

**WIDE  
AWAKE**

A CITY HILLS DEVOTIONAL

## **WIDE AWAKE: A CITY HILLS DEVOTIONAL**

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# PREFACE

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Dear Reader,

Since the beginning of our church in 2015, we have set our hearts to be a people of prayer. Our rally cry has simply been, "Pray First." In every situation, whether good or bad, we try to pray before we act. Many times people act first and then want God to bail them out of that situation, but prayer should be our first response, not our last resort.

Understanding the necessity of prayer is not enough. In order for it to become a part of our life, it needs to become something we look forward to. I'm convinced most people don't enjoy prayer because they have never been taught how to pray. That's where this simple prayer journal can help. Using daily devotionals from the Bible and having some guides to make prayer more personal, this booklet is designed to help bring joy into your time with God. When you discover the beauty of daily conversation with Him, you'll be "Wide awake" to the voice of God that will change your life.

God wants to speak to you! He has a great plan and purpose for your life. Regardless of your past failures, hurts, or regrets, He is not finished with you yet! His voice is still speaking to you, calling you higher! Like Samuel in the Bible, let's wake up to the voice of God and see our world changed for the glory of God!

"Oh give me Samuel's ear!  
The open ear, O God!  
Alive and quick to hear  
Each whisper of Thy word;  
Like him to answer at Thy call,  
And to obey Thee first of all."  
James Drummond Burns (1823-1864)

Prayer changes everything!

PASTOR BRANDON SHANKS

**PRAYERS**

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## DAY ONE GIVE ME A HEART THAT HEARS

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Sometimes when we get quiet and begin to seek God more, we may discover that we don't initially like what we hear. I recently experienced something similar when the Lord began speaking to me.

The majority of my life, when asked to help with something, my answer was typically, *yes*. I would say *yes* before I checked with my schedule, before checking with my husband or family, and more importantly, before checking with God. Oftentimes, my *yes* left me feeling frazzled, overwhelmed, and confused. There were times, I also felt frustrated or angry with myself for not having the courage to say *no*. So, what does this have to do with hearing God?

I've been trying to slow down and actually listen to God. He's had some pretty interesting things to say. He's revealed to me that often my *yes* was a way of controlling the situation. Often, I said *yes* to prove I could do a particular task or because it was a boost to my ego. I could show that I was capable of performing a particular task or meeting a need. This helped me feel needed, accepted, and wanted. I was not trusting God and saying *yes* for the right reasons.

Instead, the Lord has shown me that I was being prideful. Inadvertently, I had made an idol of myself by trusting in my own abilities more than His direction in

the things I undertook. I'm a work in progress as He is gently leading me and revealing areas for repentance and opportunities for growth.

In 2019, I participated in a Freedom small group and the conference. Early in 2020, I felt God speaking to my heart that I needed to be water baptized. This was a test. But, would I listen? I was baptized as a teenager. But the Lord reminded me He was doing a new thing. This was an invitation to act in obedience to Him....a YES to Him for all the right reasons. I leaned over to my husband, told him what was happening, then allowed God to do the rest. The next thing I knew, I was rising from the water. I listened Lord!

I would love to say I have it all figured out and that I only say "yes" when I feel like the Holy Spirit is nudging me. But, sometimes, it doesn't work out that way. I occasionally say *yes* more often than I should. But, I am also learning to hear my Father's voice and say "YES" to the things He is calling me to do. He lovingly invites us to slow down, listen for him to speak, and to walk closer with him. I'm grateful He is a good and patient Father. I am grateful He is giving me a heart and desire to hear Him above all else.

"...speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." 1 Samuel 3:9

"...consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." Romans 10:17

RENEE BRADLEY

In anticipation of the upcoming deer season, I spend a TREMENDOUS amount of time in preparation. I will place cameras, install hunting stands in trees and, of course, double check all the rest of the many pieces of equipment that make hunting my sport.

After months of preparing, finally the big day is upon me, opening day is here!. I get up early, pack food for the day. Equipment. Check. Camouflage apparel. Check. With all the work leading up to this day there are no other thoughts than I will be successful in my pursuit.

Yes, my sporting pursuit is hunting. Much like baseball, soccer and football, we hunters spend a tremendous amount of time in preparation and practice for the big game. While success in sports and the time it takes to be successful is an admirable pleasure, I want to remind you there is a bigger, more meaningful pursuit before us every day. The real pursuit is our eternity.

Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made this good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

1 Timothy 6:12

I have found that many days sitting in the forest end without taking the prize

trophy, but, as I sit in God's promise, I never go home empty hearted. God has revealed to me time and time again that the journey is the prize. Our one life is here and gone so fast; but, the end of life on earth is when all the preparation and practice of pursuing a relationship with Jesus provides the win. To win is to have God know your name and give you a seat at his glorious table.

So know, whatever your sport is, I wish you a win. More than that, I pray you win the bigger prize. Pursue the one true prize, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and you will receive the kingdom of heaven. True victory indeed!

Seek the kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. Mathew 6:33

Until that day for me, I know I must "practice and prepare" as I continue my walk with Jesus. Never losing focus. Always prepared by his word and holy spirit to win the race before me. Join me. Be my teammate. We will be celebrating our win together one day!

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

2 Timothy 4:7

ROGER LACEY

I recently read a story about two Steinway Grand pianos. They were both very old. One was a sight to behold with beautiful ornate carvings in the wood--like something out of a fairytale. However, when you opened it up and began to play it, it sounded like something out of a haunted house. The strings were out of tune, bent in all the wrong ways, no longer sounding like anything that resembled its purpose. It was so far gone that the only way to make it usable again was to strip it of all of its inner-workings and replace it with all new parts.

The other Grand piano was simple and nothing special to look at. There were no carvings and no great story to tell--until the artist opened it up and began to play. Even though it was just as old as the ornate piano, when the artist played it, the most beautiful music could be heard.

The difference between the two pianos was that one had been untouched over the years. Its strings were never subjected to the consistent bending and tuning of a master artist. It was of no good use to anyone and only useful to look upon. What was inside had no value because it was left for nature to take its course.

The other piano, even though it was nothing special to behold, had been regularly tuned. Its strings were consistently tightened & adjusted to the correct pitch--bent a certain way and submitted--yielded to the artist's hand. When the

artist sat down and began to infuse his mastery with the purpose of what the piano was created for, it forged a beautiful masterpiece.

Our hearts are a lot like those two pianos. Without deliberate and ongoing tuning, it goes out of tune with the Gospel, and out of tune with God's purpose for us.

Our tendency to focus on ourselves is not just a temptation, but it is a human default. Our focus is constantly pulled inward. The very nature of man is self-seeking, self-exalting, and prideful. Deceitful and wicked (Jeremiah 17:9). This means we have to consistently submit to the Master's hand to tune and re-tune our hearts to Him, or we will bend right back again.

Realizing that we do not have all the answers, that we desperately need His guidance and correction to keep us submitted and on track, is one of the biggest steps to having a humble heart.

I pray that God would awaken our hearts today to the gentle and consistent tuning of His hand. That we would gladly submit to the bending that is sometimes uncomfortable, but brings us into alignment with Him and the purpose for which He created us.

SHELLY WILSON



## DAY FOUR      CLEANSE MY HEART OF SIN

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David, as the Psalmist to the 139<sup>th</sup> chapter, encapsulates the contrite desire to be brought into closer union with the Lord.

<sup>23</sup>Examine me, God, and know my mind; test me, and understand my anxious thoughts. <sup>24</sup>Watch lest I follow any path that grieves you; lead me in the everlasting way.”

Growing up we have a tendency to lean towards independence from our parents, school, and other institutionalized concepts to procure our own identity and sense of “self.” Our own determination, accolades, and goals become our self assessment to see if we made it. I’ve been there and if you’ve ever been on that path, that elusive *it*, is never enough.

David, the one after God’s own heart, fought this distraction to sin too as he asked the Lord to search out his blind spots. Although he never lost a battle because the Lord was on his side, acquired more riches than anyone, to hand off to Solomon, even he was susceptible to err, to sin, and fall short of the mark of God’s goodness.

What ultimately leads him back after accepting the consequences for his actions is a humble and contrite heart. The Lord hears and is able to abide in us

as our mind, body, and spirits are submitted before Him. He is good to raise us back to abundant life and take away the weight of our shortcomings. There is nothing we can do to deserve such kindness, so let us rejoice! Let us ask for His help, receive it, and give to others what we’ve been freely gifted today.

As we seek to rely on Him and surrender our hearts completely to what He has accomplished, He is faithful to transform our lives into instruments of His glory. Within us, the living water bubbles, purifying, changing, and cleansing our hearts of sin as we confess to Him. Looking at Christ, we are sure of this — He has forgiven all sin past, present, and future, and in every circumstance the direction we need is there if only we seek and wait patiently for His perfect timing.

<sup>25</sup>I shall sprinkle pure water over you, and you will be purified from everything that defiles you; I shall purify you from the taint of your idols. <sup>26</sup>I shall give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I shall remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh.”  
Ezekiel 36:25-26

The question that strikes me as of late is this: *“In my thoughts, where is Jesus?”* As you start out today, my prayer is that you ask God to reveal, trim, and tend the garden of your life to showcase His beauty to others so that as He is lifted up, they may be drawn closer to Him.

MICHAEL LANA

There are so many wonderful, wholesome things around us that cause us to nod our heads and smile in agreement that yes, God is all powerful, and He is truly working all things together for our good (*Romans 8:28*).

But what about those things that leave us wondering about His ability and goodness? If we are honest, we have all been there in that place of unanswered prayers, and lots of questions. Is God still good? Is God really all powerful?

In Mark 9:14-29, we read of an account where a father pleads with Jesus to heal his son that has been possessed by an evil spirit, leaving him mute and epileptic. As any loving parent would be, he is desperate for anything that might give his boy respite from this agony. The father says to Jesus: "...if you can do anything..." If.

Right away, Jesus throws those words right back at him: "If you can?" And then tells the man that everything is possible when one believes.

The boy's father immediately hears the disbelief in his own voice after Jesus speaks his own words back to him, and cries out, "*I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief.*" (v24) Jesus then casts the evil spirit out of his son forever. Praise God!

Verse 24 is one of those that is a head scratcher at first glance. How can this man believe, but ask for help with his unbelief? There are a couple of things to take note of here.

First of all, in verse 23, Jesus says that everything is POSSIBLE for one who believes. He did not say that everything is definite, or everything that a believer asks for is signed, sealed, stamped, and delivered. It is possible, meaning that God can do whatever He wants. There is no power higher than Him, and no power that He must yield to before He can move. Our job is not to keep a checklist of all the prayers that He hasn't answered the way that we wanted Him to, but rather to believe that He CAN do it.

Second thing of note is the boy's father's reaction to hearing his own unbelief echoed back to him by Jesus. He cries out for Jesus to help his unbelief while also claiming to believe. It is hard to think of a more vulnerable plea than this. The man seems to know that Jesus is his last hope while also being aware of his own shortcomings before the Healer. Oh, that we would all be this honest and transparent in our prayers to the Father! Can we be honest enough to admit that we cannot see the big picture, but wise enough to completely trust the One that can?

Oh God! We believe that you are all powerful. Give us the faith and trust that is required to see You move in and among Your people in accordance with the powerful name of Jesus!

## DAY SIX REMOVE THE DISTRACTIONS FROM MY HEART

---

Imagine you're at the farmers market on a hot August day. You've come to buy the best produce summer has to offer so you can enjoy a delicious meal this evening. As you arrive you notice all kinds of vendors, some selling food, others wooden bowls, others trinkets, and still others, household wares. You wander through the stalls examining everything, buying pieces here and there. At last, you remember you came for produce, so you return to your favorite vendor only to find that he has sold out for the day. You've missed out on what you came for because you became distracted.

Isn't that just like us as believers? We have the best intentions, desiring to spend time with God, reading and meditating on His Word. But somewhere along the way we become distracted by the things we choose to pursue. Or perhaps we lose our focus because of our lack of discipline. We prioritize our activities of the day over our time with the Lord.

The prophet Isaiah asks us, "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live..." Isaiah 55:1-3a

We are reminded that only God satisfies. He stands in the market, arms open

with an abundance of nourishment readily available for our souls, a cornucopia of all things eternally good and satisfying. Yet, because we are distracted we are unable to see.

God implores us to listen diligently to Him, to "*taste and see that the Lord is good.*" (Psalm 34:8) If Samuel had been distracted in 1 Samuel 3, striving for other things, he could have missed God's voice, specifically calling him out to the most important mission of his life.

What is drawing your attention away from Jesus' voice? Have you chosen His good portion, or are you so distracted you've missed it? Your savior, Jesus, still stands, arms outstretched, holding delightful spiritual food that only He can provide. He longs to give you every good eternal gift, if only you will turn your heart and your ears to Him in order that you might take hold. In order that you might turn and say, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

TIFFANY COUGHLIN

## DAY SEVEN LEAD ME TO BE STILL LORD

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13 But Moses told the people, “Don’t be afraid. Just stand still and watch the Lord rescue you today. The Egyptians you see today will never be seen again. 14 The Lord himself will fight for you. Just stay calm.” Exodus 14:13-14

Father, thank you for Your unfailing love for us.

When I began to think about and meditate on the title of today’s devotional, it struck me that in order to be led by the LORD, I need to choose to follow Him. In this passage of scripture, the Israelites are camped at the shores of the Red Sea, on their exodus journey from Egypt. Because of their choice to act in faith and follow the LORD, they were released from slavery and on their way to God’s promised land.

At the beginning of chapter 14, the Lord instructs Moses to tell the Israelites to camp at the Red Sea, while He hardens Pharaoh’s heart, causing him to give chase after them. Pharaoh thought that he had them trapped in the wilderness, but little did he know that it was a trap planned by the LORD, so that He would defeat the Egyptian army, bringing glory and honor to God.

In 2 Chronicles 16, Hanani the seer came to Asa, the king of Judah, letting him know that instead of relying on the LORD, Asa had acted foolishly by relying on

the king of Syria to protect Judah. Asa made this poor decision, even though the LORD had previously helped Asa to defeat many powerful nations that had come against Judah. In vs 9 Hanani reminds Asa, that the eyes of the LORD are looking for those who look to the LORD with their whole heart, so that He can show Himself strong on their behalf. The Lord is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow!

Like Asa and the Israelites, we too have a decision to make. Will we choose to continually follow the LORD, surrendering our hearts to Him daily and enjoy the victory of the LORD over our enemy? Or will we choose to look to the world’s ways to protect and save us? The LORD has a plan for our lives. He is drawing the enemy in, setting a trap for him using our circumstances, so that the enemy will be defeated, and God glorified, as the LORD shows himself strong on our behalf.

Let us look to the LORD then with our whole heart, so that He would lead us to be still (at peace), knowing that He is God, and that in all circumstances the LORD is drawing the enemy into His trap, to show Himself strong on our behalf. All of this is so that the many-sided wisdom of God would now be made known, through you and I, the church, to the rulers and to the authorities in the heavenlies according to the eternal plan which He made, using Jesus Christ our LORD (Eph 3:10-11).

Thank You LORD Jesus for giving us Your Holy Spirit and Your written Word to guide us as we live in faith. Holy Spirit lead us to be still as we surrender our hearts to the LORD daily.

GARY BEKKER

## DAY EIGHT      GIVE ME A SPIRIT THAT HEARS

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Picture yourself getting ready for bed. You lie down and hear a voice. You run to the other end of the house and ask your mentor what they want because you heard them call out your name. Your mentor says that he didn't say anything, "Just go back to bed." This happened to Samuel three times as recorded in 1 Samuel 3: 1-10. On the third time, Eli told Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'" Then the Bible says, in verse 9, that Samuel went and laid down in his place. After Samuel laid in his place the Lord called him again and Samuel told the Lord, "Here I am, please speak" Then God spoke as Samuel listened!

Just like Samuel, we must have certain things in alignment to hear the voice of God. Notice how Samuel went to Eli when He first heard the voice of God. Samuel had the right person at his table. Someone that would give him wise and godly counsel. There are many times in life that had the right people not been at my table, I would have missed what God was leading me to do during that time.

Eli told Samuel to go and listen. Samuel then said "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening"! Samuel's heart was positioned so that he was open to whatever God had to say. We must be willing to listen! God will always speak. But, we need to be open to hear what He has to say. If we have already worked out in

our minds what we want God to say, or what we think He should say, we are not open to His voice. We have to submit our will to His!

The other thing that Samuel had in alignment was that he went to "his place." The Bible says he was lying in his place, in the temple where the ark of God was. In the Old Testament, the ark always represented the place where the Spirit and the presence of God dwelled. Samuel knew where to go to hear the voice of God. From the text, I think it is safe to say Samuel was lying in the night with everything blocked out of his head except the Lord. He silenced all other voices, including his own, and tuned into God's voice. The Bible says that God is a jealous God. All He wants is our heart and attention. I encourage you to find that place where you can get alone in your life with God and just listen!

Don't worry if you keep missing his voice, God will always call your name out again and again!!

WAYNE WILSON

## DAY NINE LEAD ME TO KNOW YOUR VOICE

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Our German Shepherd, Kyro is going through re-training. Coming from a large populated metropolitan area, always indoors and all walks on a lead is VERY different than being a “country “ dog. You get the idea, right.

So, for Kyro, learning to enjoy the freedom of leadless roaming and living the “country” dog life is a good learning experience for me and hopefully an entertaining short story for you to enjoy and maybe get a little chuckle out of it.

I am learning in the process of re-training Kyro to the country life that he listens to me when I speak to him but he doesn’t always HEAR my voice.

Here’s a good example of what I’m talking about. Our wonderful neighbor across the street has cats. From what I’ve discerned in the spirit,(Kyro’s behavior) he’s not too fond of cats (not throwing shade on cats). And, apparently these country cats have no fear of country dogs.

Recently on one of our leadless training walks our neighbor came out to say hello to us and one of her cats came out to say hello to Kyro. I immediately began to speak to Kyro telling him to: sit, leave it, good boy, leave it, leave it. He was doing exceptionally well with not only listening to my voice but HEARING my voice UNTIL... a SECOND cat came out to say hello to us. That’s when Kyro

lost all his hearing and the chase was on!

I’ve learned that the best time of the day to re-train Kyro to enjoy his leadless country dog life is early in the morning when there is silence and little to zero distractions (*i.e. cats and other country critters*).

No one can conjure up God or force Him to speak. It’s never in my control. When I say, like Samuel, “Speak. I’m your servant, ready to listen” ( 1 Samuel 3:10), I will be in a place to hear WHEN God speaks. Developing an ear that recognizes God’s voice opens up your life to the possibility of hearing the voice of God through anyone or anything.

God can speak to us through Scripture, the voice of a dear friend, through nature, even through our own reactions and interactions. In the silence we learn to wait attentively. If nothing seems to be happening in our prayer, if God seems silent, we return to the truth that we are not separate from God. We may not “hear” a specific word, but God is near, closer than our own breath, abiding deep within. Our part is to faithfully show up, wide awake, and trust that God is present beyond the words, or in the words, waiting to bask in our full attention.

MANNY MENDOZA

“Whoever has ears let them hear...” Matthew 13:9

I don't know about you, but if I am surrounded by a group of people, or by myself, and suddenly there's a wind, an earthquake and a fire, it's going to get my attention. But, this passage says that God wasn't in those things. They were present before He showed up. The wind, the fire, and the earthquake were just an announcement. God is saying "I'm about to show up. I'm about to move in your life. I'm about to accomplish something in you."

Then there is “the still small voice.” You have to understand from God's point of view that if you are a spirit, and you're dealing with a natural world, then the way you manifest yourself to that natural world is through your voice, and through what you say. God desires to speak to us. The wind of adversity, the fire of trials, and the earthquake of change are introductions to prepare our hearts to hear from God. God's desire is to show us who He is by what He says.

From the beginning of time God has desired a relationship with every human--a personal relationship where He communicates with each of us Spirit to spirit. In Romans 8:16 Paul writes, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit, that we are children of God.” How do we know we're hearing God's voice? It is that small voice inside, that according to James 3:17, “is first pure, peaceable,

gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, without hypocrisy.” Anything contrary is something that is not from God.

Many times in life we are looking for God to speak to us in a big way but more often than not it's the little things that he's whispering to us everyday. Don't miss or take for granted what God can do through the little things!

“Then He said, “Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.” I Kings 19:11-12 NKJV

STEPHANIE SULAK

## DAY ELEVEN GIVE ME A SPIRIT OF WISDOM

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Paul said in his letter to Ephesus (Ephesians 1:17): I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. We know from Corinthians (12:8) that wisdom can be given as a spiritual gift, but it must be used in the spirit and in love.

I believe that when you ask God for wisdom through prayer for a situation or circumstance, it will be granted. However, I also believe if you follow Christ and the fruits of the Holy Spirit are evident in your life, wisdom may already be evident in your life.

Wisdom can be hard. Wisdom is often gained through difficult events. These events build our character and teach us lessons that can last a lifetime. Yet, so many of us learn lessons in hard places that leave us battle-scarred. In those places, we must remember what the Lord says in Hebrews (13:5) “I will never leave you nor forsake you”. The Lord is there, the Holy Spirit is there. Rely on the Holy Spirit to do the heavy lifting.

Solomon, who is known today as the wisest man, said in Proverbs 9:10, *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*. I once heard an intercessory prayer team teach on how to “walk in the fear of the Lord.” It's important to understand

that fear of the Lord isn't like the terror version of fear that we see in secular areas of life. Fear of the Lord is a renowned reverence of His greatness. It is knowing that he is God. Proverbs 8:1 tells us that *to fear the Lord is to hate evil*. This is a choice, we have to purposely, with eyes wide open, choose to fear the Lord, everyday. We need to be aware of God's presence and learn to speak to, trust, and hear from him everyday. We must highly value God's word in the Bible. We have to worship him and embrace his discipline. This is the beginning of wisdom. After Solomon asked the Lord for wisdom, Kings 3:10 says: “The Lord was pleased.” How spectacular is that?

My prayer for you is that you will see manifestations of greatness within your life, that you will kneel before the Lord and ask for the spirit of wisdom. That in all things you will walk with the Lord, and feel the power of the Holy Spirit daily. My prayer is that when it seems impossible, you will ask the Lord for help and that He will grant clarity through wisdom. I pray His wisdom would be so evident in your life.

HARRY MCKINNEY



## DAY TWELVE GIVE ME A SPIRIT OF REVELATION

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Paul, while speaking to the saints in Ephesus, prayed that the Lord would give them the “Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him” (Ephesians 1:17-18). He continued his prayer to have the eyes of their hearts enlightened, that they would know what the hope to which God had called them-which was the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.

When we take the time to study the Bible for ourselves, we have trouble figuring out what God is trying to reveal to us in His word. Jesus often spoke in parables, telling his disciples in Matthew 13:10-17 the many reasons why he chose to teach in that way. In his explanation to the disciples, he tells them that being his followers allowed them to know the secrets to the kingdom of heaven. But others may not know these secrets because they have eyes, but do not see; ears, but do not hear; and they lack understanding. Because of this, the way for them to receive the revelation of His teaching became parables.

Oh, but what a wonderful gift we have received from the Lord! 1 Corinthians 2:12 tells us that we have not received the Spirit of the world, but the Spirit of God that we may freely understand the things given to us freely by God. We have the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Helper, so that we no longer need to be given parables. But we can ask the Lord directly to reveal to us what he wants us to see, what he wants us to hear, and to condition our hearts to be enlightened to

the riches of our glorious inheritance in Him.

So Lord, give us the Spirit of revelation so that your word can be laid bare and made plain for our understanding. That it may take root in our hearts and be evident in our daily lives. Let us be not only hearers, but doers of your word. Let your revelation to us help us to understand the breadth, and length, and height, and depth of your love for us.

CLAIRE PHELPS

## DAY THIRTEEN    INCREASE MY FAITH IN YOUR WORD

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It can be hard to trust the Bible. Sometimes it's confusing and other times it makes us mad because it goes against our sinful desires. However, the most common problem is that it can sometimes feel empty and powerless. While these feelings are normal, they are far from the truth.

The Bible is the living and active word of the Creator of the Universe. It is a gift from God to show us His love and guidance in our lives. However, in order for the word of God to be active in our lives, we must have faith in it.

Faith is simply putting active trust in something. James 1:22 says, "*But be sure to live out the message and do not merely listen to it and so deceive yourselves*". James is telling us that in order for us to have faith in God and His word, we must actually live out the message. The Word of God can't change your life if you're not trying to live it out. Belief and knowledge in the power of God is good. But, if we stop at knowledge, we are deceived.

We must put our knowledge and belief in action. Abraham showed his faith by moving his family to unknown lands at the word of God. Moses showed his faith by leading a people out of slavery at the word of God. Joshua led an army to destroy Jericho with nothing but the word of God. None of these men would have made the impact they did if they had not put their faith in action. If they

had merely listened, they would have been deceived.

Lord increase our faith in your word!

CODY HUBBARD

## DAY FOURTEEN    LEAD ME TO ACT ON WHAT YOU SAY

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I was 12 years old standing on a platform 75' in the air. I have waited 45 minutes, climbed nearly 100 steps, and had hundreds of people behind me waiting in line. My heart was pounding out of my chest. I was questioning my sanity and my eternal security, but there was no turning back. If I turned back I didn't want to live knowing I didn't have the guts nor did I want to face any judgement from those waiting in line behind me.

"Son, get into position. Lay down, cross your feet, and cross your arms over your chest" the water slide ride attendant directed. If I was going to go through with this I felt it necessary to pay full attention to the directions of the ride attendant since he had guided many others to successfully survive this 75' drop. Surely he did not want to see me plummet to my demise. I laid there in perfect surrender to the process. My mind raced with my own statistical data and probable survival rates.

When the timing was right I was released into a wild exhilarating ride that I would remember decades later. As I rode down the slide I could no longer feel the slide or the water! I was "flying" for a moment and I quickly realized the purpose of the water slide attendant's directions, but I still wasn't sure if I would be a tragic headline story. My body reconnected with the water slide and the whole experience ended with arms in the air and a victory shout.

How many times have we been in a similar situation? We go about our days following what we sense is God's direction then all of a sudden. Bam! We are in a place of great decision. Look at the life of Abraham. In Genesis 12, the story of Abraham starts like this: "God told Abram: "Leave your country, your family, and your father's home for a land that I will show you."

Did God realize what He was requiring of Abraham? God was essentially directing him to leave his known comfortable life for a life of risk and absolute trust. I've been there many times. God knows and God cares as He passionately rewards our obedience. This is evident in the verses following God's risky command.

I'll make you a great nation and bless you. I'll make you famous; you'll be a blessing. I'll bless those who bless you; those who curse you I'll curse. All the families of the Earth will be blessed through you." Genesis 12:2-3

There are few more dangerous prayers than lead me to do what you say, but the reward far outweighs the risk. Trust God. Trust His direction. Trust He will always lead you through. Trust even when our heart is pounding out of our chest and our feelings tell us we are not gonna make it. When we do that we are truly living and living wide awake!

JOEL KRUGJOHANN

We are spiritual beings living in physical bodies; yet so many times we live our lives asleep

‘Speak for your servant is listening’ is something we usually apply to our Bible reading or our prayer time. Then once we’ve closed our Bible (or closed the Bible app) and finished our prayer, we go about the rest of our day and don’t always stop to consider that maybe we should make this statement all throughout our day.

Just what if we stopped to say this when being faced with a challenging situation at work? What if we stopped to say this when having a disagreement with a family member? What if we stopped to say this when facing a temptation at school, at work, or on our technology?

Instead of reacting in the moment, what if we paused to say this - and this doesn’t mean we need to say it outloud...we can just think it on our thoughts.

Being wide awake to how He would have us live our moments - being wide awake to how He would have us interact with our classmates, our colleagues, our loved ones - being wide awake to how He would have us interact with the people we cross paths with on a daily basis.

Just think - we don’t have to live our lives alone....living a life without Him speaking into it. Even in those moments when we FEEL alone, we are not alone. And if we will only ask Him to speak in those moments, He will let us know that He is there.

A few weeks ago I had one of those moments of increased understanding. I was driving to an appointment with a coaching client and I always pray out loud while driving to meet with a client. I was asking that He would go before me (which is a good thing to do). But then I literally stopped in the middle of my prayer and said, wait, I want You to go WITH me....not just before me. I need You with me during these appointments.

I want to think that He was so excited that I finally asked Him to be with me. I know scriptures say that He is with us and that He will never leave us; but I really believe He wants us to ask Him to go with us. I believe He wants us to be wide awake to His presence in our daily moments.

ANGELA MENDOZA

Let me start by saying that our God is a God that heals! Jesus bore our sins on the cross to save us, and those very wounds that save us, heal us(1 Peter 2:24, Isaiah 53:5). Scripture tells us to call on elders to pray over those who are sick(James 5:14). His Word repeatedly tells us that we can call on our Lord for healing or anything else in our time of need.

But what happens when the answer to our plea for healing is “not yet”? Is our God still good before we ever see our healing? For someone walking through sickness themselves or watching a loved one walk through it, these seasons can be hard. We can feel left out of His promises, separated from His goodness, and forgotten-all lies from the enemy! Our God is just as loving, good, and present in the “not yet” seasons of life. We can hold tightly to His steadfast promises. We can stand firm on His word and cast down every lie of the enemy during our sickness! This is what God is speaking to you in your time of need:

1. His grace is sufficient for you! Take a moment to read Corinthians 12:8-10. When Paul wanted an affliction plaguing him taken away, God didn't give him the answer he wanted but was clear that He had all Paul needed. The sickness we face within these earthly bodies leaves more room for God's perfect power. He will meet us where we are and His grace is always sufficient!

2. There is no shame attached to your sickness. When confronted with questions about who had sinned to cause a man to be born blind, Jesus answered clearly “this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.” Our sickness is a tool to be used for the glory of God! We are just as much a beloved child of God during our affliction.
3. You are not forgotten; this season is not a waste. In Romans 8:28, God promises to work ALL things (especially the heartbreaking, difficult things) out for good for those who love Him. Philippians 1:6 promises that our God will finish the good work He began in us. He has not pushed you aside, He is working even now on your behalf. There is purpose in this pause!

I believe we are called to have faith that our Heavenly Father can and will heal us on this side of heaven. We declare His truth boldly in the meantime as His beloved and chosen children. Praise Him for the healing on the way!

Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits— who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion Psalm 103:2-4

DESTIN RICKARD

The voice of fear is loud. Deafening. Crippling. Debilitating. It can leave us feeling powerless. Oftentimes, it can feel as though it is towering over us. It lies to us and makes us believe we are alone and that no one is coming to the rescue, leaving us in a pit of darkness feeling utterly hopeless. Even worse, it makes us believe that God isn't able to help us. It makes us believe that God can't overpower it. It makes us believe that God doesn't want to save us. Even the disciples cried out "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" in Mark 4:38 while they were on a boat in the middle of a storm. As the storm raged around them externally, fear ravaged them internally. They had seen firsthand Jesus do miracles beyond their understanding and yet, their fear made them believe they would not be saved. For a moment, think about those times when you've been afraid. Then think about what those fears made you believe about God.

So how do we overcome it? God has Good News! It has already been overcome. What has deafened our ears, He has silenced. What has crippled us, He has brought to its knees. What has debilitated us, He has now debilitated. It wasn't even a close fight. Shortly after Jesus was awakened by his disciples, he stood up, rebuking the wind and the sea saying "Peace! Be Still!" (Mark 4:39). There was no debate or argument. The wind and the sea obeyed and the storm

stopped. Whatever fear told the disciples was disproven in a swift moment by Jesus.

God is calling us to recognize fear for what it is, a liar. He wants us to know that whatever fear has ever dared to utter about God has been a lie. Fear wants us to believe God can't, but God's word tells us that he is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we could ask or think (Ephesians 3:20). Fear tells us that God won't do anything to help us when we're afraid, but His word tells us "I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears" (Psalm 34:4). God is calling us to believe Him over fear. He is calling us to no longer entertain where fear is trying to lead us. And that is not easy. We have to constantly go back to what we know is true about God every single time fear tries to speak. We have to choose to believe what God has spoken over anything else. The power we think fear has is nothing but an act and God has closed the curtain. Let this be your reminder that you are free from having to ever believe fear again. Dwell in the shelter of the Almighty and meditate on the truth of who He is. Fear is no victor.

JANEE WILLIAMS

## DAY EIGHTEEN    WHEN I WANT TO GIVE UP

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Have you ever felt like giving up? I have. Have you ever questioned if what you're doing is enough or if it really even matters? You can't see me, but my hand is raised again. In Galatians 6:9 Paul reminds us "So let's not allow ourselves to get fatigued doing good. At the right time we will harvest a good crop if we don't give up, or quit." The word that leaped off the page at me here is "ourselves". See, we aren't intended to do things in our own strength, but in God's. As Christians we can become overwhelmed with all the responsibilities that come along with the life we live and experience firsthand how wearying spiritual battle can be.

If you continue reading The Message Bible translation, verse 10 says "Right now, therefore, every time we get the chance, let us work for the benefit of all, starting with the people closest to us in the community of faith." Paul is urging the Galatians not to give up, especially during a season when they feel discouraged and are wondering if it's enough or if it even matters. He encourages them that it does matter, and it is worth it! And the even better news is we aren't in this alone! We have each other.

My family came to City Hills Church in September 2020 feeling defeated and alone. We were discouraged. We wondered if anything we had done up until that point in our lives was enough. Did it matter? We were overwhelmed and

we were hurting. We were feeling the weight of the spiritual battles at hand. It would have been easy to just give up. But we found community and we found hope. We were reminded the battle is not ours to fight. And just as Paul encouraged the Galatians, we were encouraged that the journey is worth it and the joyful harvest is coming!

Your journey is worth it! Your harvest is coming! Don't stop. There is a next step for you, always.

SHAWNA KRUGJOHANN

Confession- I trust my feelings too much. I use my gut feeling as a barometer and it shapes how I interact with everyone. It is a huge part of my life. I trust my gut feelings to a fault. Because of this, I question how do I hear God over the noise of my feelings? What if trust and I make the wrong decision? Scripture shows that you can do everything right and have everything go wrong (Job). It shows you can do everything wrong and be in the right place (Jonah). It shows that you can deny your calling, savior, and friend and be accepted and forgiven (Peter). It shows that you can do the unthinkable and be transformed, redeemed, and used (Paul).

God blinded Saul so that Paul would hear what he had to say. (Acts 9:4) Saul heard the words of Jesus and didn't see salvation. Paul listened to the words of the master and received sight. Paul learned what the disciples struggled to comprehend when they approached Jesus to correct, or teach him out of tradition or custom. Saul was born out of these traditions, he was bound to them and was compelled to enforce them. Like the disciples, Saul was humbled, taught, and set free by a loving Savior. On the Damascus road, Saul encountered God. He saw and heard the Lord speak in no uncertain terms, and had a decision to make.

Saul immediately fell back into what he trusted with the men that he had

surrounding him. He didn't allow that comfort to keep him from the plan that God had for him. He had to leave that comfort to go to Ananias' house. He would have to go into the home of someone that he was persecuting only days before. Saul knew that Ananias would have known him by name and would have considered him a threat.

It would take bold confidence in the voice of the lord to enter that home. Or... Trust in God's plan. Trusting in only what I can see, hear, and feel isn't enough, because my perspective is limited. Trust in the voice that created the heavens and the earth, brought the dead back to life, and made an enemy of the church it's greatest teacher. We are not called to do the easy things in life, and trusting my comfort and perspective is easy. Aim higher.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; Proverbs 3:5

TREY WAGNER



Calm is not my natural state. I prefer things under control and in their places. And of course, they rarely are which means it's easy for me to get stressed. In an anxiety ridden society with the world's opinions at our fingertips, it's even easier to drown in the noise. Sometimes, the noise even feels comfortable, and we become unable to withstand silence and be still in God's Presence.

It makes me think of one of my favorite passages in the Bible in 1 Kings 19. Elijah, a prophet of the Lord, had witnessed miracle after miracle. Ravens fed him, he saved a widow and her son with blessings from God, he called down fire from heaven, he prayed away a drought, he outran a horse-drawn chariot, and an angel even fed him in the wilderness (no joke! Read it for yourself!) And here at one of his lowest points after expressing depressive and suicidal thoughts, God presents Himself to Elijah. A terrible wind passes, but God is not in the wind. Then an earthquake shakes the earth, but God isn't in the earthquake. Then a raging fire comes, but God still isn't even in the fire. And after all of this noise, God instead presents Himself in the quiet, intimate nature of a gentle whisper.

In 1 Samuel 3:10, we find Samuel sleeping next to the Ark of God, a holy item where God's Presence was, when the Lord calls out to him. At first, he thinks it's Eli calling him. But when he realizes that God was presenting Himself to

Samuel, Samuel says, "Speak, your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3:10 NLT). The thing that hits me hard is that Samuel was sleeping near the Ark of God, near God's Presence in the stillness of the night. Even when he didn't understand what was going on, he still sought after God in the stillness, in the quiet, in that gentle whisper.

What if we've been going about it wrong? What if we look for God in the busy, in the rat-race, in the messy crazy life, but He's not in those things? The Psalms says, "Be still in the presence of the Lord, and wait patiently for Him to act" (Psalm 37:7 NLT). And again, "Be still and know that I am God!" (Psalm 46:10 NLT).

We even see examples of Jesus getting alone with God away from the crowds and even away from His disciples. God has already offered to take away our cares in Matthew 11:28. I ask myself sometimes, "Why are you still holding onto something God has already offered to take away?" It isn't easy, and sometimes I find myself back in old stressful habits. But if we crave peace and calm, we have to seek stillness with God and find Him in that whisper. In that moment before work or before the kids wake up or just before bed: Seek Him in the stillness, and He will present Himself in the whisper.

MORGAN McMULLEN

## DAY TWENTY-ONE    WHEN I NEED DIRECTION

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“A man’s mind plans his way [as he journeys through life], But the Lord directs his steps and establishes them.” Proverbs 16:9 AMP

I am a person who is what I would call directionally challenged. I know how to get to the places that I frequent the most such as; work, church, or my favorite place to eat, but for all other destinations; you are guaranteed to see me typing the address into my phone to guide me to my desired location. Sometimes when I’m getting closer to my destination and my surroundings become more familiar, I will select end route because I feel that I’m in a place that’s familiar enough that I can get to my destination on my own. Oftentimes I get to my location fine and other times I still get lost and have to type the location in again to get me back on the right path. Nevertheless, with the help of the Maps app and the voice of Siri, I will always get to where I’m supposed to be.

What’s so amazing about this is in a similar manner, we have our Heavenly Father to lead and guide us every second of every day, when we are struggling and need direction or even when we feel like we are in a familiar space. God is always there and He doesn’t leave.

Regardless of where we are it’s important that we do these three things when we need direction:

**50**

1. Remain in God’s presence. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” Proverbs 3:5-6 NIV

2. Rid ourselves of distractions. “Finally, believers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable and worthy of respect, whatever is right and confirmed by God’s word, whatever is pure and wholesome, whatever is lovely and brings peace, whatever is admirable and of good repute; if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think continually on these things [center your mind on them, and implant them in your heart].” Philippians 4:8 AMP

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,” Hebrews 12:1 NIV

3. Rely on our community of believers “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” Proverbs 27:17 NIV

And if you ever find yourself not spending time in God’s presence, becoming distracted, or isolating yourself from your community; just remember much like Maps, God has the ability to reroute us and lead us in the right direction.

JOURDAN JONES

**51**

## DAY TWENTY-TWO WHEN I WONDER IF GOD WILL PROVIDE

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While our Heavenly Father directs us to look at the birds of the air as witness to how He provides for them to assure us of our provision by Him, He does not direct us to inaction or hand outs. As the farmers will say, “Pray for the harvest and say amen with your hoe”. We saw this in action as we witnessed the romance and nesting of a pair of Carolina Wrens.

We first noticed the birds by their song as they were flitting around our patio.

A month or two later my husband and I were witnesses to the finishing of the nest building and ultimate flight of five wren chicks. As the parents finished their nest in the patio flowerpot we became accustomed to their song. “Teakettle, Teakettle”.

One fine beautiful afternoon as I looked out my window a tiny baby chick was perched, well, teetering, on the edge of the nest.

Five plump, healthy chicks emerged one by one. That first afternoon they couldn’t even stand up with any strength and their small wings seemed glued to their sides. Their tails looked like one or two stubby feathers. But mama and daddy hovered over each chick as they tried to move, preen their small wings and flutter for maneuverability. After several hours of this activity all five

retreated to their nest for a night of recuperation. At first light the family was at it again. Mama fed each chick as they struggled to gain their independence. The chicks flew into our windows, fell as they tried to hop with assurance, and flap their inadequate wings. But slowly and surely the wings dried out and short trips of flight became evident. The baby chicks would cuddle together, and then fly back to the nest to recover. They experimented with the bird bath and which plant or twig that would hold their weight or where they could perch without falling.

The next few days one by one they flew away. Only one was left and we thought the parents had left him but they stayed until he gained his confidence to fly.

Jesus told us of God’s provision for the birds in Matthew 6:26. However, the birds did their part, they prepared the nest in a secure location, were persistent in its construction, and parented their brood with skill and provision which resulted in successful flight training for the chicks. All the while, daddy bird was singing a song. I believe a song of praise for his creator which continually reassured and encouraged his brood. It entered my mind that if God can give birds with the brains the size of a pea those kind of nurturing instincts, how much much more has he given us!!

NINA HAINES

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