



MORNINGS
with JESUS
2014

DAILY ENCOURAGEMENT *for your* SOUL

365 DEVOTIONS

SNEAK
PEEK
FREE 7-Day
Sampler

TUESDAY, JANUARY 7

You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness; That my soul may sing praise to You, and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever. Psalm 30:11–12 (NAS)

TONIGHT I TUCKED THREE LITTLE ONES into bed, and their prayers went something like this. “Dear Jesus, thank You for our dog, Jake, and our beds, and the ladder on the bunk bed, and our curtains. Thank You for Mommy, Daddy, our books and toys. Thank You for popcorn and . . .” (You get the idea.)

Sometimes I want to give my kids a limit. “Okay, only pick ten things each to be thankful for tonight.” Yet, even as I considered that, I felt a gentle stirring in my soul. Maybe I need to be more like them. Maybe I need my list to be longer, rather than their list be shorter.

When do we outgrow thankfulness? When do we come to the age when we only thank God for the big things? This is one of those times that Isaiah 11:6 (NLT) talks about: “a little child will lead them all.”

Do you want to be more thankful in your life? As you’re going through the day washing laundry, driving to work, or chasing around kids, make it a habit to thank God for the little things around you that may seem commonplace—your ability to use a washing machine, the radio in your car, the sunshine outside. I try to remember to thank God for my family members as I’m folding my family’s clothes. As I fold my husband’s shirts I thank God for his arms of support. As I fold little socks I thank God that my children are healthy and able to run and play.

Finally, thank God for all the ways He’s turned your mourning into dancing. The way He’s taken away your heaviness and filled you with gladness. The moments I’m most thankful are when I look back to where I was in times of sadness and pain, and see where God has brought me to now!

FAITH STEP: *Buy a yearly calendar to use as a thanksgiving journal. For each day write down one thing that you’re thankful for. It’ll be a wonderful keepsake!*

—Tricia Goyer

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 1

*Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him,
“See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something
worse may happen to you.” John 5:14 (NIV)*

MY HUSBAND AND I HAVE an annual mini-retreat each New Year’s Day. This year instead of praying about goals for the year, we decided to invite the Holy Spirit to convict us, guiding us to repent of habits and confess sins that were His priority for us to change.

Along with our daughter who was home from college for the holidays, we spent time in prayer, writing as insights came to mind. After we filled our pages, we prayed and asked Jesus to grant us forgiveness and also to change us through His power.

A large pillar candle was burning in the middle of the table, and its center was guttered down, creating a perfect vessel to symbolically burn our papers full of sins.

We folded up our papers and tucked them down by the wick, feeling grateful as we watched them burn. Unfortunately, the extra flames from the paper caused the wax sides of the candle to melt rapidly. Soon liquid wax poured over the coffee table and dripped onto the floor. We scrambled to put out the flame and clean up the mess.

The experience helped me make sense of this verse. Although forgiveness is a free gift, and through Christ we are completely absolved of guilt, there are often natural consequences to persisting in sin. I’m grateful for Jesus’s forgiveness, but also reminded of the damage my poor choices can cause. All the more reason to ask for His grace to work in me each day.

FAITH STEP: *Have you noticed the effects of poor choices spilling into your life or the lives of others? If so, in what ways? Receive the forgiveness of Jesus, and ask Him for strength to stop sinning.*

—Sharon Hinck

THURSDAY, JANUARY 2

*So faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing
the Good News about Christ. Romans 10:17 (NLT)*

I HAD NO BOYFRIEND, NO friends. I was a big mess. But as I lay there—seventeen, pregnant, and depressed—I thought back to days long ago when I'd attended Sunday school. Words . . . God's Word . . . filtered through my mind:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16, KJV).

I thought back to the stories I heard as a child about a God who would never leave me, would never forsake me. Tears overwhelmed me, and with the drama of *The Young and the Restless* in the background, I rolled to my side and wrapped my arms around my stomach. Then I prayed the first prayer I'd prayed in years. It wasn't eloquent, but it was real.

“I've really messed up this time, God. If You can do better, please do.” That was my moment of change. The moment when heaven met my heart. And God has indeed done better. I had led myself down a dark path, but through God I had found a silver lining.

I discovered that no matter what I had done in my life, through the forgiveness of Jesus Christ, I was a new creation. I can't say at that moment I realized fully how special I am to God, or I knew then that God had big plans for me. But over time, as I continued to read His Word, I grew in my relationship with Him. And this path started with the simplest Scripture verse of all.

Faith comes when we hear the Good News of Jesus and believe it. We don't need to know the whole Bible well to start our faith journey. We just need to believe and accept what we do know—believe it with all of our hearts. Once I took my life and placed it in Jesus's hands, our relationship grew.

Every relationship has a first step before there is a next step. What step of belief is God asking you to take today?

FAITH STEP: *Write down some of the Scripture verses that you have memorized. Is there any truth in them that you need to accept today in a way that you haven't accepted before?*

—Tricia Goyer

FRIDAY, JANUARY 3

When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below. Joshua 2:11 (NIV)

JOSHUA, THE ISRAELITES' NEWLY APPOINTED leader, was about to cross the Jordan River into God's "promised land." He sent in two spies to look over the area, especially the city of Jericho. The two spies took refuge in the home of a prostitute named Rahab, a rather questionable place to hide for two God-believers.

But Rahab was different. She, along with the people around her, had heard of God's miraculous intervention: God enabled one million-plus Israelites to cross the mighty Red Sea after they had spent over four hundred years as Egyptian slaves.

Wait! That event had occurred forty years earlier. Rahab still remembered—if she was even born then. Or her family and those around her had passed on the remarkable story, along with recent news. God's name and authority made a lasting impression on that pagan community! Rahab chose to believe in the "God in heaven above and on the earth below." She hid the spies, and God spared her life.

On the other hand, the Hebrew children of Israel experienced short-term memory loss—often. The Bible records them forgetting about their miraculous crossing. They began grumbling three days after their feet hit dry land (Exodus 15:22–24).

When I read those passages recently, I wondered which kind of faith I've mirrored the most through the years: the reverential fear that remembers God's faithfulness or the fickle faith of the Israelites. Rahab only *heard* about God's miracles; yet she gained a place in the great "Hall of Faith" (see Hebrews 11:31). But the Hebrews had seen those miracles firsthand, repeatedly.

Instead of my forgetfulness, I pray I'll focus daily on God's long-term faithfulness—extravagantly poured out through the greatest miracle of all, Jesus.

FAITH STEP: *Review the Israelites' miraculous crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus 14. What impossible things will you believe in Jesus for this year?*

—Rebecca Barlow Jordan

SATURDAY, JANUARY 4

Then He said to them all, "If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me." LUKE 9:23 (HCS)

I FELT POSITIVELY VIRTUOUS AS I went about my morning. This time I would really stick with my commitment to eat a healthier diet. For breakfast, I had enjoyed Greek yogurt with homemade granola. *See*, I told myself, *it's not so hard*. Then I opened a kitchen drawer and found myself staring at a paper-wrapped rectangular object with my name written all over it. Drat that Ikea for selling such creamy chocolate bars with crunchy hazelnuts! And for giving a special price when you buy three giant bars at once. By midmorning, I no longer felt virtuous. And I didn't have any chocolate left to share with my husband.

Self-denial is not a popular concept in our culture, which promotes self-absorption. We demand instant gratification and the freedom to make lots of personal choices. Jesus taught that being His follower means taking on a different mind-set. Going against our human nature, which seeks our personal desires above all else. Relinquishing control of our lives in order to follow His leading. Dying to self so we can live for Him.

When it comes to chocolate or desserts, I can have a real problem with self-denial. And while there are times when I'm willing to subjugate my own desires for a greater good or for the benefit of a loved one, I have to admit that dying to self is an ongoing battle. It certainly doesn't come naturally.

Taking up my cross to follow Jesus means making a conscious decision every day, moment by moment. It also means believing that if Jesus calls me to give up something that I *think* I want, it's only so that I can receive what He knows will truly satisfy me.

FAITH STEP: *Is Jesus asking you to give up something you want in order to follow Him more fully? Do you trust Him enough to believe that He has a reason for doing so?*

—Dianne Neal Matthews

SUNDAY, JANUARY 5

For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NLT)

I'VE ONLY BEEN TO NEW YORK City a few times, but each time I go, I've seen something that I haven't seen before. One night I saw something so bizarre I doubt I will ever forget the image.

We had just finished seeing a Broadway show and were walking back to our hotel when we saw a large group of elegantly dressed men and women Dumpster-diving. Yes, you're reading that correctly. They were in evening wear, fancy dresses, suits, and tuxedos . . . and leaning over a large Dumpster to pull things out of the trash. As we neared, we saw what the fuss was about. The Dumpster had apparently been brought in by a large publishing company, and they had filled it with brand-new hardcover books. These weren't just any ol' books. They were by bestselling authors, several of whom were on the *New York Times* bestseller list. I know because the crowd would cheer the name of the coveted author when they hauled out another book.

That group was willing to do something they normally would never do in order to gain the prize of a bestselling author's books (or in this case, a *lot* of authors' books). In spite of how beautifully they were dressed and their probable affluent lifestyles, they dove in to the trash to gain the prize.

Christ dove in to the trash once, too, didn't He? When He left his beautiful sin-free realm of Heaven to come to earth and take on our sin. Christ, like that group that night, was willing to dive in to the trash, because He found the prize worthy. He found *us* worthy!

FAITH STEP: *When you put something in the trash today, push the item down into the can. Think about your hand, surrounded by that muck. Then imagine surrounding your pristine soul with sin. That's what Christ did. Now, wash your hand and praise Him for washing your sin away.*

—Renee Andrews

MONDAY, JANUARY 6

Therefore, imitate God like dearly loved children. Live your life with love, following the example of Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us. Ephesians 5:1–2 (CEB)

DIGITAL CAMERAS AND CAMERA PHONES have ushered in dramatic changes in our culture. We take more photos than ever before. Even amateur photographers can produce an artistic image. We don't stand at the photo counter mourning an entire roll of film that came out looking like the interior of a coal mine on a moonless night, or bleached-out reddish brown from overexposure. We no longer save shoe boxes full of photo duplicates or hang on to images that can be deleted.

We may not waste film anymore, as we once did. We may not shoot pictures that aren't worth taking. But we may waste focus.

I remember being awed by my then ten-year-old granddaughter as she took random photos while on a field trip. When asked why she photographed those particular individuals, she answered, "I'm taking pictures of *kind* people."

Not celebrities. Not humans acting silly. Not humans behaving badly. She wanted to capture images of kind people.

What a photo album that will make!

Jesus asked us to imitate Him, to imprint His image on our lives, and to focus on the good and worthy and honorable. Is that where my lens is focused? Do I point my mind's camera at those who act like Jesus, show kindness like He did, love as He did, sacrifice like He did, give generously like He did?

If others are focused on the same, how often will I show up in someone's "looks like Jesus" shot?

FAITH STEP: *The pictures we think worth taking tell a lot about us and where our attention is focused. Take a moment today to skim through the images on your camera. Do you see a theme? Beauty, nature, family, friends, acts of kindness? Or are there coarse, unkind, immature, greed-revealing images ready for the Delete button?*

—Cynthia Ruchi