



THE JOURNEY

A 30-Day Devotional to help you know
and follow Jesus better

The Journey Begins

In Luke 9:28-26, we read a story about Jesus taking his disciples to the top of a mountain where he will be “transfigured.” That’s a word that most of you don’t use in every day conversation, but it’s actually a pretty simple concept. For years, the disciples had followed Jesus around, and they had gotten to know Jesus as a man. They had eaten dinner with him, slept around a campfire with him, and listened to him teach. They had even watched him perform some incredible miracles. They had done life with Jesus, and they knew that he was remarkable, but they didn’t yet understand just how special he really was.

When they go to that mountain top and Jesus is transfigured, they catch a glimpse of Jesus’s real nature; they see that he isn’t just a unique and powerful man, he is actually the Son of God. They had a mountaintop moment, and it was astonishing. It was so amazing that they wanted to stay. Peter wants to build houses for everyone and stay on the mountaintop, but that is not the plan. The plan is for them to catch a glimpse of God, and then go back down the mountain and continue the work of God.

My guess is, that’s how you feel right now. Throughout the years, dozens of students have told me “I’d love to just stay at camp.” It’s easy at Round Lake. We worship every day, we study God’s word regularly, and a lot of your temptations are left behind at home. It is my prayer that you caught a glimpse of God this week at Round Lake, but we were never meant to live on the mountaintop. Like the disciples, we must go back to the real world and carry out God’s mission.

I am so glad that you made a commitment to follow Jesus this week at Round Lake, but that is only the first step on the journey. This book is designed to help you take the next steps. It’s a 30 day journey through some key ideas about growing and following Jesus better. We hope that it will help you develop a daily routine of spending time with God and that the action steps will challenge you to live out your faith as you head back to life. Plan to spend 15 minutes every day reading the scripture, wrestling with the questions, and talking to God. I recommend doing it at the same time every day, just like you did at camp. Please know that I am praying for you as you begin your journey; God has great things in store for you.

Day 1 – Introduction: Life after the Mountaintop

1 Kings 19:3-4

Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there. Then he went on alone into the wilderness, traveling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, LORD,” he said. “Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died.”

Have you ever reached the point where you just wanted to quit? Maybe it was in the middle of football practice as the coach blew his whistle for another sprint or perhaps it was when you struggled to master a new song for solo and ensemble. Sometimes you just reach the point where you don’t want to keep going because it feels too hard.

In 1 Kings 19, Elijah has reached that point. He has had enough and he wants to quit. He wants to quit being a prophet, he wants to quit following God, and he wants to quit life. The crazy part is that Elijah just had one of the coolest mountaintop experiences ever. He had faced down 500 enemies of God and shown the power of God by calling fire down from heaven (seriously, get out your Bible and read 1 Kings 18...it’s amazing). Now, a few moments later, he is ready to quit everything. It’s possible that you have also had moments where it seemed like there was no point in even trying anymore. I want you to know that you aren’t alone, and that there is still hope. Don’t quit.

So what happened? Sometimes when we have a really cool mountaintop moment with God, it can be hard to come down from the mountain. It is often in the moments right after a “spiritual high” that we feel the furthest from God. Today is your first day post-camp. Something happened at camp that was special and memorable, but now you are home and it’s going to get hard. There will be moments when you feel like quitting; you may think following God just isn’t worth it, and what happened at camp wasn’t real. Hang in there don’t give up. God is still with you, and he wants to do great things with you. In fact, just a few verses after Elijah wants to quit, God shows up again. This book is designed to help you keep seeking God because the story doesn’t end when we come down from the mountain; this is only the beginning.

Questions To Wrestle With

1. What did you learn about God at camp that you never want to forget?
2. What commitments did you make at camp that you want to keep?
3. What do you think will be the hardest part of coming home?

Pray

“Father, remind me that you are with me always. I want this past week to be the beginning of something new, so me not to forget.”

Action Step

Write down the words “God is with me” on several post-it notes. Place them on your bathroom mirror, car dashboard, favorite book, or anywhere else where you will see them this week. These notes will remind you that even though camp is over, God is still present in your life.

Day 2 – The Struggle: Facing Fear

Joshua 1:9

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

What are you afraid of? Most people answer that question with their small, usually irrational, fears. They are afraid of spiders, snakes, clowns, or heights. These common phobias startle us, make our heart race, and cause our palms to get sweaty. But they aren't what we really fear.

Our deep seated fears are often different. We're afraid that we'll grow up and no one will love us for who we are, so we need to spend our lives trying to fit in. We're afraid of rejection. We're afraid that we won't be good enough to make the team, pass the class, or be successful. We spend our lives trying to avoid these fears. We work to get good grades and win awards. We can't bear the thought of being a failure. We're afraid that something will happen to the people we love. We're afraid that we'll end up alone..

In Joshua 1:9, Joshua has been given a big task. He has been asked to lead God's people and conquer a land full of enemies. He has every reason to be afraid. What if he isn't smart enough or strong enough? What if the people don't want to follow him? What if the enemy is too strong? He has every reason to be afraid, but one reason to be bold: God is with him. No matter where he goes, God is going to be his companion.

Maybe you made some commitments to change your life at camp, but you are scared that if you actually keep them, you will lose friends. Maybe you promised to stand up for your faith at school, but now you are scared you won't be smart enough to answer their questions. Maybe you decided to have a difficult conversation with your parents, but now you are scared about how they will respond. I want to give you the same command God gave Joshua: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you." Just because you left camp doesn't mean you left God behind. He is still with you. You can do this because he is with you no matter where you go!

Questions To Wrestle With

1. Think about the commitments from camp you wrote down yesterday. How committed are you to still keeping them?
2. What fears do you have about those commitments?
3. How does knowing that God is with you make it easier to keep those commitments?

Pray

Father, your love drives out fear. Remind me that you are with me, and that I can boldly keep my commitments because I don't have to do it alone. Thank you for being with me.

Action Step

Write down your excuses and fears on a piece of paper or index card. Read over them, and then remember that God is bigger than all of them. Shred your paper, throw it away, or tear it up. You have nothing to fear because God is with you.

Day 3 – The Struggle: Overcoming Temptation

Hebrews 2:18

Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Sometimes being a Christian is hard. We know we want to live for Jesus, yet we sometimes feel like failures as we continue to be tempted to sin. How can we be a good Christian if we are constantly thinking about (and wanting to do) things that we know aren't godly. This struggle can make us feel like failures. Temptation has the power to make us feel dirty and unworthy. We might all be surprised – even shocked – to find out that every Christian has temptations. Temptation itself is not sin -- even Jesus was tempted.

God knows we will be tempted, and God Himself will provide an escape plan. Matthew 4:1-11 tells the story of Jesus' own temptation and how to defeat it:

- Temptation comes when we seem weak and defenseless, so be alert. (Matthew 4:1-2 and 2 Corinthians 12:10)
- The scriptures are our weapons against temptation, so arm yourself. (Ephesians 6:17 and James 1:25)
- God is faithful to protect us and provide for us so that we can endure. (John 14:27 and Matthew 6:30)

Look up 1 Corinthians 10:13. Underline "common to mankind." There is nothing new out there, and you are not alone. Because Jesus was tempted in these ways, He doesn't frown upon or condemn our struggles with sin. He says with compassion, "I know what you are going through." If we give up and give in, temptation leads to sin (James 1:2-15) -- but this doesn't have to be the case! Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit to lead us and remind us whose we are (John 14:23-24). God protects us and provides an escape plan. The question is, will we be faithful and use it?

Questions To Wrestle With

1. Think about a time when you were tempted to sin. How did you respond?
2. What helps you resist temptation? How does it make you feel to know that God is with you in the temptations that you face?
3. What specific temptations do you struggle with? What are some things you can do to protect yourself from those temptations?

Pray

Pray with me. "Father, first take this doubt and discouragement from me that has entered in because of the temptations I have in my life. Let me look to you for guidance"

Action Step

Look up 1 Corinthians 10:13. Underline "common to mankind."

Day 4- The Struggle: Accepting Grace

John 8:1-11

But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' They were using this question as a trap, in order to have basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, 'If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.' Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, 'Woman where are they? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one, sir,' she said. 'Then neither do I condemn you,' Jesus declared. 'Go now and leave your life of sin.'

Have you ever done something that you poured your heart and soul into, and many people praised you for the work you did? Maybe it was an art project, a paper for school, a song you sang at a talent show, or all the work to improve in a certain sport. You can hear many compliments from people, but it only takes one person with a negative comment to ruin the experience. What do to remember the most? Usually, it's the negative comment, even when you heard more positive ones.

In John 8, we meet a woman who is accused of adultery. The leaders want to stone her to death. They bring her before Jesus, and he immediately kneels down and starts writing in the sand. We are never told what he writes in the sand, but I often think that perhaps he writes words of encouragement to this woman. Despite her sin, despite what the leaders are saying about her, Jesus sees the good in her. He tells the leaders that if they are without sin, they can throw a stone at her. Because none of us are without sin, no one threw a stone, and the woman went free.

At camp, you are around people who constantly remind you that God loves you. He loves you despite your past. He loves you even though you sin. He loves you so much that He gives us grace daily despite our mistakes. He loves us so much, that He gave His son Jesus to die for us!

Questions To Wrestle With:

1. The woman who was told to leave her life of sin. What is a sin in your life that you need to leave behind?
2. Who do you need to tell that Jesus loves and values them?
3. What is something you can do to remind yourself daily that God values you?

Action Step

For every negative thought you have about yourself today, write down something positive that God sees about you.

Day 5 – The Struggle: Be Transformed

Romans 12:2

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

How often do we really let God's word transform us? Many times we think His word has changed us, but in a few days it falls away again and we are left back to our old self and our old ways. What do you think your impact on the world around you would be if we did two things. FIRST, if we stayed in God's word daily so that we continue to build upon the change that He created in our lives when He first came into our hearts and made us new creations. SECOND, if we took Mark 16:15 literally and had a passion for the lost, taking His Gospel into our neighborhoods and making disciples of the people there. If we do these two things, we can have a massive impact on not only our own personal spiritual lives, but also the spiritual lives of those we come into contact with.

The most important part of this whole thing is that we have Christ dwelling in us, and we are growing in Him. Luke 6:45 says, "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." That means that whatever we have stored up within ourselves is what the world is going to see. If we fill ourselves with sinful things, then we will only reflect sin to those around us. Trying to do otherwise is like going to the store and buying jalapeno pepper seeds and planting them in the ground, then hoping that they produce watermelons. Whatever we are sowing in our hearts is what we will grow.

We are like a mirror. We are supposed to reflect Christ to everyone we come in contact with. I know I don't always do that. Whether it is an angry word, ignoring someone, gossip, or whatever other sin it may be, I don't always live up to the command that we need to be the light in the darkness around us. Light and darkness cannot exist together by definition. Darkness is the absence of light. We cannot have darkness in us and light in us at the same time. The Bible says that there are no lukewarm Christians. We are either on fire for Christ or cold spiritually. God does not like lukewarm. We need to think "what am I doing today to help myself become better spiritually?" Then, as we grow, those around us will begin to see the fruits and know that we are different because of God. They will begin to see the joy in all circumstances and the peace that passes all understanding that comes from being a child of the one true God. They will want what we have.

Questions To Wrestle With

1. How has God already changed you and helped you look like Jesus?
2. What are some distractions that you can remove to enhance spiritual growth in your life?
3. What new spiritual habit could you start to help God keep transforming you?

Pray

"Father, help me to reflect you through my actions and words. Help me to remove my selfish desires and replace them with your will. Allow your Spirit to flow through me to bring the true life that you have planned."

Action Step

This week, find 1 verse of Scripture and memorize it. Then, after memorizing it, tell it to someone and explain how it has affected you.

Day 6—The Struggle: Finding Help

Ecclesiastes 4:12

Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Ephesians 4: 11-13

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

I was watching NCIS the other night and one of the agents was upset that he was given the task to “mentor” some students. When he questioned Gibbs about it he was told, we all have people that we look to or that are looking to us, people that are guiding us or are being guided by us!

When we follow Jesus, we need to do it in community. We need people to help us in the areas we struggle, and we need to be able to help other people in the same way. Ephesians 4:11-13 says that we all have different strengths and abilities “so that the body of Christ may be built up.” You need a church community. You cannot follow Jesus by yourself. Each day we face is different. Some days we learn from others and some days we teach. Together we are stronger. If you aren’t already, make it a priority to connect with a local church or youth group and find spiritual strength with them.

Questions To Wrestle With

1. What weakness do I have that the church can help me with?
2. What do I have to offer other people to make the church stronger?

Pray

“God, I realize that I am not alone today. I’m not sure just what it is you want me to be or do in life. You have determined that I cannot and will not go through this journey by myself. Lead me to other people who will walk through life with me.”

Action Step

Grab a friend and “be the church” together. Pick up some trash around the church, mow someone’s yard, or write cards of encouragement. Thank God for the good friendships in your life.

Day 7— The Struggle: Commitment to this New Life

James 1:22-25

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

Commitment starts with agreeing to do something- we say “Yes.” Yes to playing on a sports team, performing in the school play, taking a solo for the choir concert or hanging with a group of friends. Each yes is a commitment that determines where we put our focus, how we work to improve our skills, and why we don’t give up until we accomplish our goal. Sometimes we find commitment easier depending on the task. If we are being honest, it’s easier when we are interested in the subject matter. What about when we commit to following Jesus? Do we find the commitment just as easy? Do you have a strong interest to learn more? What happens when following Jesus gets difficult?

After camp you may have this new energy. You may feel on fire for Christ. Maybe at camp they set a challenge for you to complete when you get home. Will you fulfill that commitment and complete the challenge when there is no guidance? I remember coming home from camp always feeling “on fire” for Jesus. I was going to be committed to reading the Bible, implementing the lessons I learned, and changing my life. I soon found out that commitment is hard. We can easily fall into old habits if we are not careful. How do we stay committed? How can we keep the new habits?

There is no fool-proof plan to being committed to Christ in this world. We are sinners, and we will fail. But we have the Bible for guidance, which can help us stay committed. Commitment means being dedicated to succeed. The world will tell you to quit. The world will question your worth in following Christ. The world will judge every action. When learning a solo for choir, hitting one wrong note does not mean you are going to give up your solo. In basketball when you miss a shot, do you quit playing the entire game? No, you commit and work to get better. In Philippians 3:12-14, Paul writes to “press on toward the goal” -- the goal of living in Christ.

Questions to Wrestle With

1. Give an example of a time when you were really committed to something.
2. Why is actually “doing” what God says so hard for you?
3. What habits can you develop to make it easier?

Pray

“God, I know what it means to follow you, but I have such a hard time. Help me to not only read your word, but to live out the love and holiness you call me to. It’s hard. Please help me.”

Actions Step

Write down a spiritual goal you would like to accomplish by the end of this 30-day devotional. Would you like to fix a friendship? Become more involved at church? Talk to a friend about Jesus?

Day 8 – A New Life: Transformed

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

Ephesians 4:20-23

That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds.

There's a story of a husband whose wife got involved in the sale of Slim Fast, a popular weight-loss drink. The woman worked on her communication skills. She memorized her sales pitch. She even got some new clothes. But the woman didn't experience a single sale. The woman was frustrated. She was discouraged. She asked her husband why this was so. Her husband replied, "I tell you the truth honey, you look more like the BEFORE than you do the AFTER!" Our decision to follow Jesus is supposed to transform us. But so many times, we as Christians look more like the before (sinner) than we do the after (Jesus). The Bible makes it clear that's not the way it's supposed to be.

The goal in our relationship with Jesus is life-change. God loves us just the way we are, but He loves us too much to keep us that way. God's desire is to continue to shape us into the man or woman He wants us to be. That transformation doesn't typically happen overnight...God doesn't expect it to happen overnight! It is truly a process and that process takes time. Have you ever noticed how different someone looks when you haven't seen them in 6 months, or a year, or 2 or 3 years? There are noticeable changes...they are taller, stronger, smarter...they may have less hair on their head or even a bigger belly. Those are changes that you may not have noticed had you been around that person on a daily basis. But you notice those changes because it's been a long time since you saw them last. The best way to evaluate your growth and your transformation with Jesus is to do the same thing: evaluate how you compare to 6 months ago, or 2 years ago, or even 5 years ago. Do you look different spiritually? Do you look more like a new creation in Christ? Or do you still look more like the before than you do the after?

Questions To Wrestle With

1. How do I look different as a follower of Jesus compared with 6 months ago? Compared to 2 years ago?
2. What are some of the sins that once dominated my life that God and I have removed from my life?
3. What are some sins, hurts, or struggles that are keeping me from taking the next major steps forward in my walk with Jesus?

Pray

"Father, thank you for continuing to shape me into that person you want me to be. Please continue to have your way with me God. My desire is to be like you.....please help me to remove the things in my life that are keeping that from happening. Thank you for your grace that covers me when I come up short."

Action Step

Create a big scorecard that you stick up on your wall. At the top of the left side, write the words "God & Me". On the top of the right side, write "The Devil". Think about a major hurdle (sin??) in your life that you need to persevere through in order to take the next big steps with Jesus. Whenever you cave in and fail spiritually, give the devil a point. Whenever you stay connected to Christ and overcome that hurdle or temptation, give a point to "God & Me". Keep score for 30 days. Evaluate the results to see if you are truly moving forward in this significant area of your life

Day 9 - A New Life: People of Love

John 13:34

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

1 Corinthians 16:14

Do everything in love.

1 John 4:20

If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.

Love is often misunderstood. Many think of it as a feeling that you fall into and out of, an emotion that just comes on you and over which you have no control. You know, like when you see that person across the room and feel your heart pound and think, "I have just fallen in love." However, that is not love as God talks about love.

God speaks of love as an attitude that we choose to have and actions that we choose to do. Jesus tells us to love one another as he loved us. Stop and think (and write down): how do you know Jesus loves you? How did he show it? Go ahead, go down the page to "questions to wrestle with", write it down then come back. The next sentence will still be waiting.

What did you write? Was it things Jesus did, like dying on the cross? Was it blessings he has provided? Notice how his love is demonstrated by his actions.

It is also an attitude that we choose to have. After all, we are told to do everything in love. So when we love, it is shown in our actions as well as our attitude. Take for example the difference between two people who do something for you, but one does it with an attitude of graciousness and the other with an attitude of obligation; they helped, but they didn't want to do it. Which one showed genuine love?

As followers of Christ Jesus, we are to be known for our love, and the final verse that you read above is a great one for self-reflection. If we don't love those around us, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ, then how can we honestly say that we love God?

Questions To wrestle with

1. Write down how Jesus showed his love for you.
2. How well do you show love in your actions towards others?
3. How is your attitude? Do others see you as a caring loving person in the attitude you show to them?
4. Is there someone you haven't been loving towards? Perhaps your actions or attitude towards that person is anything but loving. What can you do to change and start showing love to them?

Prayer

"Father, forgive me for not loving others as I should. Help me to understand the love that Jesus has for me and everyone else and to show that love in my actions and attitude."

Action Step

Think of someone you need to show the love of Christ Jesus to, perhaps someone you haven't done a good job doing that with. Pick a way to serve them and offer to do that. Apologize for previous behavior if necessary.

Day 10 – A New Life: People of Joy

Philippians 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

1 Thessalonians 5:15

Rejoice always...

1 Peter 4:13

But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

Think about the happiest moment in your life. Maybe it was at camp, a big party, a vacation or even just a great time hanging out with friends. How did you feel right then, “in the moment?” Joyful and excited, right? Your heart beats faster and your breathing grows a little erratic. A smile spreads across your lips, joy fills your soul. Your endorphins kick in and you feel ready to face anything or anybody. Nothing is going to ruin that moment.

That’s exactly what the verses above are depicting, that kind of moment. Not because of cake, presents, a beautiful beach, or a great time with friends. It's rejoicing because Jesus is in your life. Remember just 10 days ago back at camp when you were worshipping together and sitting around the campfire and lifting up your voice and your heart in praise. That moment is still locked in your memory and nothing can take it away; not trials, not hardships, not even personal suffering.

We don’t know how hard life is at back home, but Jesus does! Turn your cares over to Him and remember when He comes to take us home, our suffering will be gone, and we will worship Him with greater singing and rejoicing than you ever experienced at camp. So hang in there, take time to read the next two verses in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-17. How do we find joy in all things? How do we truly live a new life? We find joy because God is with us all the time. Pray continually and give thanks to God for everything.

Questions To Wrestle With

1. What moment at camp brought you the greatest joy? Why?
2. Who is in your life that can help you to be joyful always?
3. Is there something (or someone) who takes away your joy? What do you need to give up in order to allow the Lord to be your joy?

Pray

“Father, help me in the midst of every situation to look up, think of you and strive to find joy in all things. Help me in my daily struggles through your word, and people you put in my life.”

Action Step

Draw a picture that reminds you of your “moment of joy” from camp. Hang it somewhere that it can remind you of how great camp was.

Day 11 – A New Life: People of Peace

Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT)

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

John 14:27 (NLT)

I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid.

It can be really easy for us to say that God is in control. We sing about it at church, and we read about it in Scripture. But what would it look like to really believe that God is in control? Paul, who wrote Philippians, wrote most of his letters from a jail cell. Many times, at the end of his letter, he wrote things like, "Don't worry about me. I'm in jail, but I'm fine!" Wouldn't it be great to not worry about things like Paul?

The truth is we have a lot of things to stress about. There is so much going on in our lives even from an early age. You experience pressure from places that did not even exist a few years ago. There is pressure to be great at school, at sports, or at music. There is pressure to fit in. There is pressure to dress the right way, say the right things, listen to the right music, and date the right people. But we can find rest in God because to Him, that is all small stuff. God is amazing and powerful, and he can handle whatever has you stressed out. He knows how tough your life is, and He is not intimidated. What God is asking of you is to look at Him, because everything else we worry about is so small compared to Him.

Is there someone that you turn to in time when you are stressed out? Many times, people might say to you, "just go to God." And you might be thinking, "How?" Our first instinct should always be to pray and ask God for help, but He has already given us that help in two HUGE ways. The first way is the Holy Spirit. When we believe in Jesus and are baptized, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. That means that we have the Spirit of God living in our hearts to help us and comfort us. The second way is something that we often forget about...the church! Your youth group or your church exists to love you and encourage you. Don't forget about that!

Questions To Wrestle With

1. What is something that is stressing you out right now? How can you "go to God" with that stress?
2. What are things that you do or have in your life that help you remember that God is in control?
3. How are you going to help your friends who are wrestling with stress?

Pray this:

"God, you are so much bigger and greater than I am. Help me believe and know that you are there with me at all times and that you are in control. Thank you that we can talk to you any time because of Jesus, Amen."

Action Step

In your journal or even on a scrap piece of paper, write down all of the things in your life that you believe are important to God. Remember, what He wants is a relationship with you. He is in control!

Day 12— A New Life: People of Humility

1 Peter 5:6

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

Philippians 3:5

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus

When was the last time you gave up something for someone else? When was the last time you gave away your last piece of gum, your place in line, your last tater-tot? The truth is we don't often put others first, it's not really what our culture does naturally. The world tells us to first look out for you, and let everyone else worry about themselves!

When we look at the life of Jesus we, realize that from the beginning of Jesus's life he gave up everything he had in order for us to have a better life. Read Philippians 2:3-11 in your Bible: he gave up his life, by dying on the cross, so that we could spend eternity with him in heaven! That is enough to prove humility, but Jesus did way more than just that. Jesus gave up heaven for a time to live on this earth and teach us what it means to be humble. Jesus was born to an average family, in a smelly stable, with some farm animals! His crew was a few average Joes, some fisherman, and a tax collector. He healed people who were sick, he fed the hungry, and he even raised a dead man to new life. Everything about Jesus's life was about putting others first before him.

It's not easy to be like Jesus, but we are encouraged in scripture to live like him and to have the same attitude he did. You see, our goal in life is different than everyone else's. The world's goal is to look out for them and do what makes them happy! We are called to share the good news of the Gospel, and to put others ahead of ourselves. When we behave in such an odd way, people are able to see your example of who Jesus is, and that's what we are called to do!

Questions To Wrestle With

1. When was the last time you showed humility towards someone in your family?
2. What are some ways others have shown humility towards you?
3. Imagine Jesus was a classmate of yours, maybe your best friend. How would he show humility toward others?

Prayer

"God teach me to show humility towards others, not because it is easy but because it will form my character to be more like you. Help me to see humility as strength rather than weakness."

Action Step

Let everyone else go first today. Open the door for everyone, go to the back of the line, let someone have the last cookie. Go out of your way to put someone else first!

Day 13 – A New Life: People of Perseverance

James 1:12

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

Luke 14:28-30

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.'

Your decision to follow Jesus is the most important decision you will ever make in your life, but at this point, it really is just a decision. Following Jesus is going to require a great deal of perseverance on your part. Compare it to a couple who announces their engagement. There is reason to celebrate the couple's decision to get married. There will eventually be a wedding ceremony where hundreds of supporters come to celebrate the decision. A gigantic reception typically follows where everyone celebrates even more. But at that moment, the marriage is really just a decision. The real celebration comes 40, 50, even 60 years later when the couple is still together and still loves each other like the day they first said, "I do."

The brutal fact is that most students don't finish what they start when it comes to their relationship with Jesus. Some statistics say as many as 85% of students will walk away from their faith by the age of 18...that's 8 or 9 out of every 10 church kids that will basically say, "Yes, I made a decision to follow Jesus but I'm not willing to persevere and follow through with that decision."

Jesus wants you to finish the race! Not only will people laugh at you (Luke 14:28-30) if you don't finish, but they will laugh at Jesus as well. But if you are able to stand firm and persevere, the non-Christians in your school, in your youth group, and on your sports team will take notice.

What are the biggest keys to persevering in your relationship with Jesus?

1. Get into the Bible every day! I have never met someone who didn't finish the race who was connected to the word of God on a daily basis.
2. Stay connected to students and adults that will cheer you on and kick you in the pants spiritually. This is not an "every man for himself" kind of event. Christianity is a team sport.
3. Reality is that trials are coming...the Bible promises that we will face trials of many kinds. The devil wants to use those trials to take you away from your relationship with Jesus. God wants you to view those trials as a way to get battle-tested...He wants you to grow in your faith because of the hurdles.
4. Pray—Ask God to give you the strength, the resolve, and the teammates to help you stay the course!

Questions To Wrestle With

1. What are some hurdles the devil has thrown at you to try to get you to throw in the towel with Jesus?
2. Who do you need to connect with so that you have the best chance to finish the race?

Pray

"Father, thank you for the trials that you are going to put in front of me because I know it is through those trials that I will grow, and I will have the opportunity to show the difference you have made in my life. Thank you for being with me every step of the way. Help me to persevere in my relationship with you."

Action Step

Reach out to someone in your church and make them aware of the decision you made for Christ. Share your desire to actually finish the race. Ask them if they would be a teammate that will help you along the way.

Day 14 – A New Life: People of Hope

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 NIV

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

I like the way The Message Bible simplified this scripture

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 The Message

So we're not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace. These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us. There's far more here than meets the eye. The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can't see now will last forever.

Most people understand hope as wishful thinking, as in “I hope something will happen,” this is not what the Bible means by hope. The biblical definition of hope is “confident expectation.” Hope is a secure guarantee regarding things that are uncertain and unknown. When we place our hope in God we have confidence in God’s protection and help. When we call out to God during the rough times that are surely going to come our way, in that is our hope in Him which will keep us safe. It’s that same hope that helps keep us free from fear and anxiety, we are not giving up, God is inside us making a new life that will last forever. Along with faith and love, hope is the lasting quality of being a Christian.

Hope is what we hold on to when it seems like life is falling apart. Hope is what we look for when our grandparent is diagnosed with cancer. Hope is our anchor when our friends abandon us. Hope declares that it doesn’t matter how things might be right now, because better days are coming. When you took Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, you put all your hope in Him. A hope that produces joy and peace!

Questions To Wrestle With

1. When rough times come into your life, do you ask for God’s help? Do you have a “confident expectation” that God’s got your back?
2. In your new life as a Christ follower, do you still feel the same joy as you did at your baptism? If not, do you know why?

Pray

“Father God, keep me mindful of your renewing work inside of me. Help me to always look towards the celebration that we can’t see but hope for each day through Christ, Amen.”

Action Step

Listen to the song “My Hope Is in You” by Aaron Shust. Find the lyrics and print them out and read them as the song plays. Let the words be your anthem.

Day 15 – Know Jesus: It's About a Relationship

John 1:34-39

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?" "Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

John 15:5

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

Think about a time when you have been introduced to someone you have never met. Was it awkward or comfortable? Many times when we meet someone for the first time, we judge them by their looks, their dress, and even the sound of their voice. Imagine Jesus face to face. You have probably seen hundreds of pictures that portray what he looks like, yet we have no real pictures of him. We see through the verses above that He is called the Lamb of God, Rabbi, and even the vine. With descriptions like this, we can't make out His physical appearance, but his inner self, his soul and spirit become very real.

In our lives Jesus can take on many forms, but what we need in this journey is someone to connect with and give us strength when ours is gone. Vines were everywhere in Bible times, and the vine Jesus talks about is one with two types of branches: one which produces fruit, and one that does not. The vine with no fruit is cut down and will never grow back, but the vine that does produce fruit is pruned and made more prosperous. God wants us to "bear fruit" (which means do God's work and love God's people), but we can only do this if we stay connected to Jesus. Our relationship with Jesus is necessary for us to grow and thrive in this life.

Did you notice in the first passage that Jesus invited the disciples to come spend the day with him, and they hung out together all afternoon? Jesus is interested in a deep relationship with you, one where you connect with him and stay connected through prayer, Bible Study, service, and a lot more. We all need to have a relationship that helps us grow and become stronger every day! Following Jesus isn't about keeping rules, it's about knowing Jesus and being connected with him.

Questions To Wrestle With

1. What kind of relationship do you want to have with Jesus?
2. Do you have the type of relationship that helps you "bear fruit?"
3. What would you do if you had an afternoon to "hang out" with Jesus?

Prayer

"Lord, help me that I may stay strong and connected every day in our relationship."

Action Step

Take a few minutes to read completely through the story (John 15:1-17), and write a letter to Jesus thanking Him for loving you enough to be part of His vine.

Day 16 – Know Jesus: He is God

Colossians 1:15-20

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

A lot of people want to focus on Jesus's physical body, but his true identity has nothing to do with how tall he was or what color his hair was. His true identity is the Son of God. Yes, he was a man who was born, grew up, had friends, laughed, cried, and eventually died, but Jesus was also God. Colossians calls him "the image of the invisible God;" this means He was God, only we could see him with our physical eyes.

It's *extremely* important to remember that the Jesus who walked on earth is indescribably bigger than anything you might picture. Words can't adequately describe him. From our passage today, we know Jesus was before all things and is the visible image of the invisible God. He took the abstract idea of who God was (all powerful and all loving) and showed us what it looked like in real life. God literally came and lived as a human being for 30 years. All things were created through him and for him. The sun, moon, oceans and our bodies all hold together through him. Everything that you have ever seen, touched, or heard exists because of him. He was there before the beginning of the world, and he will be there after it. Jesus was fully God, in every sense of the word.

Why should this matter to you? Our divine Savior hears and comforts us. Jesus is never too busy and unlike humans, He is not limited by anything. He can hear all our prayers, help us in all our needs, and love us all deeply at the same time. Jesus is present in every facet of our lives 24/7. He is to be our first priority. He is God!

Questions To Wrestle With

1. How has your image of Jesus changed since reading today's devo and passage?
2. How can you make sure Jesus is your number one priority in life?

Pray

"Jesus, help me to learn everything I can about you. Help me to grasp the grandeur of your existence."

Action Step

Find something in creation that you find beautiful, such as a sunset, a mountain range, or the ocean's waves. You can Google videos or pictures if you need to. Remember that all of these things exist by the power of Jesus

Day 17— Know Jesus – The Perfect Sacrifice

Romans 3:22-23

This righteousness from comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Colossians 1:21-22

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—

Hebrews 10:10

And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Have you ever really messed up a relationship? Maybe you lied to a friend or rebelled against your parents, and you lost their trust. How did you try to fix the relationship? Did you apologize? Did you try making it up to them? Maybe you bought them a gift or promised to never lie again. Maybe you were never able to fix the relationship.

If you were to read the stories of how the people of Israel tried to get back in touch with God after they had sinned, you would find them making sacrifices for their sins. They brought and killed animals as a way to make up for all the times they had rebelled against God. That became quite a chore. There were not any shortcuts available, a blood sacrifice was required.

God opened the way for all peoples to come to Him by accepting Jesus Christ, His one and only Son, as their Lord and Savior. Until Jesus shed his blood on the cross for us, there was no other way to make ourselves right with God. Even the animal sacrifices only made things right for a short time, but eventually another sacrifice was required.

Our confession of faith and our baptism into Christ joins us in His death and we are raised to walk different than we did before! This does not mean that we will no longer sin, but it does mean that our sin has been taken care of once and for all. Jesus was the final and perfect sacrifice that makes it possible for us to have a right relationship with God again.

Questions To Wrestle With

1. What is something you have that could mess up your relationship with God?
2. Have you seen God working in your life to bring you closer to Him?

Pray

"Thank you for the gift of your son. Help me to remember that I am forgiven and loved because of Jesus' death."

Action Step

Pick up a large stack of books. Lay them down one by one, and as you feel the stack get lighter, remember that Jesus has removed the weight of your sin. You don't have to carry your sin around with you anymore. Rejoice in that freedom.

Day 18 – Know Jesus: Man of Compassion

Luke 17:11-19

As Jesus continued on toward Jerusalem, he reached the border between Galilee and Samaria. As he entered a village there, ten men with leprosy stood at a distance, crying out, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” He looked at them and said, “Go show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed of their leprosy. One of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back to Jesus, shouting, “Praise God!” He fell to the ground at Jesus’ feet, thanking him for what he had done. This man was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, “Didn’t I heal ten men? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?” And Jesus said to the man, “Stand up and go. Your faith has healed you.”

Think about that phrase, “stood at a distance.” Are there people who others avoid? They may look different, act different, or even smell different. We all know people who are kept at a distance. Do you ever wonder what that feels like? Maybe you know what it feels like, and you know it’s not a good feeling.

Jesus loved everyone he encountered, the sick, the poor and the rich. Matthew 9 talks about the calling of Matthew, a rich tax collector who would become one of the 12 disciples. The above scripture, Luke 17, tells the story of Jesus healing lepers.

Lepers were required to be separated from society because of their disease. They had to live a life separated from their family and friends. This was such a big deal! A leper always had to be 6 feet away from anyone, 150 feet away from anyone when the wind would blow. When Jesus enters the picture, he shows great compassion by healing them. These lepers’ identity has changed. They will no longer be known as lepers. The separation between them and those they love no longer exists. They have a connection to Jesus now. Why? He had compassion on them.

Jesus extends his compassion to you every day. He longs for there to be no distance between you and Him. Maybe you experienced compassion at your week of camp. It may have been in worship, in a lesson, or from someone at camp. The experience of true compassion always moves us from separation into community.

Questions To Wrestle With

1. Where has the compassion of Jesus showed up in your life?
2. How can you have the attitude that Jesus had towards the lepers?

Prayer:

“Father, thank you for compassion through Jesus Christ. Help us to show this same compassion to those I come in contact with.”

Action step:

Write down the name of someone who has shown Godly compassion to you. Take a minute right now and thank God for bringing this person into your life. You may even write the person a thank you note. Write down someone who God needs you to show compassion to. Take a moment and pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you and equip you to show the compassion of Jesus.

Day 19 – Know Jesus: Our Priest

Hebrews 4:14-16

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Four words in this brief passage sum up all it has to say: *the throne of grace*. A throne speaks from authority and power, while grace conveys the idea of sympathy and understanding. These two thoughts are combined in God, although He is all powerful, He is also a king who reigns in grace. A priest is one who connects humans and God, and Jesus is the priest who grants us access to God and all of His power and grace.

The writer also makes clear that just because Jesus has come from a divine place, and just because he is all powerful, doesn't mean he can't understand what we are going through. He has already walked the same road we have to walk. He has felt every pressure, he has known every pull. He has faced every temptation we face, felt every anxiety, and been depressed by worry. Yet He did it without failure, without sinning. Never once did He fall. Because of this, He has the ability to grant us access to God in a way that no other priest ever has. We can approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Temptations are something we cannot escape or avoid. They are all around us and get worse as time goes on because our culture gets more and more corrupt. But Jesus knows our reality, and we are called to have strong faith and reverence for Christ. This reverence is practical, because what we get is vastly more than what we think we are leaving behind. Jesus will save us, as in guide us through our temptations; He will lead us out and even forgive us. He will give us the faith and resources to keep away from temptations and overcome past hurts and failings, but we must allow Him to do so! The key is our focus! We have a Great High Priest who intercedes for us, who loves, cares, and is more than kind to us, *to you*! See His mercy and compassion! See His work and go to Him with confidence of faith, leaving behind what hurts and tempts you.

Questions To Wrestle With

1. When have you made a really big mistake, and someone forgave you? How did you feel?
2. How do you feel knowing that Jesus faced temptation just like you?
3. When you talk to God about your sin, do you feel confident that you will find help? If not, how do you feel?

Pray

"Help us, Father, to obey these simple words of action: to come with confidence, with boldness, to the throne of grace from which all help comes."

Action Step

Write down 2-3 sins that are on your heart right now. Fold the paper up and write the words "The Throne of Grace" on the outside. Keep this as a prayer reminder that God sits on the Throne of Grace, and all of the mistakes and failures that you encounter are lifted to the One who has covered them with His grace.

Day 20 — Know Jesus: Our Shepherd

John 10:14-15

I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.

He was given the name Shrek and he was lost for 6 years. Shrek was a merino sheep who had wandered away from the rest of the flock in the mountainous regions of New Zealand. Imagine a cloud with legs—that was him. He had so much wool surrounding him that his life was endangered. When he was finally rescued and shorn, it was discovered that he had more than 46 pounds of wool weighing him down!

It makes you wonder; how did Shrek the Sheep get so separated from the rest of the flock? Likely, he wandered so far that he could no longer hear the calls of his shepherd, and he lost his way back. He might have strayed from the guiding voice that would lead him back to safety and security. No one knows if sheep have deep thoughts or not, but would you suppose that Shrek intended for life to be like this? Lost, alone, and burdened. It was probably not what he wanted. By instinct sheep need someone to give them direction, to give them guidance. They need a constant shepherd.

Ask anyone who knows about farm life and they'll tell you that sheep are—well, just dumb. They need a lot of help and a lot of protection. It hurts a little when we see that we, as believers, are often referred to as sheep in the Bible. But if we're honest, we tend to stray and get ourselves into trouble when we don't follow the lead of the Good Shepherd, Jesus. But the good news is that since we have the ultimate Shepherd in our lives, we know can trust that voice. We have confidence that we have the One who is there to guide and protect us.

Questions To Wrestle With

1. What voices have been trying to speak loudest to you lately?
2. How can you listen to His voice above all others?
3. How does following the Good Shepherd prove itself to be the best option?

Pray

"God, please help me to intently listen to the voice of Jesus as I continue through my week."

Action Step

For the next 24 hours, change the home screen on your cell phone to a picture of a sheep. As you use your phone—the source of many different voices in your life—consider how Jesus' influence is greater than any other.

Day 21 – How to Grow: Be Like Jesus

2 Corinthians 3:18

So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.

How much do you look like your parents? How much are you willing to admit you act like your parents? You may have the same hair color or the same nose shape, but I am sure it goes deeper. As you continue to grow and mature you will begin to see more and more of your parents' appearance in you. It could be the way you walk, how you stand, even the words you say. There are reasons why this will happen. One of those reasons is because you are around them so much, and the other is because their DNA is in you.

When you grow and mature in your faith, you begin to see more and more of Jesus in you. This happens because you have the Holy Spirit in you. He is now your DNA. Your actions will reflect the same actions of Jesus. You will begin to have the characteristics of the Spirit; for example, love, joy, and peace.

How does this happen? It begins with self-denial. Self-denial sounds hard, but with the power of the Holy Spirit and your willingness to let go, it's possible. You are no longer being guided by you. Your decisions and your actions are not based on how you feel, what you want, and what is best for you. They are now based on what the Holy Spirit tells you. With your love of Jesus, you will want to follow what the Spirit tells you. This is why we were created. We were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27)

Questions To Wrestle With

1. What area in your life do you need to deny yourself and let the Holy Spirit in?
2. How do you think the Holy Spirit can help you grow right now?
3. Knowing the Holy Spirit (God) is in you, how does this motivate you?

Pray

"Lord may you increase, and may I decrease. I ask this so our relationship may grow, and I can show the world your love."

Action step

Ask God to show you one area in your life that you need to let go of so the Holy Spirit can begin to work in you. When you have that area, write it on a small piece of paper and then rip it up. This area no longer has a hold of you.

Day 22 - How to Grow: Self-Denial

Luke 9:23-26

Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels."

Phil 3:7-8

You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.

There are many things that we like to have in life which deep down we know we shouldn't have or take. Someone makes fun of you or calls you a name and you want revenge. You want to say things that you know aren't right, or just plain hit the person right in the nose. Do you do it, or do you deny yourself?

Then there are those pesky tests and quizzes at school. A question is asked and you just can't remember the answer. Your classmate next to you is pretty smart. They probably know the answer. Do you look? You know you want to, but should you?

Or you are talking with friends at school, and filthy language is being used. You know such words as #@%! or *blanket-blank-blank-blank*. Words you would never say in church or at church camp. You want to fit in, so do you use those words or not? Do you deny yourself acceptance?

In one case, you want revenge, or justice. In the other case, you want a good grade. The third case, you want acceptance. Good grades, justice and acceptance are all good things in and of themselves. Do we do what is easy, or do we deny ourselves in order to do what is right and pleasing to God? Any time we do what is wrong in order to be accepted by or excel in the world, we are denying Jesus. Any time we deny ourselves and refuse to do what is wrong, we are proclaiming that Jesus is the one in charge of our lives and that he is Lord.

Questions To Wrestle With

1. What things in the world entice you the most: fame, fortune, success, or something else?
2. How do we sacrifice our relationship with Jesus when we recklessly pursue such things?
3. Look at Philippians 3:7-8 again. Ask yourself, "What things in this list do I need to work on getting rid of and deny myself?"

Prayer

"Lord, it is very easy to simply do and say what I want without even thinking, 'Is it the right thing. Is it what you want me to do?' Father, help me deny myself the sins of this world that so easily entangle and instead be obedient to you."

Action Step

Pick one or two things from the list in Philippians 3:7-8 that you want to stop doing. Tell a friend who will help you that you don't want to do those things anymore. If they catch you, they are to remind you of your commitment to get rid of it.

Day 23 - How to Grow: Prayer

Philippians 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Have you ever had butterflies in your stomach? It happens in that moment right before you take the field for a big game against your rival. They show up when you are supposed to sing the solo for the Christmas concert. Your stomach starts to turn when you ask someone out for the very first time or when you start talking with your secret crush. That is the nice, innocent version of anxiety; it's a little bit of worry mixed with fear. We really want things to go well, but we don't know if they will, so we are anxious.

Anxiety has a much darker side, though. It shows up when you can't sleep at night because you know you need to pass tomorrow's test or you will fail the class. It makes you sick to your stomach when you wonder if your friend will forgive you for the things you said and did. It makes our mind go crazy with worry wondering if anyone will ever really love you. It makes us ask questions like: Am I good enough? Does anyone love me? Will I ever be ok?

The Bible's answer to anxiety is prayer. Talk to God about everything. "In every situation" we are to come to God and tell him what is on our hearts. God will listen to your concerns about the big test and the big game. He will listen to your fears about your health and your future. He will listen to it all, and he promises you something in return. You receive the "peace of God" to "guard your hearts and minds." What does that mean?

It means that when we talk to God about our fears, worries, and anxieties, we are reminded that God is bigger than all of them. You are loved because he loves you. You are good enough because he makes you good enough. You are okay because he is in control of this whole thing. We can have peace because God is in control. So the next time you are freaking out; STOP! Don't text your friends, tweet a complaint, or take a sad selfie for Snapchat. Pray. Present your requests to God, and he will give you peace to guard your heart and mind.

Questions To Wrestle With

1. What makes you anxious? What are you worried about right now?
2. How does knowing that God is in control help you deal with those worries?
3. Why don't you pray? What keeps you from talking to God about everything?

Prayer

God, thank you for hearing my prayers. I need the peace you promise, so let me tell you about my worries and anxieties.

Action Step

Finish the prayer from above. Write out a list of all the things that you are worried about today. They can be small (like making it to work on time) or massive (like mom's health). Talk to God about each of them. Tell him why you are afraid. Ask him for help. Ask him for peace.

Day 24 — How to Grow: Study

Psalm 119:105

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

Romans 15:4

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

How many of you **ACTUALLY** like to study for school? If you do, then what's wrong with you?! Just kidding, if you do that's great. Most students don't like to study for school for a variety of reasons. School can be difficult. For some, it's boring, or maybe you are studying for a subject that you don't like.

You probably have something you do like to study, though it may not be related to school. I am an avid sports fan, and I like to collect sports cards. When I was younger, I would get a new magazine each month that talked about sports cards and how much they were worth. I would read the magazine cover to cover multiple times each month. The magazine went with me to school, and every time I had a free moment I was reading it. I could tell you all about different sport cards. As much as I liked sports, and knew a lot of information about sports cards, that information was meaningless in the long run. That information was not going to change my life.

Fortunately, though, we have something we can study that isn't meaningless. The Bible is something that will change our lives. God has given us the Bible to study and apply to our lives. We read in Psalms 119:105 that is a "light for our path." You are going to have moments in your life when you will need the Bible to guide your decisions. In Romans we read that you will have moments of endurance and encouragement, and it's the Scriptures that will give you hope. You are going to have times at school, at home, and with your friends when you will need the Scriptures to guide your actions. The only way to know what the Scriptures say is to study it. Spend time reading through God's Word each day. It doesn't have to be a big passage; it could be a couple verses. Whatever you read; take it and read through it a couple times. Try to figure out how it applies to your life. If it is a verse that really sticks out to you, memorize it. Take the opportunity daily to study God's Word because it truly will change your life.

Questions To Wrestle With

1. Over the last 24 days, what is a verse that you've read that has impacted you?
2. What is the hardest part about studying the Bible to you? What do you enjoy about studying the Bible?
3. How have you changed by going through this devotional?

Prayer

God help me to love you word. Sometimes it is hard for me to understand what it all means, but I want to know you more. Help to understand it, and give me the discipline to study it often.

Action Step

This week pick a verse that will be your theme verse for the school year. Write that verse down on a piece of paper and place it by your bed so you see it every day.

Day 25—How to Grow: Community and Accountability

Hebrews 10:23-25

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

There is one light on the dashboard of a vehicle that no one likes to see: the “check engine” light. Now, there are a couple of options when you see it. You could cover it up with a piece of black tape, so you don’t have to look at it, or you could take it to a repair shop and have the vehicle looked over and be given a diagnosis of the problem.

When you arrive at the auto parts store, a person comes out to your car with a hand-held tool which they plug in. The device pulls the error code from the car’s computer that is tripping the check engine light. Then he looks in a book that tells him one of the possible problems, how serious it is, and how to resolve it.

We’ve all had periods in our Christian life where the “check engine” light is on. We have a problem in our life, and we can’t afford to just ignore it. We need to know that there is a sort of plugging in that might help diagnose the problem in our faith. God has given us the power of church community to help us stay on task with our spiritual lives. We need other people to help us in our journey with Christ. We encourage, challenge, and push one another to maintain the Christian course.

Consider the next step you can take to have someone keep your life accountable to the Word of God. Maybe your first step is regularly attending church. If you have that mastered, perhaps it’s consistently attending your church’s student ministry. Have that one down pat, too? You just might consider meeting regularly with another Christian whom you will allow to ask the hard questions about your faith life so you can get a regular checkup.

Questions To Wrestle With

1. Why is it important that we stay in community with other Christians?
2. How can doing life alone create dangers in our faith?
3. Who can be someone you might ask to be an accountability partner with you?

Pray

“Lord, thank you that we can do life together with other believers. Please help me so see that having Christian community is a blessing and a benefit.”

Action Step

Call, message, or text someone this week and ask them if you could start meeting regularly for accountability. With your accountability partner, Google “accountability questions” and create a personalized list of questions that will help you both.

Day 26 – How to Grow: Service

John 13:12-14

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

Galatians 5:13-14

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Have you ever been inspired by a “rags to riches” film or story? You know how the story goes. An underdog nobody believes in beats the odds and wins the big game! The kid from a broken home overcomes the obstacles to succeed at the highest levels. We love to cheer for the underdog. It gives us hope that maybe if they can do it, we can do it, too. God calls us to something different, though. He says that even if you are at the top, you should humble yourself and get back down to the bottom.

Jesus was king of heaven, and yet he came to this world as a lowly human without honor or class. He was born to a carpenter from a pretty normal, boring town, with average parents. His whole life was about serving others, healing the sick, and feeding the hungry. Jesus made it such a point to serve others that on his last night with his disciples, he washed their feet. Do you know how gross their feet were after walking everywhere in sandals? This was something that the lowest class of people did! He wanted his disciples to really understand what it looks like to be a servant.

Think of it as a pay-it-forward type of program, Jesus served us in the best ways possible. Now, he calls us to do the same, to serve those around us. If we make it a point to serve others just like Christ served others, we can influence the world.

Questions To Wrestle With

1. What movie or book is your favorite underdog story? What makes it attractive to you?
2. Who in your life has ever served you in a meaningful way?
3. Who in your life do you have influence over? How could you be a servant to show them the love of God?

Prayer

“God show me the people in my life that I could serve, so that they might see how much you love them. Help me to put others first so that I might be more like you and learn what it means to be a servant.”

Action Step

Think of a task you hate doing (washing dishes, cleaning out your car, etc), and offer to do it for someone else. Make their day better by serving them.

Day 27 - How to Grow: Generosity

Matthew 25:34-40 (Read 31-46)

Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothed you? When did we see you sick or in prison and did not go to visit you?" The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

Instead of "Why should we give" the better question is "why not?" God has given us so much. Every breath we take, every friendship we have, every piece of food we enjoy is a gift from God. How can we choose to not give to others when we have been given so much? This passage calls us to give to other people as if we were giving back to God himself.

If we believe this to be true, it spurs us into action. If there are no actions associated with our faith, God's Word says our faith is dead. (James 2:14-26) Being able to give and share what you have with others is one of the greatest joys of following Christ. The way we give and share with each other is how the love of God is demonstrated among us. Look at the passage for the day (Matthew 25:31-46). Jesus teaches a valuable lesson about how the sheep and the goats will be separated at judgment time. The message is an eye opening one of how Jesus views our generosity and servitude toward one another - or our lack of it.. Circle in your bible what Jesus says: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me."

God's love is meant for everyone, everywhere. If we are truly following Jesus, generosity should be something we strive to have.

Questions to Wrestle With

1. How generous a person do you consider yourself? Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-8. Do you give reluctantly or freely when asked to? Does anything hold you back from giving generously?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 9:10-15. What does this passage tell us about God's purpose and plan for our generosity? Is seeing God praised for your good deeds a motivation to you?
3. God sees what people can't see! How can that inspire you to be generous, even if you won't get applause for it? Would you say that you have been a generous person?

Prayer

"Dad, today I pray that you begin to make me generous. Show me how I can use what little I have to help someone around me. I pray that when I give of my time, energy, stuff, money, etc. that people don't see me, but see Your love. God I love you. In Jesus name, Amen"

Action step

Think of ways in which you can become generous. What areas and relationships do you need to work on? This week commit to do three acts of generosity. What are they?

Day 28 – How to Grow: Worship

Psalm 95:1-6

Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.

Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.

For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods.

In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him.

The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.

Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;

Mohammed Ali is one of the greatest athletes to ever live; and he knew he was great. In fact, he made a career out of telling people “I am the greatest.” One particular story reveals just how prideful Ali could be as he compares himself to Superman. In Muhammad Ali’s heyday as the heavy weight champion in boxing, he had taken his seat on an airplane which was starting to taxi down the runway for take off. The flight attendant walked by and noticed Ali did not have on his seatbelt, and said, “Please fasten your seatbelt, sir.”

He looked up proudly and snapped, “Superman don’t need no seatbelt.”

Without hesitation she stared at him and said, “Superman don’t need no plane.”

Ali needed to be reminded that as great as he was, he was still human. That’s what worship does for us. The Psalm writer reminds that God is great, that he is the king above all gods, that the whole earth belongs to him, and that he is our maker. Sometimes we think this life is all about us. We get so focused on our own skills, our own perspective, our own failures, and our own relationships that we forget that this life is about God and not us. We need to be reminded that we are only human, and we serve an incredible God who is there in the good times and the bad times. That’s what worship does for us. It re-centers our hearts on God. It shifts our perspective heavenward and helps us remember who we are, and who God is.

Questions to Wrestle With

1. What are some ways that you get so self-focused you forget how big God is? Is it when things are going good and you feel good about yourself? Is it when things are going bad and you feel defeated?
2. How can worship refocus your thoughts and life on God?
3. Which of the statements in Psalm 95:1-6 reminds you of God’s greatness?

Prayer

“God, I’m sorry for thinking that this life is only about me. Remind me of who you are; remind me of how great you are, and help me keep my focus on you.”

Action step

Pick a favorite worship song or two, and let the lyrics refocus your heart on God’s greatness. You could start with *Great Are You Lord, How Great is Our God*, or *So Will I (100 Billion X)*.

Day 29 – How to Grow: A Process

2 Peter 1:5-9 NIV

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. If you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our LORD Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

Does your family have a favorite family recipe? The one everyone loves to eat, but no one shares, because it's a secret. That very first time you got to make the dish you looked at that recipe like it was a map to hidden treasure! You carefully measured out all the ingredients. You knew that special combination mixed up just right would be totally awesome!

In some ways we can compare our lives to a recipe. The big difference is that there are no secret ingredients. It begins with a faith in Jesus Christ. Peter, a disciple of Jesus and a leader of the Church, gave us some ingredients for an even better more satisfying life in Christ. His recipe for an effective and productive life is found in the words he wrote in the scripture 2 Peter 2:5-9:

- Begin with a personal relationship with Jesus (faith).
- Add goodness and an equal amount of knowledge.
- Mix in self-control and perseverance (determination).
- Combine with godliness and a pinch of mutual affection.
- Stir thoroughly and bake with plenty of love.

God doesn't expect us to have these qualities instantly. Just look at Peter, who, as a disciple of Christ, kept messing up, and yet he kept growing in faith. This is why the verse above tells us to add these attributes in increasing measure. The further we walk with Jesus, the more loving, the more faithful, and the godlier we will be. Peter tells us that if we keep learning these qualities, we will know more about Jesus. He also tells us that if we get lazy and no longer seek that knowledge that we will fall away from the One who loves us.

Questions To Wrestle With

1. Which characteristic from the list Peter gave us do you think God wants to help you grow?
2. Can you name one way you have grown since you became a follower of Christ?

Pray:

"Father, help me to always want to know more about you, fill me with goodness, knowledge, self-control, determination, godliness, mutual affection and most of all love, Amen"

Action Step

Bake a cake or cookies. As you add the ingredients, think about the kind of person God is making you to be (loving, faithful, and kind). Share the cake with a friend and talk about who God is making you to be.

Day 30 – Moving Beyond

Hebrews 6:1

Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity

My son's school has a phrase they use when planning their curriculum and programming. They constantly talk about a "growth mindset." The idea is not to focus on meeting a certain set of standards or passing a certain test, but making sure that every student, no matter how far ahead or behind they might be, is growing every single school year. Everything is measured based on where you are now, and helping you grow as the year goes on.

We forget that in the church sometimes. We think that everyone who has decided to follow Jesus should suddenly be perfect and know everything. A Christian doesn't lie anymore...does she? A Christian doesn't look at pornography anymore...does he? A Christian prays every day...right? The reality is that following Jesus is a long, complicated journey. You have days where you feel like you have really grown into a mature follower of Christ who loves people, serves people, and is close to God. But the very next week you may have days when all of the old habits come back, and you feel like an utter failure. That's all perfectly normal; following Jesus is a lifelong journey of growth.

What we need, as followers of Christ, is a growth mindset. Every day we wake up determined to look and love more like Jesus than we did the day before. We keep fighting against our sinful desires. We keep learning to love people more and more. We keep learning to humbly serve the people around us. We leave behind the elementary teachings and move forward into maturity as the author of Hebrews says. Today is the last day of this book. It has been 4 weeks since camp concluded, and hopefully you have grown, matured, and been prepared for life in "the real world." But your journey is not over. This book is kind of like the training wheels on your bike; it was necessary to help learn how to start seeking God, but nobody wants to ride with training wheels forever.

Find a book of the Bible to read through. Purchase your own devotional off Amazon. Ask your minister to help you put together a plan. Just keep moving. Keep growing. Keep maturing as a follower of Christ.

Questions To Wrestle With

1. How have you grown as a follower of Jesus since camp has ended?
2. In what areas do you still struggle to keep God first?
3. What is the next area of your life that you need to grow in?

Prayer

"God thanks you for all the change you have already brought in my life. Please help me to keep growing and change. Make me more like you every day, Amen."

Action Step

Ask a close friend or spiritual leader (minister or youth leader) where they think you need to grow the most (honesty, biblical knowledge, loving others, etc.). Have them help you develop a plan to grow in that area. Maybe there is a book of the Bible you can study, a book you can read, a ministry you can help with, or some other way to keep growing.