

# RENEW

SMALL GROUP DEVOTIONAL



CHURCH OF THE KING

*Letter* from  
**JENNIFER ROBINSON**



Ladies,

Have any of you felt attacked in your mind with self-defeating, anxious thoughts that are so destructive it affects your emotions and decisions? Our God has empowered us to break this cycle and experience peace and growth. That's why I am so excited that you have decided to join a Renew small group.

Over the next six weeks, we are going to journey together and allow the Word of God to renew our minds and transform our lives. My hope is by the end of the study, you will be equipped to expose toxic thinking and replace it with the life-giving truth of God's Word. As a small group, I want to encourage you to dig in, dive deep and do life together.

Thank you for taking this journey with us!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jennifer Robinson". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Jennifer Robinson

# Introduction to Renew

Welcome to Renew, a six-week journey of renewing your mind through the Word of God. The Renew devotional is designed to uncover and unpack areas that can hold you back from all God has purposed for you. This tool will help you identify common areas most vulnerable to negative thinking: purpose, self-worth, fear, relationships and offense. Whatever your struggle, you will find the encouragement and godly principles you need to overcome. Each day, you will be provided with a:

- Daily scripture verse relevant to the weekly topic
- Daily devotional reading filled with relatable illustrations and encouraging testimonies
- *Looking Further* section to explore additional scriptures
- *Going Deeper* section to journal what God is speaking to you

Each week, you will meet with your small group to connect and discuss the small group lessons at the end of each chapter. You'll want to complete the daily devotionals and discussion questions prior to your small group meeting.

## Let's get started

A pdf version of the Renew devotional is available at [ChurchoftheKing.com/womensnight](http://ChurchoftheKing.com/womensnight).

## Special Thanks To

The team of Church of the King women who wrote the *Renew* devotional. Thank you for devoting your time and skills and for inspiring our hearts and minds to follow Jesus.

## Additional Resources

- *Switch On Your Brain* by Dr. Caroline Leaf
- *21 Day Brain Detox Plan* with Dr. Caroline Leaf  
[21daybraindetox.com](http://21daybraindetox.com)
- *Battlefield of the Mind* by Joyce Meyer
- Freedom Small Groups at Church of the King  
(offered each Summer and Fall)

*Week ONE*  
**PURPOSE**  


The reason for which  
something is done or  
created or for which  
something exists.

# Day ONE

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

*Romans 12:2 NLT*



What is the meaning of life, and what is my purpose? As women, we ponder these questions quite often. Over the years culture has dictated what is acceptable or unacceptable for women to do with their lives, but more recently has declared we can do it all! There are so many options. How is it possible to know what the will of God is for my life?

Growing up at the tail end of the baby boomer generation, it was understood that women were supposed to get married—preferably sooner than later. I believed in marriage, but in college my passion was playing sports and pursuing coaching after graduation. There was always this “to do” list in the back of my mind and getting married was number one. Wasn't that my purpose? I wanted to get married, but there was a problem—it wasn't because I loved someone, it was just to check it off the list.

Fast forward to 46 years young. I was divorced, had a precious daughter, a good job, family and friends, yet something was still missing. My daughter and I started attending a new church, where I met and fell in love with Jesus. Twelve years later my entire body, soul and spirit have been transformed and renewed by God. Romans 12:1-2 are my life verses. God directed me to a new career that glorifies Him and uses all of the gifts, talents and abilities that He created in me. My purpose is found in Him.

What are you good at and what do you enjoy doing? Follow your passions! God places desires in your heart for a reason. When we stay in the Word and keep an eternal perspective, revelation will come, no matter what season of life or role we are experiencing! God has a specific plan for each and every one of us. When we meditate, study, speak, and read the Bible our thinking begins to line up with God. As we continue to do this, He reveals His good, pleasing, and perfect will and His purpose to us.

## Looking Further

Proverbs 16:3, Exodus 9:16 & Ephesians 2:10



## Day TWO

...Doesn't that privilege of intimate conversation with God make it plain that you are not a slave, but a child? And if you are a child, you're also an heir, with complete access to the inheritance.

*Galatians 4:4-7* MSG



What a privilege we have to be a child of God! The Lord of the Universe calls us His daughters. We can talk with and have complete access to Him because of the blood of Jesus Christ. Any feelings of insignificance are dispelled when we renew our minds by reading His Word. Understanding who we are in Christ makes our lives matter.

Before I knew this truth, I believed the lie that I could not impact people's lives. Being the youngest of four children, I was highly impressionable among my siblings. I can remember at an early age holding my brothers in high esteem. But what was my role as a daughter supposed to be? Growing up, I felt my parents didn't expect much from me academically. It was understood that I would go to college; however, there was never discussion about a major or career plan. The only expectation, I felt, was to pledge my mother's sorority. Unfortunately, the sorority scene was not for me—another let down. Even then, God was directing my steps without me having a clue.

Praise God, having discovered my faith, I was able to share the love of Christ with my parents and lead both to a relationship with Jesus. I also had the honor of serving my father Communion a year before his death. He asked if I thought Jesus would be angry. I assured him that Jesus was definitely smiling! At the end of my parents' lives, it was my sister and I who took care of their daily duties. What a precious time this was in our lives. I thank God for the opportunities He gave to me. Even when my parents didn't have high hopes for me, God did. From the beginning, He had a great plan to prosper me and give me a future and a hope. Renewed in Him, my ultimate goal as His daughter is to hear "well done good and faithful servant."

## Looking Further

Matthew 25:21, Galatians 3:28-29, Ephesians 1:4-6 & Exodus 20:12





## Day THREE

She opens her mouth with wisdom, And on her tongue  
is the law of kindness. She watches over the ways of  
her household, And does not eat the bread of idleness.  
Her children rise up and call her blessed;

*Proverbs 31:26-28 NKJV*



Motherhood can be one of the most rewarding yet discouraging roles we play as women. Daily we see the fruit of our labor, but it can take years before we see the tree fully grown! God blesses us with the incredible gift of children, both natural and spiritual, and understanding the impact of our words and actions is paramount to successful stewardship.

Our words of affirmation and correction must be spoken with wisdom and kindness. Consistently reading and studying the Bible and spending time with other godly women teach us valuable lessons. Parenting or mentoring someone is a huge responsibility and it is important to God. His Word says to be fruitful and multiply. When we do it this way, we reap benefits for us and for those we steward.

As a single mother of a young daughter I had the opportunity to speak into her life-probably more than she wanted to hear! In addition to my counsel, she also had many other women surrounding her through the years: grandmothers, aunts, teachers, coaches, neighbors, employers, and small group leaders. It takes a village to raise a child, right? Praise God that she had so many different households and healthy marriages to learn from. What could have been a deficit in her life, ended up being a powerful influence in developing her into the strong and kind woman that God desired her to be.

God knows the exact situations that we face, and He wants us to use our talents wisely. We all may not have children or the ideal family life even, but we can influence anyone God places in our paths. Let us be women of faith who speak life into our natural or spiritual children no matter their age. We could be the vessel that God uses to produce a miracle in someone's life. When we walk in His ways and speak truth over those we steward, we can impact the world for Jesus one life at a time.

## Looking Further

Proverbs 18:21, Proverbs 31, Matthew 25:14-30, 2 Timothy 2:2, Proverbs 27:17, & Proverbs 22:6



## Day FOUR

Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

*Galatians 1:10* NIV



“Great job! Way to go! You’re on your way to the top!” We all want and need to hear words of encouragement in life. Yet, there is a fine line between our need for affirmation and a longing to be recognized. When we cross over that line, we begin to look to others to define our wins in life. If they approve then we succeeded. On the other hand, if they criticize or reject, we have inevitably failed. Once we have entered into the performance zone, we begin to compete for the affections of others instead of looking for validation from God.

I have always been very performance driven. Hearing “job well done!” and “you have done things right!” were words I longed for in every job and really, every area of my life. Although I didn’t consider myself competitive with others, I was definitely competitive with myself. How others scored in life wasn’t my concern; but how they rated me became my central focus. The problem was it was never enough. The accolades only lasted until the next performance opportunity. I was stuck in a cycle where performance was my taskmaster and acceptance was my payment. So how do we end this crazy cycle? In order to break the pattern, we have to be willing to make a change. I came to God exhausted, frustrated, and unfulfilled. As I began to express these feelings to Him, He began to show me how needy I was for others’ affections. God expressed His love and acceptance for me; and how He longed to be the One sought out for these things. The more I saw His heart for me, the more I wanted to please Him. Likewise, when we begin to see His love for us, our hearts begin to change for Him.

Who are you seeking to please? Do you struggle with people pleasing or the need to be recognized by others? We don’t have to stay in our places of weakness. Jesus came that we could walk in victory. As we look to Him in our walk, He will guide us away from the crazy cycles and onto the path of life He has laid for us.

## Looking Further

John 12:42-46, Colossians 3:22-24, & 1 Thessalonians 2:4-6



## Day FIVE

The Lord says: “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught.”

*Isaiah 29:13 NIV*



Have you ever had a conversation with someone and every word seemed superficial? Nothing takes place—no bonding, no connection, no “real” relationship. Sadly, this describes a majority of relationships we have. It is not, however, the relationship God wants with us. To fully experience our purpose, we have to be willing to go deeper with Him. What does that look like?

I love routine. I am such a methodical person that I can easily get into the habit of doing things by rote and simply meander through the task. I began to notice this pattern in my devotional time with God. I would go through the motions, check it off my list, and go on with my day. Even my prayers were lists! Don't get me wrong, God loves order. He brought order out of chaos when He created the world. What He isn't fond of is complacency. That's where I was. My devotional time had turned into a shallow “talk session” that consisted of highlights of what I felt I needed to tell Him. The truth is God desires a deep, intimate relationship with me, a time of worship, and connection. Once I was able to grasp this, my motive and approach changed. Instead of coming to Him out of obligation, I began to approach Him with sincerity. I tell Him all my fears, my insecurities, my hurts and concerns.... and then I listen.

Worshipping is a two way street. God doesn't just want us to talk to Him; He wants to speak to us as well. Many of us are quick to tell God everything we need, but slow to listen to what He wants to say to us.

How do you view your worship time with God? Is it shallow and boring, leaving you feeling unsatisfied? It doesn't have to be. We can have an exciting, rich time of worship every time we call upon God. When we come to Him completely raw and open to hear Him, we can be sure that He will respond.

## Looking Further

Psalms 95:1-7, John 4:23-24, Colossians 3:12-17, & 1 Peter 2:9



# Small Group Questions

What are you looking to gain from the Renew small group and daily devotions?

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Read Romans 12:2. What behaviors and thoughts do you need God to help you change in order to grow in your relationship with Him and the purpose He has for you?

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On Day 2 in the Renew Devotional we read "*Doesn't that privilege of intimate conversation with God make it plain that you are not a slave, but a child?*" (Galatians 4:4 MSG). What thoughts and feelings do you have when you consider you can be called a child of God and relate to him as a loving father?

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As a "*child of God*" we are called to follow him and reflect his character. Read Proverbs 18:21 and discuss what you can do to reflect the life-giving character of God the Father. As you begin to reflect the character of God, how will that impact people around you?

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In order to grow in our relationship with God, and in our influence we need to develop daily habits that will lead us to growth. What step can you take this week to begin to grow closer in your relationship with God?

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## Declaration

I am the salt and light of the world and I want to share that with others. God has set me apart for such a time as this! The Holy Spirit guides me to seize every opportunity that He has arranged. I will glorify God in my thoughts, words and actions. Today, I enter into the destiny God has in store for me.



## Prayer

Lord God, thank you for creating me on purpose for a purpose. You knew what my purpose was before I was in my mother's womb. Thank you, God, that I have your Word for revelation and renewal of my spirit, soul, and body. Your love for me makes life worth living! Thank you, Jesus, for your example of living life on purpose and serving our heavenly Father by dying on the cross for me. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for directing my steps and helping me to discover and to walk out my cross for God—it is where I find fulfillment. Thank you for your love and grace Lord. Amen.



*Week TWO*  
**SELF-WORTH**  


The sense of one's own value  
or worth as a person

## Day SIX

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will...

*Ephesians 1:3-5 NIV*



Years ago, my self-worth was based on personal successes and achievement. Although it seemed that I had everything I wanted in life, there always seemed to be a void that I attempted to fill unsuccessfully. It wasn't until I developed a life-changing disease that I realized the void in me couldn't be filled with personal or professional accomplishments. Months into my illness, I was severely limited in my walking, and I was suffering physical and emotional pain. The dynamics of every important relationship in my life had drastically changed. One morning, feeling lonely and sorry for myself, I poured my heart out to God. A sudden realization came over me—I couldn't handle my circumstances without giving myself to Him completely.

There are many circumstances that can affect the way we view ourselves, as well as how we believe others perceive us. Our own perceptions of self can be so clouded that we may feel we are not worthy in God's eyes. I know what it feels like to believe the lie: there is nothing of significance I can personally contribute to anyone or anything. Comparing yourself to the world's standards has a way of doing that to you. I had fallen into the trap of judging myself, externally and superficially.

One of the most important things I've learned is that neither our condition, nor culture defines our self-worth—God does. Because of His amazing grace, He has given each of us the ability to receive every spiritual blessing, including forgiveness, salvation, and eternal hope, when we accept His Son as our Lord and Savior. When the enemy tries to deceive us into questioning our self-worth, the Spirit speaks of our true identity and worth. We are worthy because the Father chose us and adopted us as His children.

## Looking Further

Genesis 1:26-27, 1 Samuel 16:7, Psalm 139:13-14, Jeremiah 29:11  
& 1 John 3:1-3



## Day SEVEN

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

*Psalm 139:13-14* NIV



Crippled. Embarrassing. Unappealing. That was how I viewed my body. How could I be attractive to my husband ever again? Always on the run, people would comment on how fast I walked, always zooming about. Now I had a dragging leg and an abnormal gait. After contracting a serious disease, many things changed physically and emotionally. I knew people were staring at me as I walked. Certainly, they felt sorry for me, most likely, they were also grateful it wasn't happening to them. My disability had become my identity.

It wasn't until I understood what it meant to be God's unique creation that I was finally able to accept and appreciate my body. I began to see that He could use this situation, this hardship, for my good and His glory. This realization allowed me to renew my perspective and to see my situation through a God-influenced vision. Through reading His Word and understanding who He said I was, I was able to learn a few valuable lessons.

- It's necessary to do our part, even when we don't feel like it.
- We all have something special to contribute to God's Kingdom.
- Focusing on others opens the door for God to work in us
- A grateful heart changes our perspective.

I have to admit, I sometimes wish my body were back to its healthy self. But, every day I am reminded that God loves me—with all my flaws. We are each created perfectly unique, according to His special standards for you and me. When we see things from His perspective, we are reminded that He knew us before we were born and knew what our future would be. God has woven together a body and soul to form the wonderful and unique masterpiece known as YOU. The question is, do you believe it?

## Looking Further

Isaiah 58:10-11, Isaiah 64:8, 1 Timothy 4:8, 1 Peter 3:3-4 & 1 Samuel 16:7



## Day EIGHT

Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, for each one should carry their own load.

*Galatians 6:4-5 NIV*



Why did life have to be so hard? Had God forgotten her? Sarah knew God had promised a baby, but it had been over a decade and still no sign of pregnancy. She was a laughing stock. The other women looked at her with disdain; she could see it in their eyes. It was almost as if they were competing to see who was the most fertile and she was in last place. There was only one option- she would give her maidservant to her husband to produce a child.

Have you ever found yourself in a desperate situation, where you were competing to be noticed, only to put yourself in a worse position? We all can get into the habit of trying to keep up with the Jones's. Although we may not completely relate to Sarah's specific situation, we can all identify with her desire to fit in and be *the* best instead of *our* best. Like her, we can make bad decisions to "push along" what we feel like God has promised, but has yet to deliver. Our value can become dependent on our ability to perform or keep up. God never intended that for us.

God's Word tells us we are not important because of what we've done, but because of what has been done for us. As daughters of the Most High, our importance is defined by the sacrifice Jesus made. We are fully known, completely understood and unconditionally loved and accepted by Him. Knowing this doesn't mean we will never seek affirmation from others; we all want to be encouraged and recognized. However, understanding who we are and whose we are, prevents us from basing our identity and worth on the opinions of others.

Are you searching for significance in your job, your relationships or elsewhere? These things can temporarily comfort us, but they will never complete us. Our true identity and worth can only be found in Christ. So the more we read His Word, talk and connect with Him in worship, the better understanding we have of who we are.

## Looking Further

1 Corinthians 11:1, 2 Corinthians 10:12, James 3:16 & Philippians 2:3



## Day NINE

To bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

*Isaiah 61:3* NIV



Has despair ever held you captive? Like many others, I experienced a time in my life when I found it difficult to see any goodness coming out of my circumstances. I was a prisoner, mourning the loss of my identity and dwelling in spiritual darkness. Hopelessness so fogged my perspective that I felt I was existing, but not truly living. Maybe that's exactly where you are today—resigned to your circumstances or convinced that you're getting what you deserve. Perhaps, you've bought into the lies that you're not worthy enough and you've been totally abandoned by God. Toxic thinking can sabotage your perspective, leaving you unable to appreciate the blessings you could be enjoying. One such blessing is God's promise: I will never leave nor forsake you.

Uncontrollable circumstances will affect each of us. However, the decision to either rise above those circumstances or to allow them to control us depends on whether or not we allow *God's control* in our lives. We're not meant to live with a defeated spirit, but with a spirit of holy confidence and victory through Christ.

Accepting that we're not victims of circumstance, we invite Jesus to lovingly cleanse us, anoint us, and remove the shackles of our bondage. Re-read Isaiah 61:1-3. Take a moment and imagine a crown of beauty has been placed on your head, your body clothed in praise and the peace of Christ. Now picture Jesus standing with arms wide open ready to comfort, strengthen, and remind you that you are God's beautiful creation. When you feel overwhelmed by circumstances and destructive thoughts, remember that you are an over-comer in Christ Jesus.

## Looking Further

Joshua 1:9, Psalm 34:17-20, Psalm 119:25-32, Romans 8:1, Romans 12:2, Romans 15:13





## Day TEN

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

*Romans 5:3-5 NIV*



The vision I had for my future certainly didn't shape up as planned. Who I had become was not the person I thought I would be. I was always considered to be tough when confronted with difficult ordeals, yet when I developed a neurological disease that would change my life completely, I was brought to new levels of suffering I never thought imaginable. My thought life so dramatically changed, I felt as if I was spinning out of control. I would go from praying for God to make me tougher so I could just "deal with it," to wondering why God would allow this in my life. "I was a good person, right?" Doesn't that count for something? Perhaps you are asking these same questions right now. How do we navigate through life when life doesn't go the way we expected?

God never promised us an easy life. His Son had to face a level of suffering we will never comprehend. However, He did promise to be with us through our sufferings, to comfort and strengthen us if we trust Him and allow Him to take the lead in our lives. I have found that when I finally admit to God that I cannot manage life in my own strength, surrendering to His control brings me into a deeper more meaningful relationship with Him. As our relationship has continued to grow, I have been able to experience God's strength, power, comfort, and peace. Persevering through these most difficult times has helped me to develop a more Christ-like strength of character, the result—a hope that will continue to flourish.

## Looking Further

Jeremiah 29:11, 1 Corinthians 2:9, Romans 8:25, Romans 15:13, Isaiah 40:31 & Revelation 21:4



# Small Group Questions

What is your favorite quality you possess?

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Read Ephesians 1:3-5 and Psalm 139:14. What does God tell us our self-worth should be based on? From where do you tend to derive your self-worth?

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How has God used your sense of brokenness as a way to draw you closer to him?

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On Day 8 we read about falling into a comparison trap. How can constantly comparing and competing with others keep you from a more intimate relationship with God? How can it keep you from pursuing God's purpose?

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Read Romans 5:3-5 and James 1:2-4. How can God bring hope to your seemingly hopeless situations?

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How has today's discussion helped you to see yourself the way God sees you? How will this impact your life?

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## Declaration

I am a beloved daughter of God, fearfully and wonderfully made! There is no one else like me! I will not compare myself to others and I choose to fully rejoice in the person God created me to be. I release any negativity and judgment about myself or others. I receive my strength from Jesus and will overcome any physical and emotional obstacles that attempt to sideline me from His purpose for my life. I am a new creation in Christ. I am made worthy because of God's great love and mercy for me.



## Prayer

Dear Jesus, I know that your plan for me existed before I was born and I thank you for creating me for your purposes. I am so grateful that you know everything about me and love me anyway. Teach me to see myself as you do and to love myself as much as you do. Forgive me for having a spirit of jealousy or envy and lead me from the temptation of criticizing myself and comparing myself to others. Lord, help me to realize your plans for me and give me the confidence and boldness to carry them out according to your will. Holy Spirit, help me to rise above my circumstances, so that I may see the masterpiece God has created in me. Amen.

*Week* THREE

# FEAR



An unpleasant emotion  
caused by the belief that  
someone or something is  
dangerous, likely to cause  
pain, or a threat.

## Day ELEVEN

Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced His perfect love.

1 John 4:18 NLT



Losing a loved one is one of life's harshest realities. In 2001, I received an early morning call that my father, who was on vacation, had been killed in a car accident. The sudden loss produced feelings of insecurity and fear of the future. I felt alone, vulnerable, and afraid. It was during this time that I began to call out to God. The more I cried out, the more He poured in. He reassured me of His love for me and that *His plans for me were to prosper me and not to harm me*. He had a future and a hope for me in His Son Jesus, and I was not to be afraid. It was the first time in my life that I felt the *peace that surpasses all understanding*.

Are you feeling afraid or anxious? Fear and anxiety are not from God. These feelings are the result of us not fully experiencing the true love of Christ. Our trust has been misplaced on ourselves or others, hoping that we or someone else can "fix" whatever our challenges are. All of us are called to be faithful, good stewards and grow in our ability to solve problems; however, every one of us will face seemingly insurmountable challenges in this life. Let me encourage you to go to God when you have a challenge that begins to produce anxiety. He knows what you are struggling with and is waiting for you to surrender it to Him. We were created to walk with the Almighty in utter dependence. Walking in unity with God produces tremendous peace and tranquility.

How can we walk with Jesus? The first step is to get to know Him. Fill your mind with His Word daily. As we read the Word of God, we begin to understand His character and trust is built. We discover his unending, unconditional, and unrelenting love for us. This kind of love, the perfect love of Christ, has the power to dislodge all fear if we allow it.

## Looking Further

Isaiah 41:10, Luke 12:32, & Psalms 118:5-6





## Day TWELVE

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything.

Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

*Philippians 4:6-7* NLT



Worry. Even as I write the word, my mind begins to think about all the many things I feel the need to control in my life. Isn't that what worry is, the need to feel in control on some level? The most recent worry to occupy airtime in my thought life—my oldest graduating from high school. Yes, it's a whole year away, but time flies. I question, "Will he make it in the real world? What will he do without me? How will his clothes get clean?" Seriously though—as I pondered these questions, I saw myself go from thinking to worrying.

As a mom, I want to take care of my babies, not send them off into a cruel world that will at some point break them down. I want to keep them close and make sure they have everything they need. But the truth is they are not mine. I am a steward. I cannot protect them from everything, but I know the One who can. As the famous song reminds us, "He's got the whole world in His hands." That includes our family, finances, health, and yes, our precious children. When we lay them down at the feet of Jesus, we recognize His control over them. This is the place where worry subsides and peace reigns. Instead of worriers, we become worshippers.

What are you worrying about today? Whatever it is, God has it under control. Instead of focusing on our worries, we can choose to worship. Worship takes our mind off ourselves and focuses on the solution to all of our problems, Jesus.

## Looking Further

Matthew 6:25-34, 1 Peter 5:6-7, Matthew 11:28-30, & Psalm 23:4



## Day THIRTEEN

Fear not, for you will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more.

*Isaiah 54:4* ESV



Each of us has done things from our past that we aren't proud of. Let's face it, we've all sinned; we've all made mistakes. However, sometimes the mistakes we make are so embedded into our conscience, due to guilt and shame, that we have a hard time moving forward in life. We feel like what we've done is unforgivable, so we carry around the heavy burden of this sin, hoping if we push it down long enough it will go away.

As a child, when I envisioned my high school years, I thought I would be hanging out with friends, preparing for college, and playing sports. Never did I imagine myself being pregnant at age 17 and in an abusive relationship. Yet, that's exactly where I was. What would I tell my friends? Cheering tryouts were next week. No, things were definitely not going the way I'd hoped. Far from God, I believed culture's lie that terminating the pregnancy would erase everything, and all would be well. The truth is, I thought about that baby often, what he or she would've looked like and been like. I never processed the feelings with anyone, because I was too ashamed to admit what I had done. I was left with an emptiness I couldn't explain. But, God showed up. In His goodness He refused to let me stay there. He put people in my path that spoke to me about Him. The more I got to know Him, the more I wanted to be in His presence. God's goodness outshined my sins. Surrounded by His love, I was able to receive forgiveness for what I had done. Not only did He forgive me; I was able to forgive myself. My shame was turned to honor, knowing that I was completely forgiven. Because of Jesus' sacrifice I am forgiven—of all past sin, all present sin and all future sin. For this I am grateful.

Is there something in your past that you have labeled "unforgivable"? Let me encourage you today. God loves you! He has a great plan for you. Whatever you have done in your past, no matter how horrible it may be, you have never gone too far for God to forgive you.

## Looking Further

Isaiah 61:7, 1 John 1:7-9, Hebrews 12:1-2, Zephaniah 3:19, & Romans 8:1



## Day FOURTEEN

The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me.

*Psalm 28:7 NIV*



I remember as a kid taking rubber bands and stretching them as far as I could to see if they would break. I certainly didn't want them to break in my hands, because I didn't want to feel the sting of it popping me. I began to notice that if I stretched it a little each time, it became more elastic and flexible. I could even push it a little farther the next time.

Have you ever felt like a rubber band, being stretched until you felt like you would break? We all tend to despise the stretching process. However, that very process is what helps us to grow, becoming more yielding and flexible. Recently my husband and two sons went on mission trips at the same time, on opposite ends of the world. Although they had been on trips before, this one was a little different for me. I was being stretched. Ten days, all my boys gone, while I was at home with three little girls. Some days, I felt like that rubber band... about to break. Each day I had to make a conscious effort to choose to trust God in my situation. Thoughts of fear arose to paint vivid pictures of negative things that could happen to my boys or to us at home. As the "what ifs?" flooded in, I realized I would have to rise up and choose to trust in God.

I had to take my eyes off my stretching and place them on the One who was stretching me. He was in control and would not let me break. Confessing truths from God's Word became a habit that I quickly developed. When the thoughts came I would immediately say, "No evil will befall me or my family this day, because the Lord is with us protecting us and keeping us safe." The more I said it, the more I believed it. Trusting in God doesn't mean that we will never be tempted to doubt. What it does mean is that when doubt does try to creep in, we have the power to push it down. That power comes from confessing His Word through our mouths.

### Looking Further

Jeremiah 17:7-8, Proverbs 3:5-6, Psalm 143:8 & Psalm 91:1-2



## Day FIFTEEN

So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.

*Romans 8:6* NLT



I love emoticons. You know, the little faces you can add on your smart phone to express how you're feeling at any given moment. For us women, they are a necessity. Let's face it—our emotions and feelings can change within seconds, depending on what is going on in our world. I was a perfect example of this emotional roller coaster, not too long ago.

I woke up feeling great. My devotional time was fulfilling, giving me strength to conquer the day—or at least the pile of dishes in my sink! I love menial tasks; they give me the opportunity to process my thoughts and pray for my family. However, this particular day my mind went in an entirely different direction. Without me even realizing what was happening, I found myself thinking about a heated chat I had the day before. Do you ever re-enact conversations you've had? I was expressing what I really wanted to say and playing out in my head what she would've said. Before I knew it I had created an entire drama in my head where I was, in essence, arguing with myself. Frustration had completely evicted my peaceful state and taken up residence. I felt anxious and exhausted. How could that happen in a matter of minutes?

Our thoughts are very powerful, attached to feelings and emotions that affect the way we feel. Usually when my emotions are going berserk. So how do we control our thoughts and balance our emotions? We begin by consistently reflecting on God's Word and staying in communication with Him throughout the day. Recently, I clearly heard God reveal to me—"If you had more conversations with Me throughout the day and less conversations with yourself, you would be a lot less anxious." It's true. I can talk myself right into anxiety, sadness, and anger. However, when I talk to God, there's always relief; not only relief, but also a sense of settling in my emotions. Peace reigns once more.

## Looking Further

Philippians 4:8, Isaiah 26:3-4, 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, & Colossians 3:2





# Small Group Questions

When you think of the word "fear," what thoughts, images or feelings come to mind?

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Read 1 John 4:18 and James 4:8. According to this scripture verse, what is God's remedy for the fear in your life? What can you do to experience God's love at an even greater level?

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On Day 12 in this week's devotional we read about the importance of prayer and worship as a way of conquering fear and anxiety (Philippians 4:6-7). How can you practically begin to lay your fears and anxieties at the feet of Jesus?

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One of the greatest fears we can have is the fear of people finding out about our past mistakes. According to Isaiah 54:4, how does God view our past? How does he want us to treat our past sins? Why is this so hard to do at times?

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Read Romans 8:5-6. Do you tend to let your sinful nature or God's Spirit control your mind and emotions?

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What fear or anxiety are you going to focus on surrendering to God? Find 3-5 scripture verses that address that fear and commit to speaking those verses out loud daily for the next week.

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## Declaration

I refuse to live in bondage to fear or allow any fear to control my life. God has not given me a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power, love, and a sound mind. My mind is the mind of Christ. As Christ is, so am I in this world. No weapon formed against me shall prosper. I will be fearless and confident, knowing that God is with me protecting me, guiding me and empowering me. I will not stay in the safe zone of life, but, I will step out into the adventurous and joyful life God has for me.



## Prayer

Lord, we thank you that we can rest in you. There is no fear in your presence, because your perfect love removes every fear from our minds. Worry doesn't have to be our first response, because you are always available to hear our prayers. Not only do you hear them, but you are faithful to answer them. God, help us when doubt tries to engulf us, taking our focus off you. Keep our eyes firmly fixed on you, Lord. You will never leave us nor forsake us. Even when things seem unsteady and unpredictable, we can count on you to be stable in our lives. Nothing is a surprise to you. Father, thank you that you are in control of all things, including our lives. We rest in your victory, Jesus, knowing you have overcome every obstacle. In Jesus' name, Amen.

*Week* FOUR  
RELATIONSHIPS  


the way in which two or  
more concepts, objects, or  
people are connected, or the  
state of being connected.

## Day SIXTEEN

‘And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’  
“There is no other commandment greater than these”

*Mark 12:30-31 NKJV*



Love God and others. It sounds pretty simple, right? Then why is it that relationships can be so complicated, often leaving me lonely, disappointed, angry, or depressed? Immediately prior to Jesus giving us the two greatest commandments, the religious leaders of the day had been grilling him with questions about the law. Jesus sums up the answer to all their questions with these two commandments that deal with relationships. First our relationship with God and second our relationships with others. If we are connected to God and others as Jesus directed, relationships can bring us joy, fulfillment, a sense of belonging, and purpose.

God created us for relationship. He desires to connect with us. We are also crafted to connect with others. Here's the hard part for me: I've had to force myself to seek out relationships with other women. I am an introvert by nature, and putting myself out there is a risk. What if I'm rejected? What if my house doesn't measure up? What if...? Statistics show that most of us do not live near our extended families and the friends we do make often move every few years. As a result, we can feel disconnected and isolated. In his book *Straight Talk to Men and Their Wives*, Dr. James Dobson explains that this disconnectedness leads us to experience even more loneliness, depression, and problems than in previous generations. Dr. Dobson encourages women to “achieve a network of women friends with whom you can talk, laugh, gripe, dream, and recreate.” I've learned that I have a safe place with God and a safe place connecting with positive, life-giving women in small group. What steps can you take today to deepen your relationship with God, family and friends?

### Looking Further

Matthew 11:28, Matthew 22:36-40, James 4:8a & Deuteronomy 6:4-9



## Day SEVENTEEN

For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

*Romans 8:38-39* KJV



When my husband of forty years recently died after a seven-year battle with cancer, I found myself faced with a level of loneliness I hadn't imagined. I was cut off from the one person with whom I'd shared my whole adult life. He was the one who met that need for connection, who laughed and cried, worked and played, and prayed with me. We raised our children together and enjoyed doting on our grandchildren. A quote by poet Robert Browning was the motto we lived by, "Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be..." Together, we basked in the present while looking forward to God's blessings for our future. But that future was cut short and the gaping void left me feeling alone. I had a choice—I could burrow under the covers and never come out, or I could look for others to connect with. My shy, introverted nature didn't make it easy for me to step out, but knowing we are made for relationships, I decided to be intentional about connecting with others.

Have there been times when you felt lonely and disconnected from others? In the midst of loneliness, we can be assured that God is with us. He has promised that He will never leave us and that nothing can separate us from Him and His love. But He doesn't stop there. He also surrounds us with people who can walk with us on our journey. Sometimes we just need someone we can laugh with, cry with, and who will listen to us. If you are feeling lonely, reach out first to God then reach out to others. If you're not sure where to start, look around your small group. This is where I have found true friendships. By doing life together in these groups, I am continually renewed and reassured that I am not alone.

### Looking Further

Joshua 1:5, Deuteronomy 31:8, Matthew 28:20, Psalm 68:4-6, & Psalm 25:16-17



## Day EIGHTEEN

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a dream  
fulfilled is a tree of life.

*Proverbs 13:12* NLT



Life doesn't always deliver what we order. We all have dreams of what our future will look. Yet few of us actually see those dreams turn out the way we planned. We pin our hopes on a person, a thing or an opportunity and when that fails to fulfill our expectation, the Bible describes the disappointment as *heart sickness*.

As a new Christian and a young mother I was determined to raise my children to follow God. I invested in their faith, took them to church regularly, taught them Bible verses, and devoted myself to being a godly example. I fully expected each of my children to live for God. After all, I did everything to ensure success in their relationship with Him. However, my expectations soon deflated, as not all of them followed God in the manner I had hoped. How could this happen? Was it something I did or didn't do?

Many of us struggle with the questions that come with disappointment. We blame ourselves and question God, leading us into a cycle of hopelessness and confusion. Can you think of something you fully expected to happen, only to have those hopes come crashing down? Maybe it was the career you always dreamed of, the marriage you trusted would last forever, an unfulfilled plan or a broken promise. Reality reminds us that disappointments are certain and unmet expectations are often beyond our control. But the one thing we can control is our reaction to life's setbacks.

We can choose to allow disappointments to drive us either toward feelings of powerlessness or toward the promises of God. In my disillusionment, I decided to dive into the Word of God. Today, my focus has moved from old disappointments to new expectancy and a greater trust in God. While we may feel hopeless, the truth is God is working things out for our good. In His timing, He answers the desires of our heart and a dream fulfilled.

## Looking Further

Romans 5:1-5, Romans 8:28, Psalm 16:9, Psalm 37:4 & Psalm 71:5





## Day NINETEEN

He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and  
he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.

*Proverbs 16:32* NASB



Sometimes I feel as though I'm lugging around a heavy suitcase. It's a drag, it's cumbersome, and it gets in my way. This particular suitcase has the word "ANGER" marked boldly on the outside. Out of curiosity, I decide to open it, assuming the bag's heaviness is because it is stuffed full with anger. What I find instead surprises me! In the bottom of the suitcase is a neatly folded pile of *pride*, smothered by tight rolls of *fear* and *worry*. A pair of *disappointment* and *bitterness*, a stack of *irritation*, *frustration* and *rage* are all tucked inside. *Sadness* and *grief* are hidden in the pockets along with rejection and offense. The suitcase labeled "ANGER" really contains an array of feelings that deceptively appear like anger on the outside.

We all lug this suitcase around at one time or another; we all deal with anger and other unpleasant emotions. I have found that when I recognize where my anger is coming from and learn how to handle it according to God's principles, I am able to control my anger instead of letting it control me. I believe that the Lord has given us so much guidance in this area because it's such a universal issue.

God's Word instructs us to put away anger. We may feel justified in our anger and want to hold onto it, but when we recognize that God is sovereign over every circumstance and person in our lives, we can trust Him to deal with the cause of our feelings and make the situation work out according to His will.

We can't control how others act or respond, but we can control how we react. Scripture advises that in all ways possible we should live peaceably with others. As tempting as it is, it's not our place to avenge ourselves. Instead, we're encouraged to trust the Lord to deal with the circumstances as He sees fit. When we respond God's way, our anger is replaced with forgiveness. The result—He is glorified and we overcome!

## Looking Further

Psalm 7:11, Proverbs 29:11, Mark 3:5, Ephesians 4:26-32 & James 1:2-4 & James 1:19-20



## Day TWENTY

Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you  
disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise  
Him, The help of my countenance and my God.

*Psalm 42:11 NKJV*



Working in the field of mental health for years gave me access to many precious children, teenagers and adults who suffered with varying degrees of depression. Sadness, a sense of hopelessness and feelings of unimportance were common threads in their lives. Many felt they were missing out on the normal activities of life. Yet after a tidal wave of personal losses within a few years time, my perspective began to change.

My mother was diagnosed with ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease). Aside from a miracle of God, I knew this to be a death sentence. She died within two years of being diagnosed. Not long after, my dearest friend of 34 years died, and just 13 days later, my precious mother-in-law —my spiritual mother—went to Heaven. To make matters worse, my husband fought an 18-month long valiant battle against cancer until he, too, left this earthly life for Heaven. Pretty depressing, right?

Losses are painful, sad; yet they are inevitable in our earthly life. When we go through devastating loss such as death or divorce, we experience indescribable emptiness. Instinctively, we know this painful void must be filled but often, we try to fill it with the wrong things – alcohol, work, material things or unhealthy relationships. For us to live free of depression, something has to replace the emptiness. So here's the good news. God is big enough to fill every void left by loss! The permanent solution is to replace that depression with the love of Jesus who fills the vacuum. It starts with the praise, prayer and the Word of God.

In Philippians 4:8, the apostle Paul encourages us to *meditate on whatever things are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and there is anything praise-worthy.* In short, what your thoughts are focused on will directly affect the way you feel. Take a moment right now and begin to praise God and encourage yourself in His Word. And watch God fill your empty spaces.

## Looking Further

Psalm 9:9, Psalm 27:13-14, Psalm 30:5, Romans 8:37 & Ephesians 3:19



# Small Group Questions

Do you tend to be more of an introvert or an extrovert? How has this impacted how you develop relationships?

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Read Hebrews 3:13 and 10:24-25. What role has God designed relationships to have in your life? Are you connected in these types of relationships?

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How can challenging and disappointing relationships help you grow closer and depend on God more?

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The first part of Day 19 of this week's devotional describes anger as a suitcase with many other negative emotions and thoughts stuffed in it. How can negative emotions and thoughts act as heavy weights in our lives? How does this weight effect our relationships?

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Read Philippians 4:8. When we face circumstances that seem to be more than we can handle how can we sill remain full of God's joy?

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How will your life be better if you committed to engage in godly relationships?

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## Declaration

I believe the Truth of God's Word. I refuse to be swayed by my emotions and feelings that come and go, changing with my circumstances. When I feel lonely, disappointed, angry or depressed, I will turn to you and seek out the godly relationships in my life. God's Word is the firm foundation I stand upon. I will seek a relationship with God first and others next. I am an overcomer in Christ Jesus.



## Prayer

Lord, help me to always trust you first. When I feel disconnected, help me draw closer to you. Even the "greats" in the Bible felt alone, depressed, and disconnected. David and Elijah both were tormented in their loneliness to the point of wanting to die, but you are faithful and came to their rescue, as you will do for me. Your Word has the answer for every situation. Help me to stay connected to you through your Word and connected to others by your love. Amen.

*Week* FIVE  
OFFENSE  


Annoyance or resentment  
from a perceived insult to  
or disregard for oneself or  
one's principles.



## Day TWENTY-ONE

A person with good sense is patient, and it is to his credit  
that he overlooks an offense.

*Proverbs 19:11 GW*



Offense. All of us have the potential to experience it, every single day. None of us are exempt from this temptation. Why? Offense happens in the context of relationships. At any given moment we can find ourselves questioning other's motives. Why would she speak to me that way? Was she intentionally trying to hurt me? Is she really my friend? The truth is, the closer you are to a person the easier it is to be offended by them. In my case, it's often my husband.

We were leaving for an extensive vacation.... two weeks, five kids and an RV. Our plans to tour across the East Coast, learning hands-on about American History, was going to be an incredible experience...if we could just get out of the house. It was almost lunchtime and I was ready to go. I figured we would grab lunch on the road and head out on the adventure! My husband had other plans. He wanted to eat before we left because there was no way of fitting a 41' RV in a drive-through lane, something I obviously hadn't thought of. Yet instead of trusting his judgment I became offended and argued my case, leading to our first "heated discussion" of the trip. At that point it became less about lunch and more about defending my stance. Once things settled down, I felt God speaking to me, "If you had spent your time trying not to offend your husband, you would have had less time to become offended." Isn't that true? We can be so focused on our thoughts and feelings that we don't even recognize that we are being offensive to others.

When we take an offense, we are in essence *building a fence*. We begin to put up barriers to prevent being hurt; all the while, we block out those who can help us, even God. God has a better plan for us, a plan to protect us from isolation and imprisonment. His plan is fulfilled in our surrender to His will. The more we seek Him, the more we become like Jesus, overlooking offenses even while being rejected. As we become renewed through His Spirit, our eyes are no longer on our feelings, but on how we can make others feel.

## Looking Further

Hebrews 12:15 & Ephesians 4:31-32



## Day TWENTY-TWO

Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon and you will be pardoned.

*Luke 6:37* NASB



When the Bible talks about judging others, it refers to slandering, criticizing, and speaking ill against someone. Judgmental behavior is often a problem of unbalanced pride.

Have you ever seen antique scales that were used in markets to weigh produce? When pride is *in check* it produces a confidence in knowing that we are children of God, with a purpose and destiny. The scales are balanced and equal on both sides. Unbalanced pride occurs when we place confidence in our own accomplishments or perceived failures instead of in our Creator. Unbalanced pride can stem from two areas: Insecurity and arrogance.

Consider the woman who was caught in adultery and brought to Jesus in the book of John. The law stated that the man and woman caught in adultery should both be stoned; interestingly, only the woman was accused in this instance. Instead of trying to right a wrong, the Pharisees' aim was to trap Jesus. He ignored their accusations and penetrated straight to the heart of the matter: hypocrisy. The Pharisees were judging the woman's behavior without looking at their own sin. Jesus said, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Jesus's response was profound. Realizing their scheme did not work, the men left one by one.

Don't get me wrong, sometimes we have to lovingly confront wrong behavior in others. Unlike the Pharisees, however, it is important for us to first question our motives. Is my motive to set someone free from sin? Or is my intent to point out someone else's sin in order to make me feel better? As followers of Christ, we are called to be fruit inspectors, not judges. If you find yourself being judgmental towards others, ask God to balance the scales of your heart.

## Looking Further

John 7:24, Matthew 7:1-5, Romans 2:1, & Romans 12:3



## Day TWENTY-THREE

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto others.

*Ephesians 4:29* KJV



When the doctor walked in, we knew. My son was three days old, perfect in every way. *Severe hemophilia*? It felt like someone had kicked me in the stomach when the doctor said, "Don't get emotionally attached. He won't make it to his third birthday." The myriad of emotions was dizzying. As I looked at my first-born son, I couldn't help but think that I was experiencing some small inkling of what God must have felt when he knew his cherished son would die. My husband looked at the doctor and replied, "Doctor, we respect your expertise, but we have another Physician and our son is going to live."

"Really, what's his name; I may know him?" asked the doctor.

"No," my husband said, "you don't know him. His name is Jesus, and my son will live."

In that moment, our hearts ached. We were wounded by the doctor's insensitive words, disease, and heart-broken to imagine a precious life cut short by disease. Out of our pain, it would have been easy to become critical, judgmental and condemning of the doctors and others. Instead we made the choice to trust God.

In our hurt, it became vitally important that the words of our mouths be words that spoke life. Over the numerous trips to the hospital, we began to encourage those waiting in the ER and show love to the doctors and nurses who cared for our son. We did not question God and we chose not to criticize or complain. We did not fully understand, but we trusted God.

It is with a profoundly grateful heart that I thank God for my son, now 35 years old with children of his own. He far surpassed his third birthday and is a walking testimony to the power of God. I'm reminded that God sometimes allows things to happen so that we will grow in faith and trust. What critical attitudes or behaviors are preventing you from moving beyond your circumstances?

## Looking Further

Philippians 4:8, Psalms 19:14, & Proverbs 18:21



## Day TWENTY-FOUR

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

*1 Corinthians 13:4* NIV



Have you ever heard of the expression “green with envy?” Or maybe you’ve experienced your own taste of the “green-eyed monster.” Interestingly, the early Greeks are credited with using the color green to denote sickness, fear or jealousy. Many believed that when a person became ill or in poor humor, so much bile was produced, it turned your skin a pale-colored green. Pretty gross, huh? It wasn’t until William Shakespeare later penned the phrase “the green-eyed monster” in *Othello* that it became a common and appropriate expression of jealousy and envy.

Each of us have had to deal with a form of jealousy, the desire for something someone else has. Jealousy can stem from the lifestyle you’ve always desired, the relationship you’ve dreamed of, the “look” you’ve always wanted, or the promotion you’ve worked so hard for. Harboring jealousy gets really dangerous when it turns into envy. You see, envy takes root when you begin to feel unhappy or angry about your jealousy. If jealousy is the “green eye” then envy is the “monster.”

No better story demonstrates the harm that jealousy and envy produce than the story of Leah and Rachel. Envision two unwed sisters: Leah, the older daughter often shadowed by her younger and prettier sister Rachel. The handsome and wealthy Jacob takes one look at Rachel, falls in love and offers marriage. Enter their scheming father, Laban, who tricks Jacob into marrying Leah first. If that wasn’t enough to fuel the flames of sibling rivalry, Leah gave Jacob four sons before Rachel had delivered one. Let the battle begin! Jealousy and envy spurred an unending cycle of competition, bickering and bitterness.

It may be hard to stop looking at what others have, but when you surrender yourself to Jesus you never have to compare yourself to anyone else. Living out your destiny in Christ brings the true contentment we all desire. Trust God to provide whatever you need to accomplish your purpose.

## Looking Further

Philippians 4:12, Proverbs 27:4, Proverbs 14:30, James 3:4, Romans 13:13, Titus 3:3, & Genesis 29-30:22





## Day TWENTY-FIVE

For if you forgive others for their transgressions,  
your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

*Matthew 6:14* NASB



In my kitchen I have a sign that declares, "FORGIVE EVERYONE EVERYTHING." Simple right? Truth be told, I have never quite mastered the 'tough skin' idea. I want to have a soft heart toward God and those He has appointed me to know. I care deeply about people and want badly for everyone I meet to know Jesus, but not everyone will choose Jesus. Some have allowed unforgiveness to stand in the way.

The Old Testament speaks of the tragic story of a mother and her sons. Rizpah, the concubine of the late King Saul, gave birth to two sons. Due to Saul's disobedience and breaking of an oath, Rizpah's sons were sentenced to death as punishment. Powerless to stop the murder of her sons, Rizpah witnessed the "hangings", their bodies left unburied, a further degradation. Rizpah did not leave that site for many days, nights and weeks, fighting off the animals and birds that came to feed off the bodies. She spread sackcloth on the rock, and stood in humiliation as she guarded her boys. At last, when the rain came to revive the land, her vigil was over. If anyone had a *right* to be angry or hold unforgiveness, Rizpah did. Her sons were blameless. Incredibly, Rizpah did not *react*; she *acted*. She did the only thing she could to show her love. She stayed by her sons. Her grace-filled response so touched the heart of King David that her sons were given a true burial and honorable burial.

Forgiveness is not something we do to benefit the person who has hurt us; but true forgiveness frees us. When we choose to forgive, we do not release the culprit from responsibility for what they have done. But we release ourselves and allow God to deal with that person. As Rizpah courageously teaches us, *forgiveness is not a feeling; it is a decision*. Being renewed begins with forgiveness.

## Looking Further

Luke 17:3-4, Ephesians 4:31-32, 2 Samuel 3:7, & 2 Samuel 21:8-14



# Small Group Questions

Why do you think keeping ourselves from holding on to offenses can be challenging?

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In the devotional this week we read about pride causing us to live unbalanced and judgmental lives. What is an area in your life in which you need God to help you find balance?

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Read Ephesians 4:29 and Psalm 19:14. How will the attitude of your heart and the words of your mouth impact your reality? What do you need to do in order to align your thoughts and words with God's Word?

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Read Philippians 4:12 and 1 Timothy 6:6. How can comparing your circumstances and relationships with others cause you to drift from God? What area of your life do you tend to fight comparing yourself to others?

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*"Forgiveness is not a feeling; it is a decision"* (Day 35). How does this perspective of forgiveness help you to be able to forgive those who have hurt you?

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How has this week's devotional reading and today's discussion helped you walk in a greater level of freedom from offense?

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## Declaration

God, your word says that offenses will come, but it also declares that you have overcome the world. You surrendered your very life and died on the cross for me. Father, I surrender the right to become offended and embittered. I walk in forgiveness because you forgave me. I am profoundly grateful for your willingness to die for me. Lord, I declare that I will live for you each and every day, walking in the forgiveness and love that you have taught me.



## Prayer

Father, thank you for your gift of redemption and forgiveness. Through your death and resurrection, I can now live as your daughter, holy and set apart. Lord, I ask you to search me and reveal any hidden bitterness or offense within me so that I may live a life of freedom. Show me how to be slow to anger and quick to forgive, no longer reacting out of my emotions but responding out of love for others. God, you said love covers over a multitude of sins. Give me a heart to love as you love. Amen.

*Week SIX*  
FRUIT OF  
THE SPIRIT



love, joy, peace,  
longsuffering, kindness,  
goodness, faithfulness,  
gentleness, & self-control

## Day TWENTY-SIX // Love

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

*1 Corinthians 13:4-8* NLT



Love—such an interesting word in our modern culture. The phrase “I love you” has become a cliché. It’s thrown loosely from our lips, sometimes to people we have met only hours before. But do we really understand what true love is? The Bible describes it so beautifully in today’s scripture verse, 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. In short, love is a choice.

I never imagined loving someone from the moment I saw them. Yet, after the birth of each of my children, that’s exactly what happened. When I saw their precious faces, I was smitten and amazed how God could put such a love in my heart for a person I had never met. Raising them over the years, I have learned that loving them is not easy, but it is unconditional. Whenever faced with wrong behavior or the fallout of bad choices they made, I chose to love them anyway. You see true love is an action not a feeling. Godly love doesn’t rely on feelings that fade over time. Godly love is a love that pursues no matter what.

Sometimes receiving love can be as equally challenging as giving love. There are times in my life when I have resisted receiving love from someone because I felt it wasn’t genuine. But the truth is, it was because I didn’t “feel” loved. Renewing our minds about what it means to love will, not only frees us to love others, but it will also enable us to receive love from others.

The Bible tells us that Jesus loved us when we were still sinners, while we were rejecting him. Today, how can you practically follow his example to choose to love the seemingly, unlovable?

## Looking Further

Matthew 5:43-44, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, Galatians 5:14, Ephesians 2:4-5, Galatians 5:22-23



## Day TWENTY-SEVEN // Joy & Peace

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

*Romans 15:13 NIV*



Masks. We all wear them. Some of them hide our faces better than others, but they all serve a purpose—to hide our weaknesses and insecurities. You know that woman who seems like she has it all together and could never relate to what you're going through? Well, it may surprise you to know that she carries her own burdens. She knows what it is like to come from an abusive childhood, to have a child on drugs, to deal with a chronic illness, to sometimes feel angry with God. Perhaps she has put on a mask because she is embarrassed about her life. Every day we put on different faces to make the world think we have it all together. We've all seen the perfect façades of life posted on Facebook; lives that appear happy from the outside, but many times, the reality may be quite the opposite.

Happiness is dependent on circumstances. If things are going well, we are happy. Joy, however, comes from an intimate relationship with God, regardless of what life brings. Having a relationship with Jesus doesn't mean that I am going to be satisfied with the difficulties that I face. No one likes to go through adversity. On the other hand, having the ability to bring these adversities to God, knowing He cares deeply about me, brings a peace that the world cannot give. Joy and peace go hand in hand. When we have joy, there is a peace that follows. Knowing that the Holy Spirit lives in me allows me to experience incredible joy and inexplicable peace in the midst of the trials and hurts of life, giving me hope that I will overcome them.

Have you been striving for joy and peace? Rest, my friend. You don't have to work to get them. It is actually when we rest in Jesus that these things come. When we allow the Holy Spirit to guide our lives, it is then that we're able to face whatever trials we come up against, living a life filled with joy and of peace.

### Looking Further

Ecclesiastes 9:7, 1 Peter 1:8-9, Romans 15:13, Romans 14:17, John 14:27, John 16:33 & 1 Thessalonians 3:9





## Day TWENTY-EIGHT // Patience & Kindness

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved,  
clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility,  
gentleness and patience.

*Colossians 3:12* NIV



Have you ever prayed for patience only to find yourself in a situation where you actually had to practice it? Or maybe you had to treat someone kindly even though it took everything you had to give it. I think we've all been there! We want to be patient and kind, but don't really want the situations that enable us to grow in those areas. We want the fruit already ripened.

When both of my elderly parents were in the last years of their lives, I had the opportunity to see the fruit of patience and kindness developed firsthand. I was working full-time, raising a young teenager alone. My schedule did not need any more tasks. It wasn't just that I was busy. To be honest, my parents were incredibly demanding. My father who had been such a rock suddenly was losing his physical abilities and the capacity to take care of himself. Taking this on was not a walk in the park. God began stretching me, growing the fruit of patience and kindness within me. Despite the difficulties, I had some of my most precious memories with my parents during those months, and my relationship with Jesus grew stronger.

The fruit of the Spirit grows and develops over time, not in a day. It must be planted by God, nurtured by the Holy Spirit, and walked out by each of us. The moment we receive Jesus as our Lord, the seeds of the fruit are planted in us. However, the ripening of that fruit happens over time. As we practice patience and kindness, they will become part of our character. The more time we spend with God, the more the fruit will ripen, becoming a sweet encounter for those we come in contact with.

### Looking Further

Ephesians 4:32, Galatians 5:22-23, Luke 6:35, Colossians 3:12-14,  
1 Corinthians 13:4-7, & Romans 2:4



## Day TWENTY-NINE // Goodness and Faithfulness

His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

*Matthew 25:21* NKJV



After our first son was born, my husband and I started saving for a home, believing God would multiply our efforts. About this time the church we were attending had launched a building campaign. One Sunday morning our pastor said, "You cannot out-give God!" I remember that moment so clearly. My husband and I looked at one another and knew God was prompting us to give all of the money we had been saving towards our own home to the building program. And we did.

Let me interrupt my story for a moment. Some of you may be thinking, "that's great for you but I'm not in the position to do something like that. You're probably one of those *super* Christians anyway." The truth be told, my husband and I did not get to this place of faithfulness overnight. Like any gift from God, we had to put it into practice and first show faithfulness in the small things. God may not be calling you to give away your home savings, but He may be asking you to trust Him with your tithe, lead that small group He's been calling you to lead, invite your neighbors to church, or use the gifts He has given you. God wants your faithfulness in what He has already placed on your heart.

Back to my story. Once my husband and I had given all of our home savings towards the church building, we were excited to see what God would do. During this time, we meditated on God's Word and believed in His promises. Within months arose an opportunity to buy a home we could never have afforded. Although God did not need the few hundred dollars we had offered, He responded to our obedience.

It is through our obedience, we can hear the sweet words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." What is holding you back today from being obedient and trusting God?

### Looking Further

Psalm 23:6, 2 Peter 1:5-7, & Luke 6:38



## Day THIRTY // Gentleness & Self-Control

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.

2 Peter 1:5-7 NIV



Imagine being a young girl, newly engaged. You are excited about the possibilities of the future and what it will hold. Yet, things change drastically. You get a visitation from the Lord, telling you that His Spirit is coming upon you and you will have a baby—from God. Although we cannot entirely relate to Mary's situation, we can guess as to how she felt. Probably confused, nervous, worried that her upcoming marriage would end just as quickly as it began. But read Mary's response:

*"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." (Luke 1:38)*

I'm not sure I would have handled it as gently and as self-controlled as she did. Yet, there was a grace on her, an ability, empowered by God, to do what He was calling her to do.

Gentleness and self-control require God's part to be active in our lives. This truth is evident in our responses when things don't go our way. We want to retaliate, throw tantrums, and sometimes take our ball and go home! At least I do. Like Mary, we will all be confronted with situations that are unexpected. That's a given in life. We can see them as obstacles or opportunities. God has given us the great privilege of free will and the ability to choose our responses to life's encounters. The more time we spend with Him, the more we can see things through His lens. Our negative views become less, while His eternal view becomes greater. When we allow God to work in us and let Him guide us, we can look forward to the amazing opportunities that lie ahead. Gentleness and self-control become a way of life, rather than a chore to be completed.

### Looking Further

Luke 1:30-38, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Titus 1:8, Titus 3:2 & James 3:17



# Small Group Questions

*“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”* (Galatians 5:22-23). Of the nine Fruit of the Spirit, which one is the easiest for you to display in your life? Which one is the most difficult?

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Read Romans 5:8. What did Jesus do to show his amazing love for us?

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On Day 26 of this week’s devotional we read, “Love is a choice.” How is this different from most people’s view of what love is?

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Read Romans 15:13. Where should our ultimate source of peace and joy come from? What happens in our life when we trust God to fill us with his peace and joy?

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What Fruit of the Spirit will you focus on developing this week? Find 3-5 scripture verses related to the Fruit of the Spirit you want to develop. Commit to reading the verses out loud every day this week.

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How has this 6-week journey through the Renew Study impacted your life? What will you do to continue the growth God has begun in your life?

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## Declaration

I am a beloved daughter of God. I love the LORD God because he first loved me. And I choose to love others even when I don't feel love in return. By the power of the Holy Spirit I will live a life that produces fruit even when the world around me tries to convince me to do otherwise. Lord, I declare that today I walk in joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. I will not be shaken.



## Prayer

Dear Jesus, I draw close to you today, grateful that, in response, you draw closer to me because of your great love for me. It is because of your love that I am given the capacity to love you and love others. You have said that you are the vine, I am a branch, and that I must remain in relationship with you in order to produce much fruit. Help me to develop a Christ-filled character as I grow in relationship with you, so that I live a life that reflects that fruit. Thank you for allowing the Holy Spirit to live in me, to guide and strengthen me to develop my character so that I may fulfill your purpose for me in this world. Amen.





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