waited on Him and chose to abide in Him, they would be fortified with His strength.

You may be feeling like the children of Zion, captive to your circumstance and unable to see how you will overcome. Whenever you are feeling weak, defeated, broken and lost remember God is omnipresent, never defeated, completely whole and omnipotent. He can save you and He is all the strength you need to endure the trials of this world. Don't lose faith, don't give up, and don't allow the devil to win. Realign yourself with God's promises. God does not want you to rely on your own strength. He wants you to rely on Him. When you are weak, God steps in, and then you are strong (2 Corinthians 12:11). Wait on the Lord, trust in His power and be renewed by His might.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for being a patient and loving God. Thank You for not allowing my fear to stop Your glory on my life. I will wait for You because I know that Your way is just, holy, and never failing. I will stand on Your promises for my life and walk in the light of Your word. Continue to cultivate a new spirit within me so that I will remain steadfast throughout this journey, in Jesus' name, amen!

Christie Gaskins

Day nineteen

Happy being me

Scripture reference: *Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*

Psalm 100:3 (KJV)

Growing up, I always wanted to be somebody else. Whether it was an actor, athlete, singer or, in my case, even a preacher, I wondered what it would be like to be them. To have their lives and notoriety, I thought, would have made me the happiest person on the earth. The older I got however, I began to see that everybody has demons and dilemmas to deal with in life. I started to realize that the shoes are wanted to walk in were sometimes trudging through more issues than I was willing to traverse. I quickly developed the philosophy of being happy being me.

The scripture tells us that it is God who has made us. I have to believe that when God made me, and when God made you, He was happy with the outcome. If the book of Genesis is any indication of the mindset of God, and it is, when He completed each phase of creation, He was so impressed by His work that He declared, "it is good". I feel no less was spoken over me when I was birthed into existence by the Master Creator God. No doubt, He congratulated Himself over my existence. So, if God is happy with me, then I believe I should be happy being me.

Every day we are bringing joy to the Father by being who He has made us. Sure, we all have some things we need to do better, and this is obviously not an endorsement to continue in sin because, "that's just the way I am". No rather, this is permission to be the person God made you to be and be happy being it. My methods, my temperament, my social likes, and personal preferences are quite different than most people I know, but that is me, and I am happy with it.

What about you? Are you happy being you? You should start today off by embracing yourself. Be happy being you. Do not focus so much on the flaws you see but rather on the greatness God has embedded in you. It is there. The more you look for it, the more you will see it.

Prayer: Lord, I thank You for who You have made me to be. I honor You by being authentic to Your design of me. I give You me as a living sacrifice. Use my life as You see fit, in Jesus' name I pray, amen.

E. Jones

Day twenty

God-pleasing faith

Scripture reference: *But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

Hebrews 11:6 (KJV)

Have you ever asked yourself the question, “Is my faith pleasing God?” Is your faith more “self-pleasing” or “God-pleasing”? Often times we associate needing faith with achieving something or obtaining something that will be more rewarding to us on a personal level. There is nothing wrong with having faith to achieve; however, it is important that what we are achieving is also benefiting the Kingdom of God. The entire eleventh chapter of Hebrews is dedicated to the subject of faith and chronicling the powerful testimonies of those who exercised great faith in the Old Testament. Their faith actions were so significant that they have been heralded the “Heroes of Faith” by biblical scholars.

If you took the time to read the backstory of these individuals, you would see that a lot of their faith actions were taken because they sought to please God. They believed God was who He said He was and they wanted His name to be glorified as the One who rewards those who seek to know and please Him. Some received tangible blessings and promised rewards because of their faith but some actually died before the promise was even fulfilled. They died believing and trusting God to do what He said He would do.

When I think about what those individuals did “by faith”, it makes me wonder if what I claim to be obtaining is really a reward of faith. Does it really take faith to finance a vehicle? Does it really take faith to obtain a college degree? Does it really take faith to buy a home?

God-pleasing faith goes beyond good credit, scholarships, and favor with man. God-pleasing faith requires us to be willing to sacrifice our sense of security like Abraham was when he was told to move to a foreign land. God-pleasing faith requires us to trust God’s supernatural ability to do the impossible like impregnating Sarah and giving her the strength to deliver a child even though she had passed “child-bearing” age. God-pleasing faith requires that we believe God is Who He says He is and that whatever He requires us to do by faith, we are well able to do it, despite our situations and circumstances.

Prayer: Father God, my desire is to please You. I ask that You give me the strength, courage, and wisdom needed to do whatever You are requiring me to do by faith. Thank You, in advance, for rewarding me as I seek You more, in Jesus’ name, amen.

Veronica Johnson

Day twenty-one

Finding light in darkness

Scripture reference: *Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.*

Psalm 119:105 (NLT)

Everyone experiences moments of darkness. It does not have to be the result of sin, but often can simply be the result of life and life happens to us all. The challenge is to begin to work yourself out of darkness when you find yourself in that period of life.

There is no magic solution to coming out of darkness. It does not take a prophet to come to town and lay hands on you and tell you that your worse days are behind you. Your solution is found in the word of God. God's word is full of light, full of answers, full of directions, full of peace and full of love. God's word is full of Himself and in Him there is no darkness. His word serves as a lamp that can and will walk you out of that dark place and bring you to a place of restoration and wholeness.

So today, turn your complete attention to the word of God. Fill your day with what the word says about you and not what the darkness of the situation is trying to express. The more word you allow in your life, the more God will illuminate the path you should take to your place of victory. The author of the 119th Psalm was fully aware of this truth. It is the word of God that illuminates the proper pathways we are take in this dark world we live in. We should never go where the word of God does not lead us.

Prayer: Father, thank You for Your word that brings life, strength, comfort, joy and restoration. Thank You for allowing Your word to find me in my darkest moment. Thank You for not abandoning me and assuring me that I am not alone. It is because of Your word that I can know that the darkness is coming to an end and brighter days are ahead of me. Thank You for loving me back into the light, in Jesus' name, amen.

Toni Stewart

Day twenty-two

The champion within you

Scripture reference: *Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.*

Philippians 2:12-13 (NLT)

Have you ever wondered why some people support certain causes like the American Cancer Society, National Alliance on Mental Illness or Lupus Foundation of America? Maybe they themselves or someone close to them is or was affected by that issue. Maybe they felt a certain pull to be more involved in that cause. Whatever their reason, much like a sports fan, they will put on their jersey, wave their flag and go the extra distance to let others know they are a representative of that organization and encourage others to support them in their cause with every opportunity they get.

You may or may not have been affected by such causes however God is calling you to represent His cause on the earth. You are the chosen one whom God has entrusted to represent the Kingdom of Heaven. You are the one God has put His confidence in. Do not worry about not knowing enough, not being good enough, or not being old enough. Even though you may be a little hesitant to step forward, do not focus on your shortcomings or faults. God has empowered you to do more than you ever thought possible. He has given you the ability to champion the cause of the kingdom and He has pledged His support of you every step of the way (Matthew 28:20).

Today decide that despite your past failures or your faults, today is the day you will put on your jersey and step forward to do what God already knew you were able to do even before you were born (Jeremiah 1:5). Today you decide to wave the flag for Christ so others who are looking to stand up, step forward and join you. Be the one to wave the flag so others can have a reason to live. Be the one to wave the flag so others will have a reason to trust God like never before. Be the reason others see the results of your salvation. Be the reason God is pleased.

Prayer: Father, open my ears and my eyes so that I may hear and see You still. Help me to stand strong and make You proud as I stand as a representative of You and Your kingdom, in Jesus' name, amen.

Terrance Phillips

Day twenty-three

All about that grace

Scripture Reference: *God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.*

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT)

Looking back on my time spent as a waitress at a local restaurant, I have realized the lessons I learned there are far more valuable than any money I could've made. Most people do not know that serving drinks and entrees to strangers for two dollars an hour will teach you a few things about grace.

On our busiest nights, I along with the rest of the waitresses, would stand with the restaurant entrance in plain sight, trying to identify which one of the patrons standing at the hostess stand, waiting to be seated, would potentially tip the best. It was mostly based on the appearance of those dining, and sometimes, if they were a regular, you could gauge what kind of serving experience this would be and most importantly how large the numbers would or wouldn't be at the end of the receipt. I was great at it, so much so that I would sometimes compromise the service for those who didn't look the part, if the payout didn't appear to be worth it. Deciding who was deserving and who was not was never in the job description, but being a great waitress to every customer was, that was grace, and that is God.

I'm sure that when God looks at us, He sees straight past our appearance, our flaws and imperfections, right to the hearts that believe in Him. We often try to overcompensate with accolades to appear worthy of His grace, when He is clear that there is nothing we could have done, or put on to deserve His unmerited favor. It is our job to accept it and to model after Him and extend that same grace to others, serving them too with compassion and love, when they choose to take a seat at our table.

Prayer: God, thank You for Your grace and the gift of salvation. Just as You have freely given to me without judgement, help me to be just as gracious to others who cross my path, in Jesus' name, amen.

Elle Roe

Day twenty-four

It's not easy, but it's possible

Scripture Reference: *Jesus told him, "If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." But when the young man heard this, he went away sad, for he had many possessions.*

Matthew 19:21-22 (NLT)

The young rich man in our scriptures was saddened by Jesus' words because he had many possessions. His response could indicate that this young man's heart was attached to his possessions, and being told to sell them and turn the money over to the poor was a hard pill to swallow. Has God asked you to give anything up in order to be closer to Him? Has He asked you to surrender something or someone to Him?

After the young man leaves, Jesus shares a metaphor with His disciples. Jesus says it would be easier for a camel to go through the "eye of the needle" than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. The "eye of the needle" He is referring to was a narrow gateway into Jerusalem. So, with the height and hump of a camel, passing through that narrow opening was pretty difficult to accomplish. Because the disciples were able to follow Jesus' metaphorical speech, they were pretty taken aback by the statement. They responded with concern about who would even qualify for salvation. Jesus gave them hope with His next statement, "Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible."

The metaphor that Jesus used revealed just how extremely difficult it would be for man to inherit eternal life outside of God. God has always desired fellowship with us and for us to be more in love with Him than we are with things and even people. Sometimes it can seem completely impossible to give up and let go of what God is requiring of us, but if we would just let God in and ask for His help, then it can and will be possible. This doesn't just apply to inheriting eternal life but it can also apply to starting and/or completing a task, overcoming a struggle, conquering a fear, and overall living a righteous life. It may not be easy, but it's possible...whenever God is in it.

Prayer: Father God, thank You for Your Word that gives us comfort and hope that nothing is impossible with You. Please forgive us for trying to do things on our own and in our own human strength. We trust Your Word today and we place these things in Your hands. Thank You for giving us the strength to surrender. We declare and decree today that what once seemed impossible is now possible because of You, in Jesus' name, amen.

Veronica Johnson

Day twenty-five

Picking up the pieces

Scripture reference: *And though you started with little, you will end with much.*

Job 8:7 (NLT)

“If only I had enough money, I would start the business God told me to start”. “After the divorce it’s just been hard for me to get back on my feet”. “I’m a single parent, there’s no way I can make this happen”. These are just a few of the statements that have been made by a vast number of people that God has given a specific assignment, but they feel like their circumstances won’t allow them to fulfill it.

Excuses will never make things happen. Procrastination will never make things happen. A “woe is me” attitude will never make things happen. A pity party will never make things happen. If you are waiting to have enough, you will never make it happen. You will always find another excuse.

Stop and really look at what you have. If you remove fear and take the responsibility off of you and put it on God, you will see that you have more than enough to do what God has called you to do. In addition to what you have left, there is a key ingredient that will assist you in making “it” happen. That key ingredient is trust in the One that not only gave you the vision, but the One who has prepared the path to your success.

God is waiting on you to use what you have left; to take hold of the remnant; to trust Him with details and simply be obedient. As a result, you will end up with more than you started with and a testimony that will give someone else confidence to start on their journey and a Father that will be pleased.

Stop waiting, pick of the pieces and LET’S GO!!

Prayer: Father, thank You for being wise and creative. Thank You for Your plan to make me successful. Thank You for giving me another opportunity to see just how powerful You are. Thank You for being able to take my little and multiply it into more than I ever thought it could be. Thank You for being invested in me and for choosing me to be a part of Your ultimate plan, in Jesus’ name, amen.

Toni Stewart

Day twenty-six

Don't hide

Scripture reference: *And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.*

Genesis 3:8 (KJV)

You ever did something that you knew you were going to get into trouble for, so you did everything in your power to hide it from your parents? I'm sure you laughed and said, yes with a smile. Truth is we have all been in this scenario. When it is all said and done, the truth comes out every single time.

God created Adam and Eve for His good pleasure and to have fellowship with Him. With that same thought God created you and I for the same purpose. Adam and Eve erred like many of us do in this Christian race. God came for fellowship with Adam and Eve and they found themselves hiding from an all-knowing, all-powerful, and loving God. God already had foreknowledge of what they had done but He still came walking in the cool of the day as He had always done. He was still coming for fellowship with His son and daughter. We can learn a valuable lesson from God's action: **BROKEN FELLOWSHIP DOES NOT MEAN THE END OF A RELATIONSHIP.**

God does have standards for us to uphold according to His word, but understand that when we mess up it does not mean He has abandoned us. We are to repent and restore the fellowship we once had with Him. God wants to hear from you. Do not allow your sin, struggle, issue, circumstance, etc. cause you to go into hiding. Submit to God and with Him confront whatever it may be head on.

Prayer: Father, in Jesus' name, we boldly come before Your throne today to ask You for Your grace in our time of need. We have committed sins and transgressed Your word but thank You for being the loving Father Who stands ready to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So we petition You to forgive us. We repent. Take away the guilt that tends to take us into hiding. Our desire is to have fellowship with You on today. Remove the barriers that separate us and restore us to our rightful place with You. Thank You for hearing this prayer today that we offering to You, in the name of Jesus, amen.

Jvon McLean

Day twenty-seven

Help my unbelief

Scripture reference: *The father instantly cried out, "I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!"*

Mark 9:24 (NLT)

I have been in church most of my life. I love church because church is where the believers congregate. People who have faith for amazing things inspire me. I have seen people who have overcome some of the most debilitating life situations imaginable through exercising faith in God. Amazing! I have seen people possess incredible blessings because they spoke in faith and believed the words that came out of their mouths. Incredible. I have to confess though, at many points in my life, my faith has been nowhere near their faith when it came to what I was dealing with in life.

The story of the father in Mark 9 is a mirror into my life on certain days. The man brought his son to Jesus in order for Jesus to heal him. This is a good start to the story because it shows he knew where to go to get his need met. In the New Living Translation, the father is said to say, "have mercy on us and help us, if you can." This puts the ball in Jesus' court. If anything was going to happen next, it would be up to Jesus' ability to do it. However, Jesus was not having it. He threw the ball right back at dad with this retort, "What do you mean, 'If I can'?" Jesus asked. "Anything is possible if a person believes." Do you see what just happened? Jesus said the miracle is not based on My ability, it is based on your faith. The father's response was classic, "I do believe", followed by "help my unbelief".

I have been where he was. I do believe but simultaneously I need help because there is a seed of unbelief working at the same time. I want the miracle. I want the blessing but doubt has crept in without me knowing how it got there. Here is what I want to leave you with. If you are believing and disbelieving at the same time, and we have all been there, the only remedy is the approach of this father. Notice what he does. First, he is honest about the fact that he is having a problem and then he cries out for help to overcome it. We too have to be honest about our faith struggle. Yes, I believe God and I know to put it in His hands and leave it there ... but it is still a struggle. Remember, according to scripture, Jesus is the author and the finisher of our faith. He knows there are times we wrestle with unbelief, but He stands ready to assist us to overcome it.

Prayer: Lord, help my unbelief. Amen.

E. Jones

Day twenty-eight

Hope that stretches past your reality

Scripture reference: *Even when there was no reason for hope, Abraham kept hoping—believing that he would become the father of many nations. For God had said to him, “That’s how many descendants you will have!” And Abraham’s faith did not weaken, even though, at about 100 years of age, he figured his body was as good as dead—and so was Sarah’s womb. Abraham never wavered in believing God’s promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises.*

Romans 4:18-21 (NLT)

Has God every given you a promise that encouraged, provoked and challenged you all at the same time? We all know that God is all knowing, and is capable of doing anything, but sometimes even those that trust Him the most, question His ability to perform a great promise through them.

We must admit “at about 100 years of age” is well past child bearing years. Sarah referred to herself as a “worn-out woman”. She knew she was not in the best condition to participate in what would allow the promise of the Lord to come to pass. Her reality was too much to overcome in her mind. Unlike Sarah, Abraham took a different approach to dealing with his reality. Abraham was willing to be stretched. The Bible says of Abraham that he “never wavered in believing God’s promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger”.

By being stretched, Abraham’s faith was actually reinforced. Abraham had a hope that was not predicated on his ability, but his hope was based solely on the fact that God was able to fulfill the promise that He made.

It is time that we allow ourselves to be stretched past our realities. Hope past the typical hope. Hope past what others hope for you. Hope past what you have ever hoped for yourself. Allow yourself to be stretched until your faith is reinforced. You may need to go back and revisit what you previously laughed at and become convinced that God is well able to perform it! Your reality may say one thing, but hope past your reality.

Prayer: Father, thank You for choosing me to show how marvelous You are to all those that I come in contact with. Thank You for allowing me to be in a position to have my faith strengthened. I am fully persuaded that You are able to perform all things through me and that is my reality, in Jesus’ name, amen!

Toni Stewart

Day twenty-nine

Don't run

Scripture reference: *But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.*

Jonah 1:3 (KJV)

We have heard many preachers preach stirring messages on the story of Jonah and the whale, or perhaps, if you slept through the word, maybe you have watched the cartoon version of the Old Testament story. The valuable lesson we learn from the story is that it is pretty hard to escape the true and living God who knows and sees all. However, we see recorded in Scripture that Jonah thought that it would be possible to do such a thing. Jonah did not want to do the task the Lord had set before him – so he ran.

How many times in life and ministry do we find ourselves at this place? We come up with thousands of excuses. We make up our mind that God understands why we are not doing what He asked of us. Some of us are just rebellious and decide we are not going to do it – so we run. I submit to you, it is much easier to do the will of God for our lives than to think we can out run God.

Doing God's will and cooperating with Him makes life much easier. Jonah tried to run from God. To run from God is a futile exercise. When David thought of the presence of God, he wrote in Psalm 139:7: Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? There is no such thing as out running God or getting away from Him. Jonah had to be forced into submission to God's will and it resulted in him being angry at God. It is better to submit than to fight.

Prayer: Father, help us to complete Your will for our lives. Help us not to fight Your will but rather submit to Your will wholeheartedly. Remove from us any root of stubbornness or unwillingness to surrender to Your desires. We praise You for working Your divine will through our lives. Here we are, us for Your glory, in Jesus' name, amen.

Jovon McLean

Day thirty

Have I not sent you?

Scripture reference: *And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him, and said to him, "The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!" Gideon said to Him, "O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites." Then the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?" So he said to Him, "O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." And the LORD said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man.*

Judges 6:12-16 (NKJV)

God has orchestrated your life to be more than you can ever imagine. But self-doubt is a destiny killer. When we question our calling, we are placing our own mortal limitations on a limitless God. Small minded thinking does not bring about change. God does not need you to be the strongest, tallest, or even the smartest person, God simply needs you to be willing to answer the call. Can you trust in the Lord when what is required of you seems impossible?

Gideon was faced with that same question when an Angel of the Lord came to tell him the Lord was with him and he would deliver Israel from the Midianites. His immediate response was self-doubt and unworthiness. He perceived himself to be the least of his family. He had resolved, in his mediocrity, never to seek to achieve more. He even tried to blame God for allowing his people to suffer. But God had chosen Gideon to save His people and subsequently equipped him with all he needed to be successful. God kept His promise to be with Gideon. Gideon went on to win battles on behalf of his people with God's help.

You were created to be limitless. You were created to rise above commonality and achieve the greatness that God has preordained for your life. All you have to do is choose to believe in what God has placed within you. Stop accepting the mediocre lifestyle you have been living and make a resolve in your mind to be greater. Seek advancement and know that your purpose cannot be prevented. Your progression cannot be blocked. You are a force to be reckoned with. God has sent you to be the change this world needs.

Prayer: God, grant me grace and strength to live out my life with purpose. Today I clothe myself with confidence and determination. Use me Lord for Your kingdom. Thank You for believing in me, in Jesus' name, amen.

Christie Gaskins

Day thirty-one

Perception

(The ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses. It is also a way of regarding, understanding, or interpreting something.)

Scripture reference: *And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, "There is nothing." And he said, "Go again seven times."*

1 Kings 18:43 (KJV)

If we can be 100 percent honest, we would admit that we do not always view things from the right perspective because of our perception. Life has a way of altering our perception of our ministry, our families, our job, etc. People speak spiritual things to us and if we are not careful we can miss it. When our perception is off we will at times disregard what has been spoken to us. Perception is very important to the believer. How we view things determines how we respond to them.

In 1 Kings, Elijah prophesied that there would be no rain for three years and guess what? It did not rain. Well Elijah goes up the mountain to pray because it is time for rain. Elijah sends his servant to go look to see if it looked like rain was on the way. The servant comes back with the report that there is nothing. How many times has that seemed to be our response as well? Elijah sends his servant back seven times. Now Elijah's servant could have ignored the prophet and said that he did not see anything, but he trusted the man of God. When he goes on the seventh time his report is different. The servant says, "There's a little cloud about the size of a man's hand." Elijah tells him to go ahead because rain was coming and sure enough the rain came.

Many times God has given us a message about circumstances that arise in our life and about our future. But the physical (what we see) doesn't match the Word given to us. So we change our perspective to something other than what God said, again because of our lack of perception. In order to combat this we have to make sure to align our perception with God's perception on every matter. What God said, He meant and it needs to settle our hearts and minds. Be careful today and the rest of the year to follow instructions carefully. If God says go 20 times, then go! Your perception through the eyes of God will make you better even when the circumstances around you are still the same.

Prayer: Father, help our perception. Let our ability to see be through Your eyes only. We want to see what You see in every aspect of our lives, in the name of Jesus we pray, amen.

Jovon McLean

Day thirty-two

What garments are you clothed in?

Scripture reference: *To grant those who mourn in Zion, Giving them a garland instead of ashes, The oil of gladness instead of mourning, The mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.*

Isaiah 61:3 (NASB)

When thinking of garments, they speak of so many things. I remember attending an International Folk Festival where the vendors were selling so many different garments. There were Indian garments, African garments, Chinese garments, Korean garments, Indonesian garments and many more. Each garment had its very own unique appeal. Each one said something special. No one could speak for the other.

When it comes to our lives and our spiritual walk, we all are clothed with a garment whether we know it or not. We must determine which garment we will choose to clothe ourselves with. There are seasons that come that can only be survived when we put on the praise garment to replace the spirit of heaviness or fainting. The praise garment will enable us to look up toward the heavens and seek our Father for His guidance.

Contrary to the praise garment, when we are clothed in heaviness, we find ourselves falling into darkness and depression. The garment of praise is vitally important as we can tell by Isaiah's prophecy. God has made this garment available and it is up to us to use our praise to combat our adversary.

The reason we wear the garment of praise is because we already know the outcome of things. We already know we win. We take on the proper garment to indicate to the enemy that we dressed for success. We are making the decision to be on the WINNING side and NOT play the victim. We will put on the garment of praise and take ownership of our future and claim our VICTORY as an HEIR OF CHRIST. So what garment do you have on? Take off the spirit of fainting and don the mantle of praise!

Prayer: Father, in the most precious name of Jesus, we come to You as humbly as we can thanking You for the victory in and over our lives. We put on the garment of praise for You have already sealed the victory and we thank You for reminding us with Your blood that was shed upon the cross on Calvary, in Jesus' Name, amen.

Natasha Jackson

Day thirty-three

Pray

Scripture reference: *And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;*

Luke 18:1 (KJV)

Scripture reference: *One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up.*

Luke 18:1 (NLT)

Prayer in its simplest definition is communication/conversation between you and God. It involves speaking and listening from both parties. It means to entreat (ask someone earnestly or anxiously to do something) or come to God in supplication (the action of asking or begging for something earnestly or humbly).

You may ask, how often should we pray? The answer is always. Always means at all times and on all occasions. The idea is that God is welcomed into every part of our day and every part of our lives. Pray instead of quitting or giving up. There is great power in prayer for the believer.

James, the brother of our Lord teaches about the power in prayer in his writings to the church. In James 5:13-16 we read this: *Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises. Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven. Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.*

When we pray with passionate intensity and sincere conviction we can be assured that God is going to act and the results shall yield great power and produce wonderful results.

Prayer: Father, You have given to the church a powerful tool to assist us in our walk with You and our journey through everyday life. Our prayer to You today is the prayer of the disciples seen in Luke 11:1, Lord, teach us to pray. Teach us as well to be consistent in prayer throughout this year and for the rest of our lives, this we humbly ask in the name of Jesus, amen.

Jovon McLean

Day thirty-four

The love of a father

Scripture reference: *For the Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.*

Zephaniah 3:17 (NLT)

As a father, one of the greatest joys I have been fortunate to have is to help raise three wonderful children. As a child and young adult, I never thought I would enjoy being a dad so much. I remember growing up thinking that I only wanted one because I really did not want to be bothered with kids. In fact, before I had my own child, kids would make me nervous because they were so unpredictable.

Now, my children have not always done the right things. Sometimes their actions have upset me, disappointed me and even saddened me, but the one thing that has never changed is my love for them. I have always told them if they ever needed me, I would always be there for them. My reason for telling them this was I wanted them to feel safe and I wanted them to know they could depend on me because I loved them.

Isn't this the same thing God wants us to know? Sure, it is. In fact, God loves us so much more that we can't even begin to comprehend how great His love is for us. There are times we have been disobedient to God, yet He stood and still stands ready to forgive us. There have been times when we thought that our way was the best way and we needed God to come to our rescue and get us out of jam. No matter what the issue or sin has been, God's love has been unfailing. He stands with His arms open wide, telling us to come to Him, as He smiles to show us that we bring Him great joy.

There's a song written by Darius Brooks entitled "Safe in His Arms". The lyrics to the song say, "When the storm of life is raging, and the billows roll, so glad He shall hide me safe in His arms". No matter what we may face, the love of God is enough to calm our fears. It doesn't matter what we hear or see, God's love trumps anything that fear can bring our way. So, as you go about your day and the rest of your life, go knowing the Father loves you and there is nothing that can be done to cause His love to fail.

Prayer: Father, thank You for Your unfailing love and the joy You have for me. Because of Your love for me all my fears are put away. Help me to share this same love with others that I encounter throughout my days, in Jesus' name, amen.

Terrance Phillips

Day thirty-five

Wanting God

Scripture reference: *As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God.*
Psalm 42:1 (KJV)

When the deer is in need of water, water becomes its sole focus. It is not looking for anything to eat. It is not looking to play with another deer. It is not even looking to mate at that moment. The deer wants water and will pant for water until water is found. It is interesting the writer of this psalm, with the imagine of the deer in mind says, that is how my soul pants for You God.

Today is a day to simply express to God how much you want Him. He is your sole desire. He is the one you are panting for and running after. Built within each of us is a desire for God. Sometimes it is buried by the many activities we deem important to each day. Yet, as I write this devotional, I hear my soul screaming out and asking the question, “what about what I desire?” My soul longs for God. My soul wants God. And it makes perfect sense because God created my soul and He saved my soul on the day of my salvation. Why wouldn’t my soul be in a state of unrest since it desires a real connection with God today?

Since this is what the soul desires, before we move on, let’s power down. Cut some things off. Get in a secret place. Maybe this is not the time to read this devotional. If not, come back to it later. If it is, then put away all the distractions and turn your focus to God. It is time to go after God.

Prayer: Lord, I want You. I want You and only You. I long for You like the deer pants for water. I willing to sacrifice my time and my activities in order to have an encounter, a visitation from You. Invade my space. Come into the place where I am right now and manifest Your presence all around me. Fill me up with You. I want more of You. I want all that I can handle of You. Hear my cry. Hear me as I call. I am not seeking You for blessings or material things Lord. I am not hoping to use this moment to later on ambush You for something more tangible, Your presence is the tangible thing that I require today. Thank You Lord for coming where I am. Thank You Lord for filling this place with Your presence. I yield all that I am to You. I yield my thoughts, my will, my faculties to You. This now is Your moment. Work in me what You will and work out of me what You must. Thank You Jesus, You are here. I worship You. I adore You. I want You.

E. Jones

Day thirty-six

Settle it

Scripture reference: *Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.*

John 6:67-69 (KJV)

They used to sing songs with lyrics like: I'm on the battlefield for my Lord. Yes, I'm on the battlefield for my Lord. I promised Him that I, would serve Him until I die. Yes, I'm on the battlefield for my Lord.

So many people are falling by the wayside these days. People are quitting and falling out of this Christian race. It is important to settle the fact that you and I will remain in Christ no matter what comes or goes. So many times in life we tell God, "yes", but then when life hits, we take back the "yes" we gave God. God is looking for people who will settle in themselves; for God I will live and for God I will die.

Jesus' disciples had begun to fall off, so He questioned His main guys (the twelve) and asked would they go away as well? Peter answers with a question, "Lord, who are we going to go to?" That is the kind of answer Jesus is waiting to hear from all of His disciples. Peter finishes strong by saying, "You have the words of eternal life." As a disciple we have to settle in our hearts and minds that there is no other way than Jesus. HE IS THE ONLY WAY!!! Peter finishes by saying we believe and are sure that you are the Christ, The Son of the living God. So, no matter what happens this year, let's settle it today; no matter what, we are staying with Jesus. It is settled!

Prayer: Father, help us to stand our ground and settle that we are going to remain in You. We believe that Jesus is the Way and the Only Way. Keep our hearts from any temptations to put our focus or attention on anything else. We settle it today, with Your help, we will remain in You forever and always, in Jesus' name, amen.

Jovon McLean

Day thirty-seven

He will keep you

Scripture reference: *There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*

1 Corinthians 10:13 (KJV)

For many of us, we are always thinking about not messing up in this Christian walk. I think the thing we have missed is that God is just as invested in us not messing up as well. God is so much invested He ensured we know by scripture that we are not facing any new big thing. From the text we see that temptations are common to man and always will be. However, God is faithful to making sure we do not just mess up.

First, God does not allow us to be tempted above what we are able to handle. Isn't that good news? We have the ability to handle whatever the devil is using in his attempts to get us to fall. Secondly, God will make an escape so that we can bear the temptation that is coming in our direction.

Remember, yielding to the temptation is always going to lead to trouble on the road ahead. It is like if a hurricane came and the news had already given you the evacuation route to get away from the storm, but you turn in a direction that is headed directly into the storm. Whenever God plots the way to escape temptation, we have to use His route or we put ourselves in jeopardy of running straight into a storm.

The problem with most of us is that we do not take the way of escape when it is offered to us. The escape route is the best route to take. Evacuate! Abstain! Run! We overcome temptation because God makes it possible to overcome it. He does everything necessary to keep us. All we have to do is cooperate.

Prayer: Father, help me not to yield to temptation, but forever deliver me from all that is evil. I honor You because You have given me the ability to deal with and escape whatever temptation may come into my life. I will not fall because You are committed to keeping me. Therefore, I will walk in victory and not yield to the temptation of the enemy today. I pray this prayer of victory over my life, in Jesus' name, amen.

Jovon McLean

Day thirty-eight

A new ending

Scripture Reference: *This means that 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)

"No one can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending" (Unknown).

There is an old adage that says "you only get one chance to make a first impression". This is so very true. Once you have that first encounter, you can never take it back. You have one shot and you have to make sure you make it count. This is true with not only first encounters, but in everything we do.

The good thing about being in Christ is although we cannot start a new beginning on our own as the opening quote attests, yet He gives us new beginnings all the time because He is Lord over time it itself. Yes, we may have stumbled getting out of the gate, but with every new beginning we have an opportunity to straighten ourselves up, get in the right position and change the expected end!

No matter what happened yesterday, last month or even last year, you can have a new start today. If you offended someone and parted on bad terms, you can fix it today. If you dropped out of school and know you should have finished what you started, you can make the call today and begin the process over again.

Every day God has given us an opportunity to change the ending to something that did not start very well. It is up to us to let go of what was and focus on what is. It is all up to us, with the help of the Lord of course, to create a new ending.

Prayer: Father, thank You for not seeing me as I was. Thank You for seeing me as You created me to be. Today, I recall the many promises from the Book of Life and I realize what You have planned for me. The ending looks nothing like the beginning and what an exciting ending it is! Thank You for my new beginnings which lead to new endings, in Jesus' name, amen.

Toni Stewart

Day thirty-nine

God is calling you too

Scripture reference: *And the Lord came and called as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel replied, "Speak, your servant is listening."*

1 Samuel 3:10 (NLT)

God wants to speak to you and use you for His glory. You probably read that sentence and thought, "but I'm not a preacher." Funny thing is, most people respond that way when they hear someone tell them God wants to use them. So, let's get rid of that excuse now because God is using people without necessitating they become preachers. If God wants you to preach, then in His timing He will make it perfectly clear. But God has purpose and destiny planned for your life beyond the pulpit and He's just waiting on you to receive the call.

In the scriptures we get introduced to Samuel's mother, Hannah. Hannah cannot have children, but God hears her prayers and opens her womb, blessing her with the child Samuel. Hannah, as she had promised God, gives the child to Eli the high priest to raise and be used in the temple. In the text we read of God calling the young boy Samuel by name to do a work for Him. Samuel had to listen and learn the voice of God. Originally, he thought Eli was calling him and was Eli who realized it was God. A good lesson to take from this is, if you can't hear God for yourself, there is nothing wrong with linking up with someone who can help you grow in that area.

Eli, as messed up as he was in his own relationship with God, teaches Samuel, you and me as well, that when we recognize the voice of God, we have to be willing to answer God's call. God could be calling us to many things. Do not limit God. Do not limit yourself. His call may be to your local church (duh), or to be a mentor in schools. He may be calling you to volunteer in a homeless shelter. His call to you may be in the area of the arts (writing, painting, acting), or to sponsor a support group of some kind. The list could go on and on. Just know that just as God is certainly calling preachers to preach, and you may or may not be one of them, He is calling you too. He is calling you to some venture that needs your gifting and anointing. Are you listening? Will you answer His call?

Prayer: Father, we pray that we would know Your will for our lives and what You are calling us to do. Reveal it to us and our answer will be, yes, in the name of Jesus, amen.

Jovon McLean

Day forty

Giving God what He wants

Scripture reference: *I want you to show love, not offer sacrifices. I want you to know me more than I want burnt offerings.*

Hosea 6:6 (NLT)

Have you ever told your spouse, significant other, parent or friend exactly what you wanted and instead of them giving you what you requested, they gave you what they thought you wanted? With a look of gratitude, you say “thank you”, but in your mind you are wondering, “why didn’t they give me what I asked for? If they were going to give me what they wanted me to have what was the use in me even telling them what I wanted?”

When it comes to God, there is no need to guess about what He wants. God is very specific in scripture concerning what He desires from us. He is not looking at who is putting the most money in the basket; who is doing the most work; who is shouting the loudest or even who is attending the most services; God sees all of the shouting and giving, but what He is concerned about is something much greater than those things.

God is concerned with the relationship between Himself and His children. God is concerned with us knowing Him. If our religious activities are not fostering a relationship with Him, He wants the relationship much more than the religion,

We all start off knowing about Him, but then we grow. When we grow, our relationship with God should become more independent of others and other things. As the relationship becomes more independent it should become more intimate. It is in the intimate place that we really begin to know God and are able to give God what He wants the most...which is for us to really know Him.

Prayer: Father, thank You for loving Your children with the unconditional love of a Father. Thank You for not leaving me to figure You out on my own. Forgive me for the times that I did not nurture our relationship the way that I should have. Today, as I spend time with You, I take the time to not just talk at You, but to listen to You. Show me Your heart and the things that concern You. Help me to always give You what You want and not what I think You should have, in Jesus’ Name, amen.

Toni Stewart

