



FORWARD

A GROWTH CAMPAIGN



40 DAY DEVOTIONAL

Letter From Pastor Eric

Dear Church With U,

Since our first meeting with just a handful of people in 2013, we have watched in awe as God has worked miracle after miracle. Lives have been redeemed, broken relationships have been reconciled, and shattered dreams have been restored. **FORWARD** represents the next chapter in God's story for our church. The last eight years have truly been a journey of faith. I am thrilled to see how God will work among us in the coming years.

The FORWARD for 40 Daily Devotional is designed for you to use as a prayer guide for the next six weeks. My hope is that you will make a daily commitment to spending time alone with God. If you feel led, consider times of fasting over the next forty days. Most importantly, pray. I would like to ask you to remember the following points as you pray:

- Pray that God will have His way in your heart, personally. What matters most to God is that we trust Him and our lives are surrendered to Him.
- Pray for me and the leadership team of Church With U. We realize that this is God's church and we are only stewards. We need His wisdom and strength to faithfully handle this responsibility.
- Pray that each member of our church embraces God's vision for his or her life.
- Pray that as a church family we will accomplish all He has called us to do.
- Pray that God will provide all the resources needed to fulfill the financial needs of the FORWARD growth initiative.
- Pray that God will show you specifically what part you can play as we move toward what God has for Church With U in the future.

Thank you for your faithfulness to Jesus and to our church. It's a privilege for me to pastor this incredible church. I look forward with great excitement to all God will do in your life, in our church, and in our community.

Sincerely,

Pastor Eric Bradley
Lead Pastor

Day 1

Reach

“On this rock I will build my church, and death itself will not have any power over it.”

Matthew 16:18 CEV

The Roman Empire at one time was the greatest empire in the world in terms of size and influence, with borders that encompassed most of the known world. Their elaborate governing system was in full operation and tax money was coming in at a higher rate than ever. Truly the Roman Empire was glorying in its finest hour.

If the leader of this vast empire, Tiberius Caesar, had looked from his palace in Rome all the way to a distant remote mountain in Galilee, he would have seen twelve men gathered around their humble leader. And had he heard what this leader was saying to these twelve men, he would have laughed out loud. “On this rock I will build my church, and death itself will not have any power over it,” declared Jesus to His small band of followers.

Yet, if Caesar had looked 350 years into the future, he would have been aghast to see his successor, Constantine, naming Christianity as the official state religion. It took less than 400 years for Christianity and the church of Jesus Christ to conquer the great Roman Empire. It is significant to note how a church of only twelve impacted the entire known world in such a short time.

Jesus embraced His Church in a very personal way. He said, “I will build My church.” As we embrace the cause of the local church and personalize it the way Jesus did, we have the ability to impact the world in the same way the disciples did 2000 years ago. Because the power of Christ dwells in us today, we can confidently build His Church with Him.

Day 2

It's All His

"The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein."

Psalm 24:1 NKJV

Depression-era businessman R. G. LeTourneau (1888-1969) understood the importance of stewarding one's work and influence for the advancement of God's kingdom. He recognized that God owns everything; we are just stewards. His commitment to being a good steward led him to become a millionaire, while giving 90% of his income to God. No, you didn't read that wrong. He gave 90% and lived on 10% and still had more than he could spend.

The father of modern earth-moving equipment, LeTourneau was among the few men who amassed a fortune during the Great Depression. He did this in spite of his unconventional—some would say ridiculous—business practices, including giving away company profits and giving workers Sundays off, while production lagged behind schedule. His entire professional life was molded by a deeply committed and rewarding partnership with the Lord Jesus Christ, the true owner of his company.

This kind of life and testimony is only possible when we live with the revelation that God owns it all. Because He is good and merciful and generous, He has entrusted each of us with a temporary stewardship of certain possessions and resources. Because God designs each of us with a unique purpose in mind, we are each given a corresponding stewardship consisting of everything that we need to accomplish His divine plan for our lives.

"His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue."

2 Peter 1:3 (NKJV)

At Church With U, we recognize our stewardship of God's dream for this community and this region. **FORWARD** represents this stewardship as we lay the foundation for God's work to continue in this area for generations to come.

Day 3

The Reward Of Fasting

“And whenever you are fasting, do not look gloomy and sour and dreary like the hypocrites, for they put on a dismal countenance, that their fasting may be apparent to and seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full already. But when you fast, perfume your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may not be noticed by men but by your Father, Who sees in secret; and your Father, Who sees in secret, will reward you in the open.”

Matthew 6:16-18 AMP

What is the purpose and reward for fasting? Why do it? These are good questions to ask. Fasting is not going on a hunger strike to force God into doing something. Fasting is not arm-twisting God for Him to give up and answer our prayers... or else! That’s foolish thinking.

Fasting doesn’t change God; it changes you. He is always the same. Fasting changes you! When we quiet our appetite, we become more sensitive to God. It puts us in a better spiritual posture before Him. Fasting gives you extra time to spend with God praying and reading the Word and waiting on Him. We become more sensitive to His voice and His guidance in our lives when we fast.

Jesus spent regular times of fasting and praying, and He came away from those times ready for anything. He emerged with power, and people’s needs were met in supernatural ways. Fasting helps prepare you so the Lord can work mightily through you. Now that’s exciting!

Day 4

Seeing God's Vision

"Where there is no vision, the people perish..."

Proverbs 29:18a KJV

Nearly anywhere you go in the world, people have heard the name "Disney."

The theme parks, movies, and signature characters, Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck, are recognized and loved. This entertainment dynasty is the result of a lifelong dream of the creative genius and visionary, Walt Disney. A few years after building the revolutionary theme park Disneyland in Anaheim, California, Disney envisioned another and even larger Disney theme park. He laid the groundwork, but died in 1966, almost five years before the opening of Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida. On the day the new park opened, a visitor commented to Mike Vance, Creative Director of Walt Disney Studios, "Isn't it too bad Walt Disney didn't live to see this?"

"Oh, but he did see it," Vance replied. "That's why it's here."

The vision of Walt Disney to create what he called "the happiest place on earth" became the driving force for thousands of people who, even to this day, continue to work diligently to build upon the foundation that he laid.

Vision is a powerful motivator. When we receive and embrace God's vision for our lives, we become supernaturally empowered by the Holy Spirit to work toward that vision. If a natural "man-made" vision like Walt Disney's can result in such an enormous legacy, just imagine what could happen if we tapped into God's vision for our lives, our families, and this region!

God's vision is fueled by His omnipotent power, provided through His limitless resources, and crafted by His incomprehensible wisdom and knowledge. God's vision leaves a lasting impact that can be felt throughout multiple generations.

Day 5

You Make The Call

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

2 Timothy 3:16-17 NKJV

Baseball umpire Durwood Miller tells of his rookie year of umpiring in the major leagues. On the mound was the famous pitcher, Nolan Ryan. The second pitch of the game was so fast that Miller never saw it. He froze, unable to make the call. Finally he yelled somewhat tentatively, “Strike!” The batter backed out of the box and said, “Ump, don’t feel so bad, I didn’t see it either!”

That story is a good illustration of what is happening in our world today. **Change is occurring so fast that none of us can see it clearly.** A new set of glasses won’t help, either. Yet we have to make vital calls and daily decisions about very important things, all the time wondering if we are making the right ones. We’re hoping we don’t strike out!

We desperately need a clear standard — a fixed point, a true north. We need an unchanging standard on which we can base our decisions. The exciting news is that God has given us such a standard. It is His Word, the Bible. It contains the rock-solid, never changing, relevant truth. It is absolute truth about life. The truth on how to live every day!

When we base our lives on the principles and promises of Scripture, we stand rock solid at the plate of life, regardless of how fast the pitcher throws the ball at us from the mound of the world.

Let the scoffers and naysayers from the stands say the Bible is irrelevant and outdated. True followers of Christ know “the Word of God is living and active.” It feeds and nourishes our souls, giving spiritual strength to our lives.

Today, make the call from the playbook of life — the Word of God — and live confident in your decision.

Day 6

Embracing God's Vision

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope."

Jeremiah 29:11 NKJV

In 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered a stirring, passionate speech, which later became the manifesto of the civil rights movement. Words of reconciliation, equality, and liberty rang out from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C.

"Let freedom ring. And when this happens, when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: 'Free at last!'"

--Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

In describing his dream of a world free from the bonds of prejudice and discrimination, Dr. King described a powerful, positive image of the future. The vision he cast that day was more than inspirational; it contained principles that could be embraced and lived out to advance the cause of ethnic equality and justice around the world.

In the same way, for Christians it is not enough to see the vision that God has for our future. We must embrace it and begin to allow our lives to be molded around it. God's vision is powerful. It gives purpose, direction, and passion to those with the courage to run with it. It cannot be altered and tailored to fit our desires, but when embraced, it meets every need, and fills every heart with joy and expectancy!

Embracing God's vision for our church through the FORWARD spiritual journey, we will create a "future and a hope" for the generations to come.

Day 7

What A Dream Looks Like

“So he said to them, “Please hear this dream which I have dreamed.”

Genesis 37:6 NKJV

In 1989, a movie called “Field of Dreams” was released. Kevin Costner played Ray Kincella, a 37 year-old man who heard a voice one day that said, “Build it and he will come.” In the story, Ray had a stormy relationship with his dad. As a rebellious child of the 60s, he scorned his dad who loved baseball, refusing even to play catch with him. Ray’s father died before he could make things right. When he plowed his cornfield over and made a baseball field, everyone said he was crazy for following his dream, but through the magic of the movie, he was reunited with his father as a man. The theology is certainly not correct, and the plot is nowhere near reality, but it remains a wonderful movie.

In the movie, people came from miles around to get a glimpse at the old timers playing ball on the field of dreams. The point in the movie is well made, and it is certain, **people will come to a place where their dreams can be fulfilled.** God’s “field of dreams” is not in Iowa, but rather is played out in the hearts of His people.

Throughout the centuries of history we have seen instances of how God sets the hearts of men, women and young people aflame with a dream — the dream to impact the world and make a difference. Look at the life of Mother Theresa. Her mission continues on after her death, giving hope to the hopeless in Calcutta, India.

Maybe there’s a stir in your soul today. A spiritual knot in your stomach that gnarls you and it won’t go away. It could be the beginning of a great dream that God is nudging you toward. A God-given dream may look like this: It stirs your passion. It’s humanly impossible to accomplish on your own. It makes an impression on you for a lifetime. You can’t shake it. It may have been a place of pain for you in your past. The place of your pain sometimes becomes the place of your life mission.

Take time today and reflect on your own “field of dreams.” What unusual things may be stirring that could prompt you to build your own field — your field of mission?

Day 8

Revolutionary Living

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God — this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform 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.”

Romans 12:1-2 NIV

What a difference it would make if we only understood the abundant life God desires us to experience!

We were made in God’s image. As children of the Creator, we are heirs to everything He owns: “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it” (Psalm 24:1 NIV).

God desires the best for His children. All He requires for the greatest, most wonderful life is surrender to Him. He demands obedience. He wants us to present ourselves as living sacrifices. He wants us to avoid the influence of the world. He wants us to be constantly renewed, to re-surrender daily. Then we can know God’s “good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Best of all, **He has already provided everything we need for a revolutionary life:** “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples” (John 15:7-8 NIV).

He wants to fellowship intimately with us. He wants us to participate in His divine nature and enjoy all of His creation: “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10b NIV). You can have a full, abundant, revolutionary life!

During this month, get ready for a new life. Re-surrender yourself to Him. Put God to the test and see how He will perform His Word in your life, how He will turn your daydreams into realities.

Dwight L. Moody, one of history’s greatest pastors and Bible teachers, often said, “The world has yet to see what God will do with and through and in and by the man who is fully consecrated to Him.” May we join those who seek to be that committed to the Lord Jesus.

Day 9

Re-Surrendering Self

“But the Lord God called to the man, Where are you?”

Genesis 3:9 NIV

“Where are you?”

That’s not the question we want to hear, no matter where we are in life, for it requires us to take stock and to get honest about the situation in which we find ourselves. We don’t want to deal with where we are. We mostly want to find a quick, pain-free escape out of the challenges we face.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they hid from Him. The Lord wanted to give them His best, but they rejected it. **Yet even in the midst of their turmoil, disobedience and guilt, He wanted to show them the way back to fellowship with Him.**

It is the same today. Christ came for this reason: “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him” (John 3:17 NIV).

“Adam, where are you?” God asked that question to get Adam to be honest about his dire situation. Each of us must answer this same question, taking stock of where we are. This is a prerequisite to rise above your challenges and move to a new level.

You cannot experience a revolution in your walk with God until you answer the question about where you are right now. The prodigal son, according to Luke 15:17, “came to his senses,” before he could start the journey home. That is the first step toward any true solution.

Likewise, Jesus made this truth abundantly clear when he said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick” (Luke 5:31 NIV).

“Where are you?”

You will never move into a more exciting walk with God until you look up into the face of God, recognizing your ever-present need for His help, and say, “I’m here, Lord. Be merciful to me.”

Day 10

Re-Surrendering The Family

“For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.”

Genesis 18:19 NIV

Did you know the Hebrew word for “parent” also means “teacher”? Abraham was chosen by God to establish His covenant with mankind. He was also chosen to be an example of how God wants to teach and guide His children. The pattern was set from the beginning of God’s relationship with His creation. **Throughout the Bible, the importance of family and parenting is absolutely vital**, and as we move into a new level of revolutionary living, it is important that we re-surrender our families to Him.

Moses understood this. He admonished the parents of Israel this way: “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7 NIV).

Re-surrendering your family daily cannot be emphasized enough. As long as Israel’s families obeyed this commandment, they prospered. The strict adherence of many Jews to this principle through the centuries has preserved their race long after many others have disappeared. Conversely, disobedience to this command has invariably caused chaos and destruction.

Isaiah 39:4 records a question asked of Hezekiah: “What did they see in your palace (or house)?” Hezekiah’s answer was, “They saw everything in my palace. There is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them.”

What does your family see in your house? God’s treasures or something else? The lives you affect most are those who live with you. If you live a Christ-like life, those in your house will see and receive it. As with the Philippian jailor in Acts 16, salvation can come to all who dwell there.

Begin a new heritage in your family. Pray together. Read the Word of God together. Re-surrender your family to God. This is the one great guarantee for building a godly family as we move into living for Him.

Day 11

Re-Surrendering Relationships

“Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.”

Colossians 3:11 NIV

The Word of God is a textbook on relationships. At the heart of every page is the message of reconciliation. The life of Jesus exemplified this, and we, as believers, must be involved in the ministry of building strong, positive relationships.

The apostle Paul understood this. Writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he touched on four major areas that have traditionally separated people: race (Greek or Jew), religion (circumcised or uncircumcised), culture (barbarian or Scythian), and economy (slave or free).

The answer to every challenge in society is Jesus Christ living through us!

A life of reconciliation starts in the heart. The primary issue is not race, religion, culture, or economic standing. At the cross of Jesus Christ, all of us stand guilty. That is why Calvary stands for all as a means of reconciliation with God and each other.

This must certainly apply to everything we do as members of the same family: “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10 NIV).

Likewise, the ministry of reconciliation must extend to those outside the family. **The cross of Jesus Christ does not belong to believers alone.** We are called to share the Gospel with those around us through everything we do.

Re-surrender your relationships today. Build bridges. Live your life as if you were the only Bible some people will ever read.

Moving into a new level with Jesus Christ begins when you start walking in the footsteps of the one whose name we bear!

Day 12

Intimacy With God

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”

Mark 12:30 NIV

God desires close fellowship with you. He wants intimacy, so much so that He was willing to sacrifice His only begotten Son for your sake.

We are commanded to love God with all our soul. We are to love Him with all our emotions and will. He wants everything. **To love God with all your heart means to love Him with every atom of your being.** This is what God desires. He wants you to love Him supremely and with everything that is within you.

When you love Him with all your strength and when you seek the Lord with your whole heart, you will find Him: “I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me” (Proverbs 8:17 NIV).

You can know the amazing, intimate fellowship with Christ, but it requires spending time with Him. Ephesians 3:14-19 tells us how:

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height — to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:14-19 NKJV

Believers must be rooted and grounded through intimacy with God. **Deep fellowship requires seeking to know Him more and more.**

Day 13

Victory Through Surrender

“And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. The one who keeps God’s commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.”

1 John 3:23-24 NIV

An instrument must be tuned before it is played. A violinist, for example, tunes the A string to the international pitch, or A-440. This means that the A above middle C is vibrating 440 times per second. Once the A is tuned, all the other strings can be adjusted to play harmoniously together. Otherwise, the result would be a cacophony of chaos.

Violinists know they must tune their strings often, knowing that an accidental bump or simply playing the instrument can result in enough variation to cause discord. Likewise, **it’s easy to get out of tune as humans**. Christ is the standard. If we are not in a right relationship with Him, we cannot get along with others. We either vibrate in harmony with Him, or we slide into dissonance.

How do we stay in tune with Him?

Obedience! Surrender daily. We must allow Him to tune us to His perfect pitch. The Bible is very clear on this: “And whatever we ask we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight” (1 John 3:22 NKJV).

Jesus Christ remains the centerpiece of history, the most powerful force known to mankind. Massive armies have come and gone, powerful political systems have risen and fallen, all-powerful dictators and kings have crumbled to dust, yet all of them combined have never impacted the world as much as Jesus Christ our Savior. He continues to change hearts and lives today. And because He died on the cross, the Word of God declares that one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is Lord. We can do this now by surrendering to Him over and over, rather than staying on our own discordant pitch. **Stay tuned to the Lord.** “Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2 NIV).

Day 14

A Life Of Victory

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

1 John 1: 8-9 NIV

Is it really possible to live a life without sin?

Living a life without sin seems so attractive, yet so unattainable in our human frailties. Our bodies of "weakness" have yet to be raised in "power" (1 Corinthians 15:43).

Yes, we have the promise that one day our corruption will put on incorruption, and sin will be finally and fully defeated in our lives. In the meantime, however, re-surrendering daily is the key to a life of victory. The power to live victoriously is available to us moment by moment because of what Christ accomplished on Calvary's cross.

The writer of Hebrews says, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15 NKJV). This is the reason why we must go to Him continually, for, "He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (Hebrews 7:25 NIV).

What should we do if we stumble?

The Bible is clear about that as well: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9 NIV). Confess your sins. Ask for forgiveness. Turn your back on those sins. Then you will be free to enjoy the unfettered fellowship of the Holy Spirit in your life again.

God desires for us to live victoriously, no matter what challenges we face!

Day 15

Hearing God's Voice

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."

John 10:27 NIV

There are many voices clamoring for our attention. These voices seek to guide, distract, direct, and even destroy. It is important to understand the voices and ultimately learn to discern God's voice of truth.

The most obvious voice that wants to direct our lives is our own. The "flesh" is a powerful voice. The mind tells us what to think. The will tells us what we want. The emotions tell us what to feel. According to Romans 8:5, this voice often rises from the natural, human flesh: "Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires" (NIV). We see images. We have emotions and feelings. Desires are ever-present. The flesh is unreliable, at best.

Another type of voice that seeks to direct us is the voice of people all around us. God does speak through others, but there are many other voices that are destructive. How do you tell the difference?

The third type of voice you will hear early, often, and long is the voice of the enemy of your soul. The devil deceived one-third of Heaven's angels, and he has perfected his act immensely since tricking Adam and Eve. No, he doesn't appear as the red, cloven-hooved terror with a pitchfork. Often he appears through our thoughts. He distracts us with a barrage of ungodly messages. He seeks to overwhelm, terrorize, seduce and do whatever it takes to destroy you and your loved ones. No wonder God tells us, "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8 NIV).

God's voice, thankfully, is assured for each of us who call upon His name.

His voice, however, is often the most subtle of all voices, since He seeks to speak through each person's spirit, not through the clamoring of the flesh and outside voices. We often want to hear God through supernatural, spectacular and sensational words. God seldom speaks that way. **He seeks to direct our paths through His presence, His Word, prayer, His Spirit, and even sometimes, through circumstances.** To hear His voice, however, we must learn to go beyond the shallow surface and go deeper where the Spirit of God lives within us.

Day 16

The Road To Wisdom

“Let your heart retain my words; keep my commands, and live. Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her [wisdom], and she will preserve you; love her, and she will keep you. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding.”

Proverbs 4:4-7 NKJV

God seeks to lead us through his voice. God’s wisdom is the best road to an abundant life. A road or path is a common example throughout the Bible. Wisdom allows us to walk uprightly, so that we will not stumble through the paths of life. Wisdom means hearing and doing God’s Word as you walk out your faith. That is why the fear of the Lord is the beginning of all true wisdom.

Where does the road lead? In other words, how do you obtain wisdom? Here are some of the best road signs you will ever see:

Understand the fact that true wisdom comes from God. Proverbs 2:6 declares, “For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding” (NIV).

Ask God for wisdom. James 1:5 declares, “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you” (NIV). If you want wisdom, ask!

Desire wisdom with all of your heart. Wisdom must be valuable to you. This is why Solomon wrote, “If you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God” (Proverbs 2:3-5 NIV).

Apply yourself to the study and understanding of God’s Word. Psalm 19:7 tells us, “The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple” (NIV). The more you devote yourself to God’s Holy Word, the more you open yourself up to the greatest wisdom in the universe.

Do you want to hear God’s voice? Learn to “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). Seek God’s wisdom!

Day 17

Entering God's Presence

"O God, You are my God; early will I seek you; my soul thirsts for You, my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory. Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips will glorify You."

Psalm 63:1-3 NKJV

Throughout the Old Testament we are given a powerful illustration, through God's provision of the Tabernacle and Temple, of God's desire for believers today to move into the Holy of Holies. **The psalmist David knew, as we must learn, that the initial move toward true intimacy with God was moving from the "flesh" to the "soul."**

- **The flesh is likened to the sacrifice for sins in the outer court** of the Old Testament tabernacle, which every studious Hebrew knew.

- Inside the sacred tent, curtained away from the outer court, was the inner court, or the Holy Place, **symbolizing the place of the soul or inner desire**. The Holy Place was twenty cubits long, and ten wide. It contained the table of shewbread, the golden candlestick and the altar of incense — each with specific significance.

- Inside the Holy Place, ten cubits square, was the Holy of Holies, which contained the Ark of the Covenant, a sacred chest which was a symbol of God's divine presence. A veil of very costly material divided the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. No one except the high priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, and he was only permitted to enter once a year on the Day of Atonement.

Everything changed for believers at Calvary: "And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split" (Matthew 27:50-51 NIV). **Christ's death signaled the opening of a new and living way to God.** Before, the veil kept people from coming into the most holy place where the Shekinah (the presence of God) was.

The price of His presence was paid in full, yet so few believers are willing to do what is required to enter in to the Holy of Holies. It begins with thirst and hunger for an intimate walk with Him: "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16 NKJV).

True intimacy with Christ depends upon a desire for closeness with Him, no matter the cost, and it is accessible to every Christian who is willing to pay the price to listen to God's voice.

Day 18

Listening Through God's Word

"It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings."

Proverbs 25:2 NIV

God's glory is concealed through His Word, but the believer can see His glory revealed through careful searching of the Word.

God's Word is a treasure to be discovered. Deep truths cannot always be mined by merely scratching on the surface. Everywhere, it seems, the Father has given guideposts that point toward the ultimate treasure, His Son, Jesus Christ.

To mine these eternal riches, even as with earthly jewels or precious ore, you have to dig beneath the surface. That's why it is so important to ask the Father to give you supernatural wisdom every day as you search the Word for fresh, priceless, life-giving resources.

God's Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our paths.

You, Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light. With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall. As for God, his way is perfect; the Lord's word is flawless; he shields all who take refuge in him. For who is God besides the Lord? And who is the Rock except our God?

Psalms 18:28-31 NIV

God's Word can illuminate our lives today.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

John 1:1-4 NIV

Spend time each day reading God's Word. It is the pathway to God's will and direction, taking us from a place of uncertainty to a glorious mountaintop of victory.

Day 19

Listening Through Prayer

“Pray continually.”

1 Thessalonians 5:17 NIV

The story is told that during the First World War a British soldier was caught one night while creeping secretly back to his tent from a nearby wooded area. He was immediately hauled before his commanding officer and charged with holding communications with the enemy. The man pleaded that he had gone into the woods to pray. That was his only defense.

“Have you been in the habit of spending hours in private prayer?” his officer asked roughly.

“Yes, sir.”

“Then get down on your knees and pray now like you’ve never prayed before!” the commander ordered. The young man knew he could be shot at sunrise for the crime he was accused of committing. He knelt and poured out his soul in a powerful prayer that could have only been inspired by the Holy Spirit.

“You may go,” the officer said in hushed tones after the soldier finished praying. “I believe your story. If you hadn’t drilled often, you couldn’t have done so well at review.”

The young man had an encounter that saved his life. He did so because he had prepared for that encounter for some time, not knowing what challenges he would face. He had learned to commune with God intimately.

- **Prayer brings a revelation of self, allowing us to see ourselves in the light of who God is.** This revelation of self is always followed by a revelation of God and His mercy.

- **Prayer brings cleansing.** As you confess your sins, He cleanses you, allowing you to come boldly to the throne of grace with a pure heart.

- **Prayer reveals the Word of God, allowing Him to lead, direct and illuminate our pathways.** Psalm 119:18 says, “Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.”

Day 20

Listening To God's Spirit

“And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you. Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation — but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”

Romans 8:11-16 NIV

Listening to His voice brings happiness, peace, direction and abundance. If you truly want to understand how the Holy Spirit speaks, read and reread these profound words found in Romans 8. How do you listen to God's Spirit? Paul the apostle proclaimed, “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14 NIV). What did he mean?

- **Fellowship requires being in His presence, spending time with Him.**
- **Fellowship means sharing with Him, pouring out our hearts and listening to Him.**
- **Fellowship implies participating with Him.** The Holy Spirit wants to become our partner in everything we do.
- **Fellowship requires intimacy.** God has chosen to pour out His love “into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Romans 5:5).
- **Fellowship includes friendship.** The Holy Spirit longs to be our closest friend, someone with whom we can share our deepest secrets.
- **Fellowship implies submission.** One of the Greek meanings for “fellowship” is “commander.” The Holy Spirit wants to be our captain, a loving, friendly commander, instructing what we should do and where we should go.
- **Fellowship gives power to share what God has done in our lives.** Jesus said, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8 NIV).

Are you listening for His voice? Recognizing His voice requires hearing it often. Seek fellowship with Him. Invite Him into every area of your life and He will lead you into a new dimension of life.

Day 21

Listening To God In Circumstances

“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” ...And the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.”

Matthew 2:1-2, 9-10 NIV

What an unusual set of circumstances God designed to lead the wise men to the birth of Christ!

The nearest planet to earth is 37 million miles away. The nearest star is 25 billion miles away. Whatever light the wise men saw, traveling at 186,000 miles per second, had actually exploded at least five years before Christ's birth for the sight of the explosion to reach earth. Some would call this star a mere “circumstance.” We know better!

Just as God gave the wise men an illuminated pathway to the Son of God, in His perfect plan, we can trust the pathway He gives us.

Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” This passage assures us that if we really want the will of God and ask for it, He will see to it that we get it!

The only way to victory and accomplishment as believers is to trust God to keep us and guide us moment by moment, not to be ruled by circumstances. Simply put, we have the choice between relying merely upon judgments made based on the best organized facts that we can gather, or upon judgments made based on the facts as we seek God's guidance.

We can learn to discern God's hand through both positive and negative circumstances; however, circumstances are not always an indication of God's plan for our lives. Maturity comes to believers who are less and less moved by circumstances, for we know the promise found in Psalm 37:23-24: “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand” (NKJV).

Day 22

Understanding God's Plan

"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

Matthew 6:31-33 NKJV

We know from God's Word that He cares about the things that concern us and the decisions we face every day, both big and small. He understands what makes us tick, and He knows our needs.

Likewise, **He cares about the choices we face:** "For this God is our God forever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end" (Psalm 48:14 NIV). More importantly, **He desires for us to make decisions that reflect His will in our lives:** "Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is" (Ephesians 5:17 NIV). With these verses in mind, here are three quick principles for knowing God's plan for our lives:

- **God's will is available only through the Lord Jesus Christ.** While the world seeks guidance through a smorgasbord of beliefs and rituals, the Savior proclaims Himself in a clear-cut way that leaves no room for error or misinterpretation: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6 NIV).
- **To know God's will in your life, you must first offer your life to God.** The apostle Paul wrote, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God — this is true and proper worship" (Romans 12:1 NIV). We must be willing to be living sacrifices before He can use us for our reasonable service. Only then can we begin to understand His design for our lives.
- **To know God's will, your mind must be renewed supernaturally.** Romans 12:2 tells us, "Do not conform 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" (NIV). As we consistently present ourselves to God by spending time with Him and reading His Word, then He can transform and show us His plan.

God's plan is perfect and complete. He seeks to bring each believer into His perfect will. With the Psalmist, we must pray, "Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground" (Psalm 143:10 NIV).

Day 23

Participating In God's Plan

"Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."

Hebrews 13:20-21 NIV

Archimedes, upon discovering the power of the lever, said, "If you find me a fulcrum to rest my lever upon, I can move the world."

God desires to reach the world, but He has chosen to use us to be His hands extended. To participate in His plan, however, requires faith in His plan and an active belief that helps us carry out that plan.

One of the Greek meanings of the New Testament words "faith" and "belief," is "fulcrum." With faith, we have a lever. With that fulcrum, we can participate in God's plan with mountain-moving faith.

How can we do this?

- **We must understand that there is a difference between faith and believing.** That difference means everything as we seek to participate in God's plan. Believing is faith in motion. It means applying the truth. Faith helps us put confidence in God and exercise what we know to be true.
- **Faith is God's gift, but believing requires our will.** Faith is God's gift just as breathing, walking, hearing and seeing are gifts. However, just as God does not breathe, walk, hear or see for us, neither does He believe for us. He has given us the capacity to believe in Him, and He requires us to actively participate in whatever He directs us to do.
- **Faith and believing become stronger as you exercise them.** They also become weaker when you neglect them. Those who are active in participating in God's plan will certainly become stronger.
- **Faith and believing are not limited.** This is why Jesus tells us, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26 NIV).

Take God at His Word by receiving His gift of faith. Then begin to leverage your world as you believe and participate more and more in His plan.

Day 24

Standing On The Rock

“He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense, I shall not be moved.”

Psalm 62:6 NKJV

The great Bible teacher, Smith Wigglesworth, once wrote: “Nothing in the world glorifies God as much as simple rest of faith in what God’s Word says.”

Jesus said, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working” (John 5:17b NIV). He saw the way the Father did the works; it was on the groundwork of knowledge — faith based upon knowledge. When I know Him, there are so many promises I can lay hold of, and then there is no struggle, “for everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Matthew 7:8 NIV).

Problems come and go all the time. Things change. This is why we must say, with the apostle Paul, “I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Timothy 1:12 KJV). Obedience to God requires nothing less!

There is a time when no one can encourage us the way we can encourage ourselves, reaching deep inside for God’s secret, unshakable provision. People can talk and counsel with us. They can pray for us — and thank God for that external help. **But eventually everything comes down to our direct, unfathomable, intimate, solid relationship with the Creator.**

Too often people have a horizontal, external viewpoint, not a vertical, internal one. They look around at all the problems — the price of fuel, unemployment statistics, always-fluctuating markets, wars, the Middle East, crime rates and so much more. It’s no wonder people wallow in distress, debt, and discontentment. **When we look at the worst of things, especially all the external problems, we find things getting worse.**

God has given a better way, a new revelation, built upon the Rock of our salvation: “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:19-20 NIV).

Day 25

Priceless Lessons Of Persistence

“Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’ For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’”

Luke 18:1-5 NIV

We live in an “instant” world. **We have little tolerance for anything that requires patience or persistence.** Therefore, maybe it is not surprising that too often believers have the attitude that our relationship with God should be something like a cosmic vending machine: “Do it, Lord, NOW!”

We get so charged up to see instant results that we forget God’s timing and divine providence are always perfect. We neglect to remember that our human, finite reasoning and expectations should not challenge His infinite wisdom.

A major part of obeying God is not giving up, even when faith is not rewarded instantly.

Jesus believed in persistence. One of His parables was given to teach us that we should not give up and lose heart. He told the story of a widow who went to a wicked judge. Her request was that she would somehow get justice. The judge, either too busy or disinterested in the case, said, “Go away!” What was the woman’s response? She firmly declared, “No, I’m not leaving until you do what I’m asking of you.” Finally, because of her tenacity, the judge agreed to hear her case because she would not give up.

After telling this story, Jesus said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?” (Luke 18:6-7 NIV). Christ never criticized the woman in the parable because she was unrelenting. He didn’t say she was lacking in faith. He commended what she did.

Keep your requests constantly before the Lord. Don’t give up. Don’t stop asking. **Don’t stop seeking. Don’t stop knocking at your Father’s door, for persistence and patience are powerful steps toward obedience!**

Day 26

Obedience To God's Word

"The Law of the Lord is perfect; it gives us new life. His teachings last forever, and they give wisdom to ordinary people."

Psalm 19:7 CEV

Roadmaps are handy. Global Positioning Systems are even more incredible. Both, however, pale in comparison to the amazing spiritual roadmap-GPS available through God's Word.

The more we devote ourselves to God's Word, the more we open ourselves up to the greatest wisdom in the universe. The wiser we become, the more we realize that God requires obedience to His instructions.

The Hebrew meaning of wisdom includes separating yourself to God, opening your life to Him, and allowing Him to reveal His roadmap to you. Throughout the Scriptures, wisdom and obedience are tied together. Moses, for example, taught us that wisdom consists in knowing and doing the commandments of God.

"See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'"

Deuteronomy 4:5-6 NIV

Essentially, Christ Jesus said the same thing in Matthew 7:24: "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (NIV).

Godly wisdom means hearing and doing God's Word. People who obey Him and humble themselves to Him understand the fact that the fear of the Lord is the beginning, wellspring, and unending source of all true wisdom.

If you want God to work on your behalf, the first step is total obedience to His Word. People often quote John 8:32: "...You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." The verse before it is seldom quoted: "...Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.'" (NIV)

Day 27

The Power Of Agreement

“Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

Matthew 18:19-20 NIV

Many people read Matthew 18:19-20, but they neglect what Jesus taught in the preceding verse: “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (NIV)

As Jesus taught, agreement is the key to releasing the power of the Almighty.

It is through agreement with God and His people that we move from the natural to the supernatural, from the ordinary to the extraordinary.

How important is the unity of believers? **Throughout the Bible when people united together, the results were remarkable.** Moses joined with Aaron and Hur for great victories. Naomi and Ruth received an answer from God. David made a covenant with Jonathan.

Jesus ministered with His disciples. The prayers of Paul and Silas brought deliverance.

Is it any wonder why the Bible admonishes us to come into agreement with each other? Glance through the New Testament and see how often we are told such things as:

“Love one another” (John 13:34). “Serve one another in love” (Galatians 5:13). “Be humble and gentle... bearing with one another” (Ephesians 4:2). “Forgive one another” (Colossians 3:13). “Encourage each other” (1 Thessalonians 4:18). “Build each other up” (1 Thessalonians 5:11). “Spur one another” (Hebrews 10:24).

Throughout Scripture, we are told the importance of agreement.

Unity is commanded by Christ: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34 NIV).

Jesus prayed, “That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe...” (John 17:21 NIV).

Day 28

Obedience, No Matter What Happens

“Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time.”

Jonah 3:1 NIV

When John and Charles Wesley met and heard General James Oglethorpe, founder and governor of Georgia, speak about life in America with the natives and pioneers, they decided to go and bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the new land.

The result: Charles, who went as the governor’s secretary, fell ill. John, who went to preach, fared even worse. The pioneers did not like his preaching or mannerisms, and the natives were unconvinced.

When the brothers returned to England, they should have been crushed by the overwhelming, highly publicized failure. Instead, **it was apparent to all who knew them that their vision burned brighter than ever, though narrowed and sharpened by the fire they had endured.**

The God of the second chance turned the Wesleys’ attention on England, a debased, degenerated country. At that time every sixth house in London was a saloon. Drunkenness, child abandonment, bands of hooligans and crime were everywhere. The church had grown into a cold social club with foxhunting parsons — the upper classes laughed at it and the lower classes ignored it as irrelevant. Once again, the Wesley brothers seemed destined for failure. Their fiery preaching style was greeted with boos and jeers. They were pelted with stones, mud and rotten eggs; however, **something was different.**

John literally leapt into the saddle, traveling throughout England, preaching up to five sermons a day for over fifty years. His message to the rich and poor was the same: “Repent and be saved!” He made faith in Christ a living reality. The nation began to be stirred. One of their converts, Robert Raikes, formed the first Sunday School, a movement that spread throughout the country and abroad. Society began to see the need to help abandoned children, the needy, the illiterate and those in prison.

Not only did the Gospel burn like wildfire throughout England, but also the message of faith sparked a flame that encircled the globe. Much of what is being done today is a result of the fact that John and Charles Wesley, like Jonah of old, heard the Word of the Lord when it came the second time.

Day 29

The God Of Miracles

“Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.”

Acts 2:22 NIV

We now have strict truth-in-lending facts, product content information, nutrition data, service estimate figures, consumer statistics and more. People today want to see what they are getting. They want the facts before their eyes.

Is it any wonder the world desires to see real Christians reflecting a God of miracles?

Jesus lived in the midst of miracles during His three-year ministry on earth. The things He did — the resurrection of Lazarus, healing the blind, restoring the maniac — could not have been done through human power. He performed these miracles, not in secret, but before friends, family, enemies, faultfinders, down-and-outers and the elite alike. **His works were such that those around Him could not deny the facts.** He freely welcomed examination of His miracles.

The apostle Peter recounted, “We did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Peter 1:16 NIV).

Jesus, before He ascended into Heaven, sent out His followers with this miracle-filled mandate, “I tell you for certain that if you have faith in me, you will do the same things that I am doing. You will do even greater things, now that I am going back to the Father” (John 14:12 CEV).

A life of ministering in the miraculous begins with a holy dissatisfaction with the way things are. Jesus came to earth to change things for all eternity. The apostles understood that they were agents of change. They were to take His message of salvation and miracles to the nations. They spent the remainder of their lives carrying that message to a lost and dying world.

God desires to intervene miraculously in the hearts and lives of all mankind.

He has called us to continue this miracle-filled legacy that extends throughout the Old and New Testaments until today! Are we willing?

Day 30

Elijah's Test

"Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him."

1 Kings 18:21 NIV

One of the greatest stories in the Old Testament of God's intervention took place on Mount Carmel when Elijah openly threw down the challenge to 450 idol-worshiping prophets of Baal. He did so by asking the question, "Which one is the true God?" This was not a test for the timid. **Elijah wanted the people to see a unique, concrete demonstration of God's intervention and power.**

The worshipers of Baal prepared the bullock, placed it on the altar, and called on the name of Baal from morning until past midday. They even jumped around the altar, cut themselves with knives, and cried loudly to heaven. No response. Then it came time for Elijah's test. He prepared an altar with twelve stones, one for each of the tribes of Israel. After the wood and the meat were in place, he asked for four barrels of water to be poured over the sacrifice to prove the power of the Almighty. Then Elijah told the helpers to douse the sacrifice a second and third time with four more barrels of water each time. There was so much water that it ran all around the altar and filled the trench that encircled it

Elijah then looked up to Heaven and offered one of the most powerful prayers ever recorded: "Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again" (1 Kings 18:36-37 NIV).

God's servant had a specific request and God gave a specific answer:

"Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The Lord — he is God! The Lord — he is God!" (1 Kings 18:38-39 NIV).

Elijah was called to a life of holy dissatisfaction with the idol worship that ran rampant throughout the land. Today a statue near Mount Carmel in Israel commemorates the victorious and divine intervention over the false prophets, and the Old Testament account has emboldened centuries of believers to become courageous agents of miraculous living through trust in God!

Day 31

Elisha's Double-Portion Anointing

"Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?" "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit," Elisha replied. "You have asked a difficult thing," Elijah said, "yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours — otherwise, it will not."

2 Kings 2:9-10 NIV

From the moment sometime around the year 856 BC when Elijah saw Elisha plowing the field with a massive team of oxen, all 120 feet or so of beasts pulling the plow, something happened that would affect generations to come. The anointing on Elijah was so powerful that Elisha immediately slaughtered his oxen on the spot, held a massive barbeque for those around him, and then followed the prophet and became his servant (1 Kings 19:19-21), similar to the way Joshua assisted Moses.

We hear little more about Elisha during the remainder of Elijah's years of ministry, until the time when it became apparent the Lord was going to take Elijah in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2).

After Elisha's double-portion request, Elijah tested his servant's commitment by asking him three times to remain while he went to Bethel (2 Kings 2:2), Jericho (verse 4), and then over the Jordan (verse 6). Elisha refused to leave his master. Why? He did not want to be separated from the promised anointing. **As when he was called from the field of oxen, Elisha knew there was no anointing without action and obedience.** He kept moving, close to the prophet, and suddenly a chariot of fire appeared and Elijah went up to Heaven in a whirlwind (verse 11).

As Elijah's mantle fell, Elisha rushed to grab it and he caught the promised anointing: "Elisha then picked up Elijah's cloak that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. He took the cloak that had fallen from Elijah and struck the water with it... When he struck the water, it divided to the right and to the left, and he crossed over. The company of the prophets from Jericho, who were watching, said, 'The spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha...'" (2 Kings 2:13-15 NIV).

God arranges times when we are near the anointing, but if we hesitate or hold back, His touch will pass us by. **Elisha refused to accept anything less than the double-portion anointing.** A lot of people want to receive great things from God. Few, however, are willing to pay the price. Today, we must activate our faith and get ready to receive what God has in store for us. **May the cry of every believer's heart be, "Lord, I hunger for a double portion. Let your mantle fall on me!"**

Day 32

Five Loaves And Two Fish

“Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish.”

Mark 6:41-44 NIV

Two different times, as recorded in the New Testament, Jesus took a small amount of food, multiplied it miraculously and fed a huge multitude. In the instance recorded in Mark 6 (as well as in Matthew 14, Luke 9 and John 6 — the only miracle other than the resurrection of Christ afforded such an honor to be mentioned in all four Gospels), these facts are known: Jesus taught a multitude of 5,000 men, plus women and children. It was in a remote area, a desert place near Bethsaida, and when it got late, the disciples suggested that the people should be dismissed to go buy something to eat. Jesus replied, “You give them something to eat” (verse 37).

Several points stand out that should help us see ourselves more clearly today:

- We tend to procrastinate (verse 35), pass the buck (verse 36) and worry (verse 37) when we truly, desperately need a miracle. There is a better way!
- **Preparation for a miracle requires an honest accounting of the current situation** (verse 38). The people were hungry. It was late. With perhaps 15,000 or more people on hand (counting women and children), the situation could have quickly become desperate. God always starts with what we have and where we are.
- **As with the lad who volunteered his five loaves and two fish, we must willingly give God what we have** (verse 38).
- **We can expect God to work miracles** (verse 42). That is what He does! He desires to pour out miracles and multiplication upon His children.

Saint Augustine said, “Miracles are not contrary to nature, but only contrary to what we know about nature.” **Get honest with God about your need. Don’t become satisfied and complacent with the way things are today. Prepare for miracles. Expect God’s intervention. Then get ready for a new dimension of life!**

Day 33

On The Road To Damascus

“Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.””

Acts 9:1-6 NIV

Saul of Tarsus had a clear-cut agenda. He had received authority from the high priest (likely Caiaphas) to represent the Sanhedrin in persecuting Christians throughout the region. That was his purpose in traveling to Damascus. Then God intervened!

God changed everything in an instant. Note that Saul, soon to be called Paul, did not debate theological dogma or even the significance of what happened. He simply asked: “Who are you, Lord?” The answer, “I am Jesus,” was enough to impact the world for all eternity. Saul did not know this, of course. He was told to wait for more instructions. **He did not know that he was making a transition from leadership in Jewish society to being used to turn the world upside down with the Gospel.** He did not know that he would be used by the Holy Spirit to pen more than half of the New Testament. All he knew was that he was giving up all that he had previously attained, and he did so without argument.

From that point even until now, Paul’s true love for the Christ he once persecuted continues to be a shining example for all believers today!

Everything changed on the road to Damascus. He went from being the persecutor to becoming a chosen vessel of God’s intervention to the world. The Lord told Ananias to minister to the blinded Saul, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel” (Acts 9:15 NIV).

Though we may not be headed to Damascus today, wherever we go, we have plans and agendas that crowd our lives. **We are called to a greater pathway,** for Daniel 11:32 declares, “...The people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits” (NKJV).

Day 34

God's Intervention In Your Family

"I will contend with those who contend with you, and your children I will save."

Isaiah 49:25b NIV

God has promised that He will fight for you and your family. He will save your children! **The principle of salvation for your household is clearly given throughout the Bible:**

- God established the family from the beginning, as expressed in Genesis 1:27-28: "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number..." (NIV).
- Genesis 7:1 declares, "The Lord then said to Noah, 'Go into the ark, **you and your whole family**, because I have found you righteous in this generation'" (NIV) Noah's entire family was saved from the flood.
- That principle comes through loudly in the Exodus 12 account of the first Passover: "Each man is to take a lamb for his family, **one for each household**" (verse 3 NIV). It was not a lamb for each person. The shed blood was to cover every person in the household.
- In Joshua 24:15, we read: "But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (NIV).
- Acts 16:14-15 shares the story of Lydia, a new believer in Jesus: "The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message... **she and the members of her household were baptized**" (NIV).
- Recorded later in that same chapter, not only did the Philippian jailer become a new believer, but he also witnessed the miracle of his household's salvation.

Because of the principles given throughout Scripture, you have the spiritual right to claim every member of your family for Christ. **Ultimately, each is responsible to God for the decision to accept or reject His simple plan of salvation, but we can intercede that God will draw all our loved ones to Himself.**

Day 35

Our Challenge

“You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

1 Peter 2:5 NIV

We are called to a life of miracles, and the greatest miracle of all is salvation. The greatest calling, as a result, is our commission as “living stones.” — “Living stones”—what does that phrase mean?

Throughout the centuries since Jesus Christ gave the Great Commission, every believer has received a divine mandate from Heaven to share the Gospel: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15 NIV). That calling was demonstrated in the lives of the disciples who were transformed into bold, dynamic witnesses for Christ. The world was changed forever.

The late J. Hudson Taylor, a dynamic English missionary to China during the 1800s, said, “The Great Commission is not an option to be considered; it is a command to be obeyed.” His life as a “living stone” was a powerful example. At his death in 1905 the China Inland Mission he led included 205 mission stations with more than 800 missionaries and 125,000 Chinese Christians.

Today God has called believers to lives of holy dissatisfaction with a lost and dying world. “Living stones” are called to reach our generation in a powerful, dynamic way, winning multitudes of souls.

We have been given the divine directive and privilege of taking the message of God’s saving and healing power to the ends of the earth.

We must never become content and complacent with the victories of yesterday, for the future is filled with new and incredible opportunities to proclaim the Gospel to millions! The greatest days are ahead!

There are millions of souls waiting to hear the Gospel, and we must not be distracted or delayed from doing what God has called us to do together: the mission of reaching people and building lives.

Best of all, we have the greatest reward waiting, for on that great day we who are “living stones” have the blessed hope of standing before the Chief Cornerstone to hear, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Matthew 25:21 KJV).

What a wonderful reward for reaching people and building lives!

Day 36

Enlarge Your Territory

“Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, “Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.” And God granted his request.”

1 Chronicles 4:10 NIV

As you increasingly wave a white flag in surrender to God’s will for your life, what do you sense that God envisions for you in the future?

There is a powerful account in the Old Testament about man who was born in sorrow. Scripture says that his mother called his name Jabez, saying, “I gave birth to him in pain” (1 Chronicles 4:9 NIV).

As the boy grew, he learned that just because he was born in misery didn’t mean he must live that way forever. Jabez asked the Lord to give him a new vision — a vision to widen his borders. It was a straightforward prayer from a man who seemed to feel both comfortable and confident in God’s presence.

What happened? The Bible says God granted what Jabez requested.

What about you? What does God envision for you? What borders does God want to widen for you?

The apostle Paul, immediately after writing “I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14 NIV), then wrote these powerful words: “All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you” (verse 15).

Before the foundations of the world, God saw you today. He saw the needs that surround you and He created you as an important part of the solution to today’s challenges. You were designed on purpose for a purpose. When you discover that purpose and become empowered by God to fulfill it, your life will never be the same!

Today, set your sights as high as the heavens, then allow God to reveal His vision for your life as you spend time in His precious presence!

Day 37

Your Victorious Vision For The Future

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 3:12-14 NIV

Imagine all the times the apostle Paul was asked, “What are the most thrilling things that have happened since that day you met Jesus on the road to Damascus?”

Yes, there were historic times that he experienced, but he was emphatic that the most exciting season was right then and in the future. The apostle Paul certainly didn't focus on his past:

- He dealt with yesterday by “forgetting what is behind.”
- He turned toward tomorrow by “straining toward what is ahead.”
- He applied himself today by pressing “toward the goal.”

What about you? Has your life become a history book, or is it a living journal with pages waiting to record the amazing details of today and tomorrow?

There are many who, instead of building a strong foundation for their lives, choose to live in a world of fantasy.

Through spending time in God's Word and in His presence, you can discover His extraordinary vision for your future. Organize your life around it, and remove the distractions the enemy seeks to place in your way.

An extraordinary, victorious vision begins as you surrender daily to Him, praying, studying His Word and listening to the Designer of all your dreams, “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6 NIV).

Day 38

Thirsting For His Presence

“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.”

Psalm 42:1 NIV

Are you thirsty today for His presence? Do you need a touch from Heaven? Do you want to walk in a greater anointing upon your life?

Jesus said, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink” (John 7:37b NIV). He is the Source. **It is up to you to come to Him, admitting in surrender that He alone can fill your life with all the fullness of God.**

“You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.”

Psalm 63:1-5 NIV

As your fellowship with God increases, He will draw you into a deeper, closer, and greater walk with Him, anointing you with a power that will help you live a life of joy, freedom, liberty, deliverance, and glory that only God Almighty can give!

Walking in our Lord’s presence is a daily process. We must come to Christ Jesus each day to be filled again. Life’s trials and situations will cause you to leak out the power with which you have been filled.

Daily fellowship with the Lord is the key to abundant living. Jesus Himself promised, “I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance (to the full, till it overflows)” (John 10:10 AMP). And as you move into God’s abundance, there is a river to go to where you will never thirst again. **In His presence, you will find all you will ever need. In Christ Jesus, you are fully accepted, fully redeemed, and fully forgiven.**

When you are thirsty, spend time in God’s presence. Get alone with Him wherever you are. He is the only one who can fill you and satisfy your soul.

Day 39

A Mighty Work To Do For Jesus

“Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18-20 NIV

After Jesus' resurrection, while talking with His disciples, He gave them (and every believer!) a job to do — He sent them forth to follow His example.

“Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.””

John 20:21 NIV

We have a mighty work to do. We are in a battle for souls. Battles with the enemy require a powerful, fresh anointing every day. That anointing is always given for service and for spiritual warfare to be used for God's glory.

John Wesley declared, “If I had three hundred believers who feared nothing but God, hated nothing but sin, and were determined to know nothing among men but Jesus Christ and Him crucified, I would set the world on fire.”

God continues to look for those men, women and young people in our day, people who will set the world on fire. Will you surrender to Him, rise up to rekindle the flame, and help change the world?

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

Jeremiah 1:5 NIV

Jesus has anointed you to go and spread the message of His love and His saving, healing and delivering power. As with every believer, it is your responsibility to share what God has done in your life with the lost and the hurting.

We must make it our life's calling to reach people and build lives, following His example in prayer, word, and deed. We have a great and mighty work to do!

Day 40

So Great A Love

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”

Mark 12:30 NIV

How much does God love you?

In London’s St. Paul’s Cathedral is a life-sized marble statue of Christ writhing in anguish on the cross. The statue is inscribed, “This is how God loved the world!”

How much do you love God?

When we love God in response to His love for us, everything changes. What and how you give back to Him are only partial expressions of your love. You also love Him in your service, in your worship, in your dedication, in your obedience, in your relationships — in everything. **If your love for Him is not evident in everything you do, then you are not totally surrendered.** Your white flag isn’t completely raised!

We are told, “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13 NIV). **When we grasp the dimension of His love, we are so overwhelmed that everything we are and everything we have becomes His.**

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Galatians 2:20 NIV

In the presence of such great love, we can’t help being touched and overwhelmed. Truly, the love of Christ constrains us to give Him our very best and to be our very best.

Perhaps Max Lucado, the famous author of our time, stated it best: “God loves you just the way you are, but He refuses to leave you that way. He wants you to be just like Jesus.”

Our Father is never content with leftovers, for throughout Scripture, we find the Father asking for the first and the best, for total surrender in response to His love. He demands no less today!

