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daily devotions
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introduction

Join us for a 30-day devotional created for women, by women—
designed to encourage, renew, and deepen your walk with Christ.
Together, we'll explore what it means to live as a new creation,
embrace forgiveness, abide in God's presence, persevere in faith,
discern His calling on your life, and experience His perfect peace.

Our prayer is that through each day's Scripture and reflection, you
will encounter Jesus in a personal and transformative way.

WEEK ONE
Presence



written by
Ali Parsons

DAY ONE

Formed in the Wandering

Ali Parsons



Read Exodus 3 (spoiler: one of my favorite passages in the entire Bible).

This is a very well-known passage, so it can be easy to skim over it because you've read it a hundred times. But try approaching it with no preconceived notions. See what the Holy Spirit illuminates as you read and take note of that.

"Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. ³And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." ⁴When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

⁷Then the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, ⁸and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." ¹¹But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out

of Egypt?" ¹²He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

¹³Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" ¹⁴God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you.'" ¹⁵God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. ¹⁶Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, "I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, ¹⁷and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.'" ¹⁸And they will listen to your voice, and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.' ¹⁹But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. ²⁰So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go. ²¹And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, ²²but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians."

Moses is a man hiding in plain sight. He killed a man in Egypt and has now fled to a wilderness land where the kindness of a man named Jethro has taken him in to tend to his sheep. Moses is at a low of lows – he does not know who he is or how he fits in the world. He is searching for identity; for significance.

Then, he looks over and sees a burning bush. But it's odd because the bush isn't actually burning up, even though it's engulfed in flames. As Moses looks at the bush, it begins to speak. You read that right... the bush starts SPEAKING! Can you imagine? You're just out in the field, minding your own business, and a whole bush starts talking to you, asking about your day and giving you orders.

God gives Moses a massive assignment – to lead the people of Israel out of slavery from Pharaoh. But Moses is a fugitive in a foreign land with no ownership, leadership, or direction. When he hears God's words, he immediately goes inward; he retreats just like you or I might retreat and shrink. The whispers start to get really loud - "Moses, you can't do this, you're a criminal shepherd with no leadership skills whatsoever". He goes from "Here I am" to "Who am I" because he is forgetting who he is talking to. And God's response to him is not "No, Moses, you got this. You have all the gifts, skills, resources, degrees, and potential you need." God's response actually has nothing to do with catering to Moses' self-doubt and insecurity. His response gets Moses' eyes off himself and onto the Creator of the world. God says, "But I will be with you." Everything is going to work out in the end, not because of who Moses is, but because of who God is and His decision to be with us. Moses offers excuses, God offers His Presence. It's not about Moses' ability; it's about God's proximity. The same is true for your life.

Then, Moses asks the most important question a human can ask: "Who shall I say sent me?" God first responds with "I AM WHO I AM." Not quite a name, which is intentional. God is establishing a massive truth about His character and nature. John Piper says, "Nothing is more basic, and nothing is more ultimate than the fact that God is." God is establishing that before He has a name, He has a being; an essence. One so other worldly, so far beyond our finite understanding, so set apart, that we will never be able to fully wrap our minds around it.

Then He tells Moses to say, "I AM has sent me to you". Closer to a name now. He is defining His being a bit more here. "I AM" means that God is the one absolutely self-existent, independent, and all-defining reality — he simply and eternally is, without beginning, end, change, or limits.

Finally, He tells Moses to say, "The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you." LORD is a personal name built from "I AM". In Hebrew, this is "YHWH," which we say as "Yahweh." He is there. He is before all things. He created all things. All things are in him and through Him. He is never changing, no start and no end. God is.

This is the forming of Moses. The introduction to God's presence. When we enter into God's presence, we move from "Here I am" to "Who am I?" to knowing the only thing that matters is God as "I Am Who I Am."

As you trek through life, your abilities will convince you they're going to take you somewhere, your relationships will convince you they define you, your thought cycles will convince you they are true, but at the end of the day, the only thing that matters is a life spent with Jesus.

He is not a far-off God, and He is not waiting for you to clean up your life so He can finally use you. All He desires is that you pick up His hand and walk with Him.

Let's pray.

Yahweh, thank You for Your presence. Even if I feel far, You never are. There is no distance between us, only my willingness to turn towards Your voice, just like Moses. I pray I'd have the posture to say "here I am," the awareness of my own sin to say "who am I to be used by an almighty God like You," and reverence for the only thing that matters – You. I want to know You. I want to know You. Help me to know You.

*In Your name I pray,
Amen.*

DAY TWO

Make Room for His Presence

Ali Parsons



“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV)

When you lie your head down at night, what is going through your mind? Is it restful gratitude for a full day? Or is it an endless to-do list of what you did or did not accomplish today and what you have tomorrow? It is often that I find myself (more times than I’d like to admit) lying my head on the pillow, heart tired, yet racing, thinking about what I didn’t get done today and what needs to be done tomorrow. Some call me a “plate filler,” like when I have just an inch of space in my life, I immediately fill it with another project, person, or passion. Anyone else?

See, we live in a world that says we need to be present moms, driven career women (with a side hustle, of course), have solid friendships, date our spouse, eat healthy, exercise, have quiet time with the Lord, have a hobby, make sourdough, call our mom, travel to Europe, and knit all our clothes (okay maybe I added that a few). But, doesn’t it feel like the list of what we should be doing is long? It’s exhausting. It’s exasperating.

The thing about being a plate filler is that at some point, you will hit the edge. When I hit the edge of my plate, I felt it before I could verbalize it. Little tasks were exasperating. And when I say little, I mean LITTLE. Think like lying in bed at night, feeling thirsty, realizing my water bottle is in the car, and crying kind of vibe (just hypothetically speaking, obviously). For months,

I felt like I was pushing my car up a hill because it was out of gas instead of driving on a full tank. My flesh wanted to quit activities, and I felt desperate. But a pastor in my life told me it wasn’t just a scheduling problem; it was a soul problem.

Ruth Haley Barton, in her book *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, asks a question at the beginning that the early Wesleyan bands of Christians would ask when they got together. Instead of “How are you?”, they’d say, “How is it with your soul?” An interesting question that digs right to the root of your current state.

Take a moment and ask yourself that question. When you lie your head down at night, how is your soul? If the question itself overwhelms you, as it did for me in that season, you may have your answer.

Jesus calls us to a life of soul rest. That verse in Matthew says, “Come to me all who work hard and need rest, for I am gentle and lowly.” I’ve got the working hard and needing rest covered, but how often I forget His gentleness and lowliness. Lowliness is a humble posture of approachability and accessibility. Meaning, He is an approachable and accessible God.

Do you know Him as that? The Creator of the entire universe, more powerful than 1,000 nuclear explosions at once, is not only accessible but also approachable, meaning He wants to be with you.

We are not meant to bear the weight of the world on our shoulders. Yet, as women, we so often do (or try). But, Jesus says, “Hey, come here. Let me take that. Let me take the weight of the world so you can live free.”

What your soul, your marriage, your parenting, your job, your friendships, and your self-image do not primarily need is an improvement plan, SMART goals, or accountability partners (although these are all good things). What you need is to be desperate for God's presence and to seek His face.

What would it look like to live from a place where we are consistently seeking God's face? What would it be like to find God in the fullness of your life rather than miss God in the "busy"? How would it look for our souls to find rest while our hands stay hard at work?

A life of consistent soul rest doesn't mean we don't go after what God has called us to do. Not at all. In fact, when we commune with God, when we spend time with the King, we are freer to do what He has called us to do and do it well. When we rest our souls in the presence of God, we can run hard the race laid before us. These things go hand in hand.

Today, bring your to-do list, your stress, and your schedule. Bring it to the feet of our lowly King and pick up rest for your soul.

Prayer.

Jesus,

You are gentle and lowly. Accessible and approachable. I have been treating you like a far-off God who can't handle (or doesn't care about) my problems and projects. I have been running with a weighted vest (not in a good way), and I want to run free. Today, I lay those at Your feet. I surrender them, knowing they are better in Your hands than mine. Help me run hard after all You've called me to, but may I do it from a place of rest and security in You. Don't lessen my load, broaden my shoulders. Help me to seek Your face consistently so that I can be a conduit of Your kingdom.

In Jesus' name,

Amen

DAY THREE

Daily Presence

Ali Parsons



“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁷“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

¹⁰Your kingdom come,
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹*Give us this day our daily bread* *,

¹²and forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

¹⁴For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” Matthew 6:5-15 (ESV)

**Italics added for emphasis*

I think we forget sometimes that Jesus gave us the framework for exactly how to pray! This is a gift, and one I like to return to often as I spend time in the presence of God. The one part of the Lord’s Prayer I want to walk through today is “Give us this day our daily bread.” This is a nod back to Moses and the people of Israel in the wilderness when God gave

them manna every day to sustain and nourish them. He offers the same to us. Let’s break it down word by word.

“GIVE”

What matters more than anything else in prayer is who we are praying to. What matters more than anything else about “presence” is who we are present with. When we can properly understand that we bring nothing to this equation, nothing to the table, and nothing to impress an almighty God, we can rightly understand that HE is the giver of all things. When the Israelites were in the wilderness, God rained down bread from the sky. There was no questioning who the giver was because the bread literally rained down. In our lives, it’s easy to slip into thinking we make our own realities. When we properly understand who the giver is, we proportionately open our hands, knowing we have no control and only He does.

“US”

Subconsciously, we tend to read the Lord’s Prayer as “give me this day my daily bread.” We live in a world that is about me, mine and more, but this is a collective asking for daily bread. This challenges me in a big way. Am I praying for just me and mine, or for the collective “us”? Am I praying for just my needs, or for the people in my life’s needs too? The Church’s needs? The needs of other nations? When the manna dropped from the sky, it was not into individual homes; it was in fields where collectively they’d go and gather as a community. Life is meant to be arm in arm, and

so is our prayer life.

“THIS DAY”

Not tomorrow, not yesterday, not a month from now, or ten years from now. Today is enough to pray for. Today, He will give you the daily bread you need. Scripture tells us that His mercies are new every morning. We can rest in asking for today’s needs.

“DAILY”

The Israelites went out and collected manna every single day. If they collected more than a daily amount, the manna would sour and spoil by morning. God wants our hearts every day. He doesn’t want you to load up on His presence and then go on your way until you need him again. Every single day, we need His presence.

“BREAD”

Jesus is not saying to pray for a Wonder loaf to drop from the sky every day, but He is using what the people hearing would remember as God’s provision to the Israelites in the desert. The manna that dropped to the Israelites was nourishing and sustaining. Jesus offers us the same. In John 6, it says, “Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.’” (John 6:35)

Moses begged God to give them provisions in the desert. And God did. The daily manna is nothing short of a miraculous display of God’s power and protection. But on this side of Jesus, the daily bread is not just our basic needs being met; it’s being given all we need for life and godliness. It’s not stuff, it’s Jesus. When we consume the bread of life (no, I don’t mean eating Jesus), when we spend time in His presence, read His Word, and learn His character, we will experience sustenance, health, and fullness as if we just ate a perfectly nourishing meal.

The promise is not that all your wants will be met; it’s that all your needs have already been met.

Their bread was flour and water blessed by God. Our bread is God himself.

Let’s pray.

Dear God in Heaven, We acknowledge who You are—holy, set apart, and yet deeply present. We start by looking up at Your greatness before we look down at our needs.

May Your world be made right. We want Your way of doing things to be the standard here on earth. Let Your love be the “new normal” in our homes and our city.

Give us today the “bread” we need for right now. Father, we aren’t asking for next month’s security or next year’s answers. We’re asking for enough. Give us enough energy for this afternoon, enough patience for this conversation, and enough resources for this day’s demands. We trade our anxiety about tomorrow for a seat at Your table today.

Forgive us for where we’ve fallen short, especially the ways we try to survive on our own strength. We release those who have hurt us, choosing to live in the freedom of Your grace rather than the weight of our bitterness.

Lead us away from the things that distract or deceive us. Keep us on the right path. When we are tempted to believe we are alone or that You’ve forgotten us, remind us of Your protection.

For You are the source of it all. The kingdom, the power, and the provision are Yours. You have always been enough, and You always will be.

Amen.

DAY FOUR

Don't Go Without God

Ali Parsons



“Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

¹²Moses said to the Lord, “See, you say to me, ‘Bring up this people,’ but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.’ ¹³Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.” ¹⁴And he said, “*My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.*” ¹⁵And he said to him, “*If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here.*” ¹⁶For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?”

¹⁷And the Lord said to Moses, “This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.” ¹⁸Moses said, “Please show me your glory.” ¹⁹And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The Lord.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. ²⁰But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” ²¹And the Lord said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, ²²and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.” Exodus 33:11-23 (ESV)

**Italics added for emphasis*

Are you desperate for God’s presence? Moses had the promised land in front of him. The land flowing

with milk and honey. The equivalent of the “American dream” for us. And yet, we see Moses *desperate* for God’s presence in the Promised Land. Moses would rather live in the wilderness for the rest of his days than go somewhere without God. Do you feel the same?

This convicts me big time. Many days, I crush a to-do list. I’m checking boxes and taking names. There are days I get to the end, and if I’m honest, I did the day without God. Now, theologically speaking, God is always there. We do not have the power to move Him from being there or not, but we can easily move through our days with zero awareness of the King of the Universe next to us.

I envy Moses’ relationship with God sometimes. We see a friendship (verse 11) that many of us long for. We see a desperation that I want every day of my life. One where I am so convinced that God is who He says He is and that I can’t make a move without Him. Not only that I can’t, but that I wouldn’t want to.

Then Moses makes a brave request: “Please show me your glory.” Here Moses stands, *desperate to be known, desperate to be in the Presence of God, and desperate for a glimpse of the glory of God.*

Exodus 33 is what led me to write an entire 40-day Bible study on Moses. When I first studied his life, I was struck by Moses’ journey. The trust he built in God and the way God continued to meet him. I was also struck by the recurring theme of God’s presence. The longing of every soul is to be known by God, and in the dark nights of the soul. Our plea with God is the same as Moses’. We are desperate to be known by God, desperate to be in the Presence of God, and

desperate for a glimpse of the glory of God. Why? Because we are created to be known by God, to live in the presence of God, for the glory of God. This is the DNA written on our hearts as image bearers.

And the crazy part? God says yes. Moses' request to see God's glory is BOLD. If I didn't know the story, I'd think Moses is crazy because why would an all-powerful God ever show a small human His glory? But God surprises Moses with a yes. Where are you not bringing bold, honest requests to God because you assume upon His character?

In this account, we see how personal God is. The friendship and intimacy that He and Moses have. We also see the sheer, raw power of a God so "other", we can only handle seeing his back lest we die. This is the reality of who has invited us into His presence. He knows your name, your deepest desires, doubts, and dreams, and He is also greater than, bigger than, stronger than, and better than anything else in the entire universe.

Don't go without God. It would be better to stay in the wilderness with God than to live in a land flowing with milk and honey without Him. Be desperate for His presence and seek His face – you have no idea what glory you'll get to glimpse.

Let's pray.

*Almighty Heavenly Father,
Thank You for Your friendship. That we have access
to seek Your face and grow in deep intimacy with
You. Like Moses, we want to be face-to-face with
You. Thank You for the Holy Spirit, who dwells
inside of us and communes with us. Make us aware
of Your power and glory. May it overwhelm us so
that it drives us. Drives us to trust You, follow You,
and be desperate for Your presence. As we go on our
day, may it never be without a deep awareness of
You. Remind us, Lord, that Your love for us goes
beyond measure, Your presence is sweeter than honey,
and hide us in the cleft of the rock when we need.*

We are Yours.

*In Jesus' name,
Amen*

DAY FIVE

His Presence Drives Our Purpose

Ali Parsons



“Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. ¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
Matthew 28:16-20 (ESV)

We started this week on God’s presence with Exodus 3 and Moses’ encounter with God through the burning bush. Matthew 28 is our burning bush moment. It’s our call to be a part of the work God is doing to advance His kingdom and push back darkness. Some worshipped, some doubted, but they were all called. Moses worshipped (Exodus 3:5 - took off his sandals in front of the burning bush), and he doubted (Exodus 3:11 - he pushed back on the assignment and Exodus 4:13 - even requested someone else to do it).

Like Moses, the assignment is bigger than anything we could possibly do on our own. Like Moses, we are completely unqualified. Like Moses, Jesus knows that and says all I need is your “yes” because I am with you always.

Moses was commanded to lead the people from slavery to freedom. The same is true for us here. We are commanded to lead people from the slavery of sin and death into freedom with Christ.

The power of the presence of God is that it is more than enough to sustain us, and it never culminates in itself. Spending time with God and knowing Him deeply will always lead to telling the world about it.

The way Pastor Britt says it is that the life of a believer is not just about changing habits. But when our hearts are changed by Christ, our habits will always follow.

In Acts 4:20, John and Peter are trying to be quieted by the government to stop talking about Jesus, and they say this: “As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

Their hearts have been changed, and now they cannot stop their habits from being all about Jesus. This has been my own journey with spending time in the Presence of God. I wanted to start practicing the spiritual discipline of silence and solitude. So, as recommended, I started with a 10-minute timer. Just 10 minutes where I am not barking orders or requests at God, but just being with Him. In the first few weeks, those 10 minutes felt like a lifetime. I didn’t know how to turn my brain off. Over time, I realized I was looking forward to those 10 minutes. The habit didn’t just change; my heart did, and the habit followed.

Now, those 10 minutes (sometimes it’s even 45 minutes! Can you believe it?) are the thing I look forward to most every morning. I can’t imagine starting my day without it. Why? I get to be in the

presence of the God of the Universe with nothing else pulling for my affections. All day, life is pulling at my affections. When I can rest in the presence of God before anything else, I am recalibrated back to my purpose. The rest of my day then feels like I am crystal clear on what, where, and when God has called me. It is so simple and yet has changed my whole life. And even still, I have to fight for it some days. You will always have to fight for the presence of God because the Enemy wants nothing more than for you to live unaware of God. Let's be a people who seek God's face, and the world is changed because of it.

This week, we have studied the Presence of God.

Day 1, we looked at Moses' call into God's presence through the burning bush. He was scared, insecure, and felt totally unqualified. But God promised to be with Him. We were called into God's presence

Day 2, we saw Jesus' warm invitation to give Him our burdens and find soul rest. We looked at our full plates and were reminded that spending time in the presence of God fuels our souls to run the race hard that has been set before us. We made room for God's presence.

Day 3, we saw the power of prayer. The framework that Jesus gave us to seek His presence every single day. We saw the invitation to seek His face and the promise to get what we need for today. We made time in His presence a daily practice.

Day 4, we saw Moses say that the wilderness with God would be better than the Promised Land without God. We saw a desperation to live a life hand in hand with God. We also saw the raw power of this same personal God. We committed to not going anywhere without God.

And on Day 5, we see the assignment given to every

believer – to make disciples. We see that the invitation into God's Presence will always lead us deeper into our purpose – to make His name known.

May I be the person, may you be the person, that spends time with Jesus and therefore cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.

Like Moses, you have been invited into the adventure of God. Will you take it?

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father,

May we be a people desperate for Your presence. This is a starting line, not a finish line. Thank You for the invitation to adventure with You. Who are we to spend time with an almighty God who calls us daughter and friend? May we never go without You.

*In Your holy name we pray ,
Amen*

WEEK TWO

Perseverance



written by
Caitlin Armstrong

DAY ONE

The Gold Chain of Character

Caitlin Armstrong



“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” Romans 5:1-5 (ESV)

Romans 5 opens up with the Apostle Paul concluding that since those who believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior are justified by faith and not works, they now have peace with God. Let’s make that a little bit more personal. If you have surrendered your life to the lordship of Jesus Christ, you are no longer at war with God. Think about that for a minute. Imagine you, who can’t even find your sunglasses when they are on your own head, going toe to toe with God on the battlefield. Whether you are 5’2” or 6’8” it doesn’t really matter when you are up against the Creator of the Universe. The outcome of a war with God is 100% of the time, God wins; you lose.

Jesus is the peace treaty between you and God, and He is the one who gives you an all-access pass into the grace you live in moment by moment. You are exempt from receiving God’s righteous wrath because Jesus endured it for you.

You can now, as Paul says, “rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” This means you can have joyful confidence in your salvation. You don’t have to fear anything because nothing can separate you from God. If you didn’t do anything to earn right standing before

God, you can’t do anything to lose it.

Paul continues on and adds a second rejoice in the mix. He has the audacity to tell Christians then and now to rejoice in their sufferings. This second rejoice has to come after the first because it can’t stand on its own. Without rejoicing in the assurance of your salvation, there is no way you can rejoice in your suffering. Without understanding your status without Christ, you can’t properly endure suffering with Christ. Paul then beautifully describes the gold chain of character. Like links in a necklace, each piece fits with the next to create a piece of art. Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame. Paul is telling the Christians that suffering is not pointless! It is actually essential in the life of the disciple. The order in which Paul describes this gold chain of character is important to take notice of. First, we see that suffering produces endurance, and the Greek word used for this describes a characteristic of someone who is not swerved from their purpose and loyalty to their faith, even in the midst of severe suffering. All humans suffer, but there is a difference when it comes to suffering well. Jesus perfectly demonstrates this as he remained faithful to the Father’s will. He not only endured extreme physical suffering before and on the cross, but He felt the depths of anguish as he swallowed the sin of the world. We don’t even have a category in our minds for the suffering Christ experienced, yet we have a Savior who endured, reigned victorious, and invites us to join Him. You are capable of enduring suffering because,

as Galatians 2:20 states, you have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer you who lives but Christ who lives in you.

The next link in the gold chain is character. After endurance has been forged, character is produced. The Greek word used here means tested and proven. One way to test the authenticity of actual gold is to put nitric acid on it. If the gold is real, it will not react. If it is fake, it will turn green and corrode. God tests the authenticity of our faith to prove that it is genuine. Genuine faith will not corrode. It will withstand, and it will produce something so valuable that you will stake your life on it.

Do you remember the first “rejoice” Paul talks about in Romans 5:2? Before he talks about suffering, he says, “rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” He starts with hope, and he ends with hope. He says that after you have suffered and remained faithful and have

been tested and proven genuine, you will live in hope. This hope is not a wish you make when you blow out your birthday candles. This hope is rooted in God’s love and sealed in us by the Holy Spirit. This hope is the assurance of our salvation and the confident expectation of the new heaven and new earth.

Let’s pray.

God, thank You for sending Jesus to be our peace treaty and giving us access to grace. Help me to rejoice in my sufferings and forge in me the character that glorifies You.

Amen.

DAY TWO

Active Endurance

Caitlin Armstrong

“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” James 1:2-4 (ESV)

There we go again, the Bible talking about joy and suffering. I don't know about you, but sometimes it makes me a little prickly when I read these verses. Just getting through trials is hard enough, but being told to have joy in the midst of them seems pretty unfair. Why do the biblical authors keep talking about this? Why does it matter?

Let's start with the word joy. The Greek word here is the same word used when describing the joy of Christ's birth and the fruit produced by the Holy Spirit. This word is more than a description of an emotion or outward appearance, but it is anchored in the assurance of God's grace. If James is telling the Christians, then and now to count it joy during trials, then this joy cannot be dependent on circumstances. Count means to consider and think about, so James is making it a point to show that this joy must come from the inside out. It must come from a renewed mind that is choosing to reflect on the goodness of God and not the trial staring you down.

Based on his writing, I think James is a straight shooter, so I think when he says “various trials,” he is not being lazy or vague, but rather he is intentionally huddling all trials under a big umbrella. Trials that are big and small, ones that last a long time and ones that go by quickly. Trials that are inconvenient and trials that feel like they are going to kill you. He doesn't



name specific trials or compare them on a scale. I think one of the reasons he does this is because he doesn't want you to set up a campsite with that trial, but he wants you to see beyond it. The trials will come, and the trials will go, and the trials will test your faith, and that testing will produce something much more permanent.

What will be produced is the same word used in Romans 5 when Paul talks about what suffering will produce. It can be translated as endurance, perseverance, or steadfastness. James is pointing to the fact that trials are used by God to test your faith and that testing will bring about something that will shape your entire life.

Steadfastness is active patience. It is not like being patient while you sit in a doctor's waiting room listening for your name to be called. It is more like long-distance running. It is actively enduring something while moving forward. It is working and waiting.

What is so interesting about this text is that James says that if you let steadfastness do its job, you will be perfect and complete. Now, it's really important when studying the Bible to interpret the Bible with itself. If you just read these verses out of the context of the rest of the Bible, you may conclude that you are capable of reaching some sort of sinless state of being just by surviving trials. You may even think you can willpower your way to perfection, but we know, because of what the rest of the Bible tells us, that this is not what James is referring to here. James is speaking about spiritual maturity. It is the ability to see the hard thing that has to be done and the character to do it. It is a maturity

that can only come through having your faith agitated.

If you keep reading in James in verse 12, he says, “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.” This crown of life symbolizes a victor’s wreath put on the head of an athlete who has just endured their race and won. It represents crossing the finish line of life and being rewarded with eternal life with God.

And you want to know something incredible? God is so holy that the good gifts He gives never terminate on themselves. They always reflect back to His glory. In Revelation 4:10-11, it says, “the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”

This blows my mind! In this incredible scene of worship, the same word for crown is used as in James 1:12. This tells us that the reward you will receive when God finishes the good work in you will be the very one you throw back at Him as your offering of worship. We can count it all joy because our reward is God Himself.

Let’s pray.

*God, thank You for always keeping Your promises.
Help me to count it all joy as I face trials, and help
me to trust You with the process.*

Amen.

DAY THREE

Stay in the Game

Caitlin Armstrong



“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” Philippians 1:3-6 (ESV)

When I read Paul’s letter to the Philippians, I imagine his eyes welling up with tears and his voice cracking as he carefully chooses each word. He has been through so much for the sake of the gospel, and his affection towards the church in Philippi shows that their partnership has helped him endure severe trials. Paul has been imprisoned for the gospel and even desires to die and be with Christ, but he knows his trials are not pointless. Paul wants the church in Philippi to know that his sufferings are not only for their sake but also for the sake of others. His trials are for the building and flourishing of the kingdom of God.

When it comes to persevering, you need vision. You need a purpose bigger than yourself. You need a why behind the what. In Philippians 1:25-26, Paul reveals his why, and he says he will continue to persevere through trials for two reasons. First, it is to help the Philippians progress in their faith with joy and second, to glory in Christ Jesus.

Have you ever thought about how your obedience to Christ could help others progress in their faith? Have you ever considered that your steadfastness could cause someone else to glory in Jesus?

When ballerinas perform pirouettes, they use a technique called spotting. This requires them to keep

their eyes, head, and gaze focused on a fixed point at eye level. The spot must be stable and unchanging because it acts as an anchor, helping to prevent them from falling. I think what Paul is describing in Philippians 1 is a type of “spiritual spot.” Even though Paul is feeling the wear and tear of suffering, he remains steadfast because he has his eyes fixed on the One who suffered for him. His anchor is unmovable.

One of my favorite disparaging ways to describe humans is to call us “navel-gazers.” This means that we are naturally self-absorbed and inward-turning. We look down instead of up. We place our hope in counterfeit gods. We implode in on ourselves. Should I go on? What I’m trying to say is that without Christ, we are doomed. This is, of course, terrible news... but praise be to Jesus who offers us the gift of eternal life and the Holy Spirit. By the power of the Spirit, we can set our eyes on the unmovable anchor, and we can live with a bigger purpose.

Paul says that the Philippians’ partnership in the gospel brings him joy and that joy helps sustain him through trials. Paul is charging the church to continue on in their obedience and to remember that God will carry them through. They don’t need to fold because what He started will one day be completed.

Do you ever want to throw in the towel with this whole following Jesus thing? I get it, my spirit is willing, but my flesh is weak too. I doubt, I complain, I choose myself over others and in the midst of all that, God still allows me to be overwhelmed by the gospel of Jesus. I can’t get over the fact that He would save a wretch like me, and I pray that I never will. As a good

dad does, He frequently lifts my eyes up to look into His and even though life is spinning around me, He anchors my soul once again.

If you are reading or listening to this, then God is not done with you yet. He didn't bring me or you from death to life to have us sit on the sideline. The moment you said "yes" to Christ is the moment you were put in the game, and we have the privilege of knowing how it all ends when the buzzer goes off. We know that Christ is already victorious because He proved it by walking out of the tomb. We know that our troubles are in no way minimized but they are temporary. And we know that our God is a good father who doesn't fail His children. He is sovereign over every moment of your life, and your life is worth living. So, keep investing in the kingdom. Keep pouring yourself out. Stay in the game. It matters more than you know.

Let's pray.

*God, thank You for never abandoning Your children.
Restore to us the joy of Your salvation and continue
to give us what we need to remain faithful and
glorify You.*

Amen.

DAY FOUR

Redirect my Heart

Caitlin Armstrong



“Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, ²and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith. ³But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. ⁴And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. ⁵May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.” 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5 (ESV)

In the first part of Paul’s second letter to the church in Thessalonica, he addresses the topics of persecution and Christ’s return. He encourages the church to continue to remain faithful amid persecution, reminding them that God will bring justice and that their afflictions are temporary. Some of the Christians in Thessalonica thought that Jesus had already returned or would be coming back immediately, so Paul clarifies some things. He explains to them that some things had to happen before Christ returned, namely, the “man of lawlessness” who would lead many into a great rebellion. There are many different interpretations of this passage and who the “man of lawlessness” is, but I want to direct your attention to what Paul says after it.

Paul reminds the church of three things. First, he reminds them that they can stand firm because their salvation is secure. No matter what they will endure, they have already been chosen by God, and nothing can change that (2:13-14). Second, he reminds them that God will comfort them and guard them against the evil one (2:16-3:3), and third, he reminds them not to be idle, but to work hard and live responsibly (3:6-15).

Sounds easy enough, right? Well, Paul is writing to real humans, and real humans have a way of messing things up. I don’t know about you, but I often get gospel amnesia. I often forget the love of God and His promises, and I take matters into my own hands. I can operate out of fear and lose focus from my purpose. I think this is what is happening to the Thessalonians. They are experiencing persecution, which brings physical, mental, and spiritual exhaustion, and they are believing something that isn’t true (namely, the details of Christ’s return). They must be redirected to the bigger picture and the One who holds it all together.

I think that is why in chapter 3, verse 5, Paul pens a prayer of redirection. He says, “May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.” You can also translate the word “to” as “into,” so verse 5 could also read as “May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ.”

You and I are invited to not only think about God’s love and Christ’s steadfastness but to actually step into them and experience them.

When is the last time you sat in God’s love? Not just thought about it or read about it, but felt it. Earlier this year, I was on vacation with my family, and as I was getting ready to fall asleep, I brought my worries and fears to God, and He responded with His love. He reminded me of how I look at my five-year-old daughter and how, daily, I am in awe that I get to be her mom. I often tell her I want to squeeze her guts out because when I hug her, the affection inside me

wants to burst through my arms and envelop her.

He reminded me that the love I have for her pales in comparison to the love He has for her, and for me too. As I lay there, I didn't list all the reasons I don't deserve His love; instead, I received it. I felt it like a blanket over me. I took a deep breath and inhaled it.

The ability that you and I have to feel the love of God is because, as Romans 5:5 states, it has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. We are children of a God who is not far off, but whose very presence lives within us.

As Paul asks God to direct the Thessalonians' hearts into God's love, he also asks that they be directed into Christ's steadfastness. The same steadfastness that remained unwavering through the temptations in the desert, the despair in the garden of Gethsemane, the torture of the cross, and the darkness of the tomb.

What I think is so interesting about Paul's letter is that he talks about steadfastness in the context of both persecution and in the mundane tasks of life. The faithfulness the church is called to is for the intense moments and the common moments. The faithfulness you and I are called to is in the face of evil and in the face of household chores. The Thessalonians were

called to stand firm against the evil one and to live quietly.

Working hard, discipling your kids, serving the church, giving generously, loving your neighbor and so on and so on. These are the things that require steadfastness, too. These are the things God cares deeply about. Just as the church in Thessalonica could live faithfully then, you can live faithfully now. If you have lost focus, this is your invitation to ask God to redirect you to Him.

Let's pray.

God, thank You for Your love and Your steadfastness.

Thank You for always keeping Your promises.

Redirect my heart to You and the purpose You have for me today.

Amen.

DAY FIVE

Train with Intention

Caitlin Armstrong



“If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. ⁷Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; ⁸for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.”

1 Timothy 4:6-8 (ESV)

1 Timothy is a letter the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, whom he refers to in 1 Timothy 1:2 as his “true child in the faith.” Timothy was Paul’s friend, mentee, and ministry partner. Paul sent him to faraway churches to resolve issues, teach, and encourage them. Timothy eventually became the pastor of the church in Ephesus, and that is when Paul wrote to him as any good mentor and friend would. Paul tells Timothy how to organize and conduct his church and warns against false teachers.

False teachers are lying teachers. They deceive people and lead them away from the gospel. They twist and distort Scripture, preach legalism and devote themselves to the demonic. Paul tells Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:6 that people have wandered away because of these false teachers, and in 4:1 he tells him that more will depart from the faith. Timothy must be on guard against these false teachers, who will try to infiltrate the flock and sow confusion and chaos. He must teach the church how to train in order to persevere, and he must model it himself.

Paul tells Timothy that if he and the church stand guard against false teachers, they will be living as servants of Christ and will be trained in the words of the faith and of good doctrine. This Greek word,

translated as “trained,” can also be translated as “nourished.” To nourish the mind is to form it with the truth, and that nourishing will lead to flourishing.

I think Paul is telling Timothy that he and the church had better know their stuff. They better know the real thing so well that in an instant, they can tell when an imposter is in front of them. When the United States Secret Service trains to catch counterfeit money, they don’t study the counterfeits. Those are constantly changing. They instead study real money. They know every watermark, security thread, and color-shifting ink. They use microscopes, magnifying glasses, and UV lights to investigate because when they are trained up, they will be able to spot a fake. As you can imagine, this training process doesn’t happen overnight, but it takes hours upon hours.

I love using this illustration for something far more valuable than money, which is the word of God! As Christians, we have the responsibility to know our stuff. False teachers prowled around in Ephesus back then, and they are still prowling today. They may look different and come in the form of a podcast or on TikTok, but their lies are all the same. In 1 Timothy 1:7, Paul says, “Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths.” This Greek phrase is actually where we get the idiom “old wives’ tale.” It literally refers to old women telling fables. Investing in nourishing our minds by consistently studying the Word of God will never return void, and it will equip us to decipher between fact and fiction and continue to persevere in the faith.

Paul goes on to say in verses 8-9, “Rather train

yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.”

The word translated as “train” means to discipline and exercise. Paul references two types of exercise, one being physical and the other being spiritual. I know not everyone feels this way, but I genuinely love to exercise. I love the feeling of pushing my body to new limits. Exercise is a way that I cope, it is a way I practice gratitude, and it has even been a way I have evangelized and ministered to others. Running more miles than I thought I could or lifting weights heavier than I have ever before does something in me that builds my character. I wholeheartedly believe that God has used bodily training to forge perseverance in me throughout my life. I also know that this body I got is breaking down. Things in my body hurt just from sleeping or sitting, and things on my body don't look the same as they did 10 years ago. No matter how much I believe I can do something or even try to train my body to do it, I still must accept that my body has limits. On this side of the new heaven and new earth, my body is wasting away, yet still anticipating being glorified and made whole one day. Physical training is useful because God didn't make our bodies separate from our mind or soul, and we should honor God with our bodies because He purchased them.

As bodily training is of some value, godliness is of all value. The Greek word used for “value” here also means “profitable,” and is the same word used in 2 Timothy 3:16 when Paul says, “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof,

for correction, and for training in righteousness.” The word “training” here is actually a different Greek word than the one used in 1 Timothy 4:8, and this time it means more of a shaping, developing, and maturing.

Is the dashboard light going off yet? Do you see the connection between godliness and the Word of God?

I get so jazzed up when I see the spider web of Scripture because it proves itself true. Each intricate woven part of the Bible is given to us by God to reveal to us who He is, invite us into His family, and show us how to live as part of His family.

To train for godliness is to submit to the Word of God and obey it. It takes habit-forming intentionality. It is worth putting in the reps because the spiritual growth it produces is not just for you.

Paul is urging Timothy to persevere and lead well because it matters. Timothy didn't know it then, but his perseverance in the study of Scripture and godly living would not only impact the flock in front of him but the one we are a part of now.

You have no idea who your perseverance could impact. Keep showing up. Keep leaning in. Keep going.

Let's pray.

God, forgive me for listening to the lies around me and for being lazy with loving Your Word and living in a godly way. Compel me to train myself in godliness and strengthen me to persevere in it.

Amen.

WEEK THREE

Purpose/Calling



written by
Tonya Annis

DAY ONE

Called Before You Were Qualified

Tonya Annis

Scripture:

John 15:16 / Ephesians 2:10

There is a question that tends to follow us through every season of life — sometimes loud, sometimes whispering: Am I doing what I was made to do?

That question sounds different depending on the season we find ourselves in.

For the college student, it may sound like, What do I major in? Where do I go?

For the young professional, Is this really it?

For the mom in the thick of little ones, Does this season even matter?

For the woman in transition or grief, Did I miss it? Is it too late?

For the empty nester or retiree, Now what?

Different seasons. Same ache.

Woven into our souls is the desire to live a life that matters, a life that carries purpose beyond ourselves. And yet, when we begin talking about calling, many of us immediately disqualify ourselves. We assume calling belongs to the confident, the platformed, the theologically trained, the put-together. But Jesus introduces calling very differently. In John 15:16, He says, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.”

Let that settle.

He chose you.



Before you felt ready.

Before you felt spiritual enough.

Before you had clarity.

Calling did not begin when you discovered God. Calling began when He decided to create you.

Ephesians 2:10 reminds us, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

Prepared. In advance. The moment we surrender our lives to the Lordship of Jesus, we are called by God and for God. We do not have to try harder or do better to earn a calling. We are invited to walk with Him day by day in simple obedience.

The tension many of us feel is this: we try to figure out what we are called to do before settling who we are called to be. So we search for assignment clarity:

Should I lead?

Start something?

Write?

Teach?

Adopt?

Go back to school?

Launch a ministry?

Stay hidden?

These are honest questions. But Jesus almost always answers identity before assignment.

Before the disciples were sent, they were first called

to be with Him.

Before Mary carried Jesus publicly, she carried Him privately.

Before Esther stepped into her palace moment, she walked through hidden preparation.

Before the Samaritan woman told her city about living water, she first encountered it for herself.

God is never in a hurry to platform us. He is intentional about forming us. If assignment outpaces identity, we collapse under the weight of what we were never meant to carry alone. Purpose flows from intimacy, not ambition. This is where many of us get tripped up — we confuse purpose with role. Roles change constantly: Student. Employee. Wife. Mom. Leader. Caregiver. Widow. Mentor. Empty nester. Grandmother. But the purpose underneath those roles remains steady.

Our core calling never shifts: To know God. To love Him. To reflect Him. To make Him known.

The expression changes with the season.

In one season, purpose looks like boardrooms and Zoom meetings.

In another, it looks like midnight feedings and folded laundry.

In another, it looks like sitting beside a hospital bed.

In another, it looks like discipling younger women.

None is more sacred than the other.

The kingdom does not rank faithfulness by visibility. Heaven celebrates obedience — whether anyone else sees it or not. If the enemy cannot stop our calling, he will try to shrink our confidence in it. He whispers:

You're too old. You're too young. You're too late. You're too broken. You're too inexperienced. You're too busy. You're too ordinary.

But Scripture tells a different story. God calls barren women. Widows. Teenage girls. Outcasts. Women with complicated pasts. Women overlooked by society.

Why? Because calling has never been built on human qualification. Calling is built on surrender.

The question was never, Are you capable?

The question has always been, Are you willing?

We love the idea of clear, burning-bush direction. But more often than not, calling unfolds quietly through obedience in everyday moments.

We say yes to serving. Yes to mentoring one woman. Yes to leading a study. Yes to showing up when it's inconvenient. And over time, we realize God has been

building something all along.

Purpose is often easier to trace in the rearview mirror than to predict through the windshield.

God rarely hands us a full blueprint. He gives a next step. Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." A lamp, not stadium lighting. We are given enough clarity for the next step, not the entire journey.

If we belong to Jesus, we are not waiting to step into purpose. We are already living in it — right where we are.

In our workplace.

In our home.

In our friendships.

In our neighborhood.

In our church.

In our celebrations.

In our grief.

In our healing.

Calling is not someday. Calling is stewardship of today. When we begin to see our everyday lives as kingdom ground, everything shifts. Laundry becomes prayer. Meals become ministry. Work becomes worship. Conversations become discipleship.

Purpose stops feeling distant and starts feeling embodied.

Prayer

Lord, thank You that my calling did not begin when I felt ready. It began when You chose me. Anchor my identity in being your beloved daughter and give me eyes to see purpose in the season I am in right now. Silence the lies that tell me I am not enough, and teach me to walk faithfully with You, trusting that You are using my daily obedience for Your glory.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

DAY TWO

Surrendering the “But Firsts”



Tonya Annis

Scripture:

Luke 9:57–62 / Luke 10:1–2 / 2 Timothy 1:7

There is a moment that comes for each of us, sometimes subtle, sometimes unmistakable, when we sense God inviting us forward. Forward into obedience. Forward into risk. Forward into something that will require trust.

It may not sound big or dramatic. It may sound like: Speak up. Forgive her. Start the study. Apply for the role. Adopt the child. Lead the group. Go on the trip. Share your story. Step back. Step in.

Often, before the invitation has even settled in our hearts, another voice rises quickly behind it.

A quieter voice. A reasonable voice. A delaying voice. It sounds like this: “Yes, Lord... but first...”

But first, let me finish school.

But first, let me get the kids through school.

But first, let me feel more confident.

But first, let me heal more.

But first, let me get financially stable.

But first, let me get through this busy season.

But first, let me know how it will all work out.

In Luke 9, we see this unfold in real time. Several people approach Jesus and express their desire to follow Him, to step into the life and calling He offers. And yet each one carries a “but first.”

“I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back...”

“First, let me bury my father...”

“First, let me say goodbye...”

These weren’t sinful desires. They were understandable. Responsible, even. And that is what

makes the passage so convicting. Jesus doesn’t rebuke sin; He confronts hesitation. The tension was never about logistics. It was about Lordship. Would they follow Jesus... or follow Him when it was convenient?

Ladies, we are incredibly skilled at managing responsibility. We hold families together. We anticipate needs. We carry emotional loads others never see. When God calls us into something, we instinctively begin organizing how it could fit around everything else. We don’t mean to delay obedience. We just want to steward well. But there is a subtle danger in constantly negotiating with God’s invitations. Delayed obedience often disguises itself as wisdom, when in truth delayed obedience is disobedience.

At the root of delayed obedience is almost always fear.

Fear of inadequacy.

Fear of disruption.

Fear of loss.

Fear of what obedience might cost.

If fear is what’s driving our hesitation, then we need to ask an honest question: Is that voice really from God? Because Scripture tells us something very clear about the Spirit He gives us. 2 Timothy 1:7 reminds us, “God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.”

Fear may be loud, but it is not authoritative. The Spirit of God in us produces courage, love and clarity. It produces movement; it doesn’t paralyze. When fear is the loudest voice in the room, it is often a sign that obedience is the invitation. Obedience is rarely convenient. It rarely feels comfortable. But it is always

aligned with the Spirit of God at work within us.

This is the part we don't always say out loud: following Jesus will cost you something.

Time.

Comfort.

Control.

Predictability.

Approval.

Sometimes even relationships.

When Jesus sent out the seventy-two in Luke 10, He didn't send them once everything in their lives was settled. He sent them in dependence without excess provision, without certainty, without a five-year plan. Why? Because calling is not built on self-sufficiency. Calling is built on trust.

If we wait until we feel fully ready, resourced, and confident, we will wait forever. God's invitations frequently stretch our reliance on Him rather than reinforce our independence.

One of the most spiritually dangerous words we carry is: someday.

Someday I'll lead.

Someday I'll mentor.

Someday I'll go.

Someday I'll write.

Someday I'll step out.

We assume calling will come when life quiets down. But for most of us, life is not quiet; it simply shifts seasons. There will always be diapers... or teenagers... or aging parents... or career demands... or health realities. If obedience is postponed until life is easy, it will remain postponed indefinitely. God does not call us once our lives are settled. He calls us in the middle of real life.

Here's the loving truth: Jesus does not compete for first place in our lives. He occupies it. When we say, "Yes, Lord... but first," we are placing conditions on our obedience.

I'll follow — as long as it doesn't disrupt this.

I'll obey — as long as I stay comfortable.

I'll go — as long as I feel secure.

Calling requires open-handed surrender. Not reckless abandonment of responsibility, but a willingness to trust God with the order of our lives. Many of us are not lacking clarity in calling. We are wrestling with what we already know He is asking.

Obedience often precedes understanding.

Abraham was told to go without knowing where.

Mary said yes without knowing how it would unfold.

The disciples followed without knowing the full cost.

God rarely lights the entire path. He illuminates the next faithful step. Calling does not begin when fear disappears. It begins when surrender outweighs fear. There is deep freedom on the other side of surrender. Freedom from regret. Freedom from wondering what if. Freedom from living small when you were made to live open-handed.

When the seventy-two returned, they were amazed, not at themselves, but at what God had done through them. Obedience didn't drain them. It deepened them, expanded their faith. Calling does not deplete us when it flows from God. It aligns us with His heart and with the purpose for which He created us.

Prayer

Lord, You see the places where I have said yes to You with conditions attached. Give me the courage to trust You beyond my need for control and show me where I have been delaying what You have already made clear. Teach me to surrender fully today and let my yes to You be wholehearted and anchored in trust.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

DAY THREE

Called Where You Are

Tonya Annis



Scripture:

Matthew 28:18–20 / Colossians 3:17

There is a subtle lie that slips quietly into many of our hearts: Real calling happens somewhere else. Somewhere more spiritual. More visible. More impactful. More extraordinary.

We imagine calling attached to microphones, mission fields, nonprofit launches, book deals, or dramatic life pivots. And yet, Jesus' final words to His disciples weren't spoken to spiritual elites. They were spoken to ordinary followers. To fishermen, tax collectors, women who had funded the ministry, men who had doubted and people who still didn't fully understand what was happening. He said: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples..." (Matthew 28:18–19)

He did not say, "Wait until you feel ready."

He did not say, "Only those with platforms."

He did not say, "Only in church buildings."

He said, "Go." And for most of them, "go" did not mean relocation. It meant living differently right where they were planted.

Many of us unknowingly divide our lives into categories:

Spiritual things.

Regular things.

Church.

Work.

Ministry.

Motherhood.

Worship.

Emails.

Bible study.

Board meetings.

But Scripture does not make this distinction. Colossians 3:17 says: "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus..." Whatever you do. That includes spreadsheets, carpool lines, client meetings, caregiving, laundry, difficult conversations, and community building. Calling is not confined to church activity. It permeates every area of ordinary life.

Because Jesus has "all authority," every space you occupy is kingdom territory. Your workplace is not separate from your calling. Your home is not separate from your calling. Your joy, your pain, is not separate from your calling. Your influence flows through the life you are already living.

One of the most freeing truths about calling is this: God has strategically positioned you. In your neighborhood. In your family. In your industry. In your friend group. In your community. There are rooms you sit in that other women will never enter. There are conversations you are uniquely wired to carry. There are women who will open up to you who would never open up to someone else. You may feel ordinary, but you are God's extraordinary workmanship, and there is no one else like you on this entire earth.

In Acts, when the early believers were scattered due to persecution, they didn't stop living on mission; they simply carried Jesus into new environments. Calling did not depend on location. It depended on presence.

And presence is something you carry.

In a culture that celebrates platforms, it can feel discouraging to live faithfully in small spaces. The woman who mentors one younger woman may feel unseen. The mother who disciplines her children may feel overlooked. The professional who quietly lives with integrity may feel unnoticed. But heaven measures differently. Jesus spent thirty years in obscurity before three years of public ministry. Thirty years.

Hidden faithfulness is not wasted time. It is formative time. Some of the most powerful kingdom work happens in spaces that never trend online. The question is not: "Is this impressive?" The question is: "Am I faithful here?"

When we think about making disciples, we often imagine formal leadership. Teaching settings, structured mentorship and programs. But disciple-making at its core is simply helping someone move closer to Jesus. And that happens in the everyday moments. Over coffee. During a walk. In a text message. In a hospital waiting room. In a business decision rooted in integrity. In how you respond when wronged. You are discipling someone, whether you realize it or not. Your children are watching. Your coworkers are observing. Your friends are listening. Your life teaches long before your words do. Calling is less about what you say and more about who you consistently are.

For women in multi-season life stages, comparison can become particularly dangerous. The young mother may look at the career woman and feel behind. The empty nester may look at the young leader and feel irrelevant. The single woman may look at the married woman and feel incomplete. The retired woman may feel overlooked entirely. But the Great Commission does not expire with age or shift with marital status. Calling matures with you.

In early seasons, it may look like bold steps and new beginnings. In the middle seasons, it may look like

endurance and consistency. In later seasons, it often looks like wisdom and spiritual motherhood. There is no wasted season in the kingdom. The soil simply changes.

Frequently, the most powerful expression of calling is faithfulness where we are. Not striving for applause but living with integrity because we belong to Christ. When we lead ethically, serve generously, honor commitments, refuse gossip, choose humility, forgive quickly or love boldly, we embody the gospel in real time.

Work becomes worship when it is offered to God. Motherhood becomes ministry when it is surrendered to Him. Leadership becomes discipleship when it reflects Him. Calling is not something we clock into on Sundays. It is the posture we carry daily.

Sometimes the most spiritual thing we can do is stop waiting for a different stage. We are not in a holding pattern. We are positioned wherever we find ourselves today. The Spirit of God does not need perfect conditions. He works through surrendered hearts in real environments. Be where your feet are because it is holy ground when surrendered to Him.

Prayer

Lord, open my eyes to see my life the way You see it. Help me recognize that where I am is not accidental but intentional placement by You. Teach me to live faithfully and wholeheartedly on mission right where my feet are planted.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

DAY FOUR

From Encounter to Assignment

Tonya Annis



Scripture:

John 4:4–30, 39–42

There are seasons in life when we feel deeply aware of our past. We see mistakes, detours, broken relationships, decisions we wish we could rewrite, and the shame we still quietly carry.

And often, without realizing it, we assume: This part of my story disqualifies me from calling. But Scripture tells a very different story.

In John 4, we meet a woman at a well. She is a Samaritan, already marginalized. She arrives at noon, the hottest part of the day, likely avoiding others. She carries relational history. She carries a reputation. And Jesus “had to” pass through Samaria.

He didn’t have to geographically. He had to missionally. There was an encounter waiting. And not just for her. For the entire town.

The woman at the well did not seek out Jesus. He sought her. He sat down beside her ordinary routine, drawing water. He initiated a conversation. He moved from common ground to a deeper truth. He named her story, not to shame her, but to free her. And then something remarkable happens.

After encountering Jesus, after experiencing living water, she leaves her jar behind and runs back into the very town she once avoided. And she says: “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did...” (John 4:29). She doesn’t hide her story. She leverages it. The very area that could have silenced her becomes the doorway to influence. And Scripture says: “Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him

because of the woman’s testimony.” (John 4:39) Her encounter became her calling.

Before this woman was sent into her town, she was seen.

Before she carried influence, she received truth.

Before she ministered, she was ministered to.

This pattern repeats throughout Scripture. God meets his children personally before He moves them publicly. Because calling without healing often produces insecurity. But calling from healing produces humility and authority.

So often we want to rush into purpose without allowing Jesus to touch the tender places first.

We want to serve before we surrender. We want the assignment before the encounter. But Jesus is not in a hurry. He is intentional about healing because He knows unhealed wounds will distort calling.

We have an enemy that wants us to assume our story is something to be managed. He whispers: Your life is too messy. You’re too complicated. That’s too embarrassing. It’s too painful. But the kingdom consistently uses surrendered people with imperfect stories: the woman caught in adultery, Mary Magdalene, Rahab, Ruth, Esther, widows, and barren women. Their past did not become their label. It became context for redemption.

The Samaritan woman did not receive a theology degree before being used. She carried her testimony. Our testimony is powerful. Not because it centers us, but because it magnifies Him. When we say, “He met me there,” it invites others to believe He might meet them, too.

One of the most symbolic details in John 4 is this: “Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town...” (John 4:28). She left the jar. The reason she came. The task she was focused on. The ordinary routine.

When we encounter Jesus, priorities shift. There are jars we must lay down in order to step into the assignment. Sometimes the jar is shame. Sometimes it’s approval. Sometimes it’s perfectionism. Sometimes it’s the identity we’ve clung to for security. We cannot carry living water while clinging tightly to what once defined us. Calling often requires release.

Notice what she does not do. She does not argue doctrine. She does not construct a sermon. She does not present polished theology. She simply says, “Come and see.” Her calling was an overflow of surrender.

Calling does not require expertise. It requires authenticity. You do not need to know everything about Scripture to point someone to Jesus. You need to know what He has done for you and in you. Overflow is more compelling than performance.

There is something deeply redemptive about this story for women across all seasons of life. The one who avoided the town becomes the voice the town listens to. The one who potentially carried stigma becomes the one God uses to bring many to belief.

Friend, your hidden seasons matter. Your quiet wrestlings matter. Your tears in prayer matter. Your wrestling through doubt matters. You matter.

When we encounter Jesus, purpose follows. The Samaritan woman likely woke up that morning thinking it was an ordinary day. She went to draw water. She left as a missionary.

Sometimes we hesitate to step into calling because we are still defining ourselves by our lowest moment. But Jesus defines us by redemption, not by record. Our past is not our identity. Christ is. And here is the thread that runs through this entire story: Encounter precedes purpose. Identity precedes calling.

Jesus meets us personally before he sends us publicly. He heals what he intends to use. He redeems what he intends to release. Calling is not something we strive to manufacture. It is something that flows from time spent with Him.

If you want clarity in calling, start with an encounter with Jesus.

If you want courage in purpose, start with surrender.

The Samaritan woman did not go looking for a platform. She went looking for water. And Jesus turned an ordinary encounter into holy ground.

He still does this. He still meets us in our ordinary moments. He still redeems our broken stories. He still rescues us so that we may join the rescue team.

The question is not, do I have a calling? The question is, have I encountered Him?

Prayer

*Thank You that You meet me exactly where I am —
not where I pretend to be.
You see my history, my regrets, my hidden places —
and You are not intimidated.
Heal what still needs healing in me.
Free me from defining myself by my past.
Give me the courage to share my story in ways that
magnify You.
Help me leave behind whatever I’ve been clinging to
that keeps me from stepping forward.
And let my encounter with You overflow into influence
that draws others closer to Your heart.*

Amen.

DAY FIVE

Living Wholeheartedly Called



Tonya Annis

Scripture:

Deuteronomy 6:4–9 / Hebrews 12:1–2

There is a difference between having a moment of calling...and living a lifetime of it. Moments feel powerful. A conference altar. A retreat breakthrough. A tear-filled prayer. A season where everything feels clear. But purpose was never meant to be sustained by adrenaline. It is sustained by wholehearted devotion.

In Deuteronomy 6, God speaks to His people: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might...”

All. Not a portion. Not a block on the calendar. Not seasonally. Not when convenient. All.

The Hebrew understanding of our “soul” (*nephesh*) is not a small spiritual compartment inside of us. It is our entire being. Our breath, desires and decisions. Our hands, habits and thoughts. We don’t merely have a soul. We are a soul. Which means living called is not about doing one big thing for God. It’s about loving Him with our whole selves, daily.

It is not uncommon for us to begin our journey with Jesus passionately. There’s hunger. Momentum. Clarity. But life stretches out longer than a single season, and somewhere in the ordinary rhythm of real life, calling can start to feel muted. Not gone. Just quieter.

Hebrews 12 reminds us: “Let us run with endurance

the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus...” Endurance. Purpose is not proven in one dramatic yes. It is proven in a thousand quiet ones. Daily obedience. Daily repentance. Daily returning. Daily surrender.

The women who live wholeheartedly called are not the ones who never waver. They are the ones who keep returning their gaze to Jesus.

Earlier this week, we talked about “but first.” There is another danger that threatens wholehearted living: drift. Drift rarely announces itself. It happens slowly. Priorities shift. Time fills up. Comparison creeps in. Disappointment hardens. Busyness replaces intimacy. And before we realize it, we are still doing spiritual things, but are no longer living spiritually anchored.

We can be active and drifting at the same time. The antidote to drift is not more activity. It is re-centering our affection. Loving God with all your heart, soul, and strength means regularly asking:

What has captured my attention?

What is shaping my decisions?

What am I building my identity on right now?

Calling remains strong when affection remains aligned.

We are skilled at compartmentalizing. Sunday faith. Tuesday frustration. Morning devotion. Afternoon anxiety. But wholehearted calling invites integration. This means the same woman who worships on Sunday is the woman who responds in conflict on Tuesday. The same woman who reads Scripture in the

morning is the woman who handles disappointment in the afternoon.

God is not after a slice of our life. He is after our whole life. Every season, every area, every moment. When our calling flows from intimacy and surrender, there is less striving and more alignment. We don't have to perform spirituality; we embody it.

Calling looks different across decades. In our twenties, it may look like bold risk and exploration. In our thirties and forties, it may look like building, nurturing, enduring, and holding multiple responsibilities at once. In our fifties and sixties, it may look like mentoring, refining, and stewarding wisdom. In later years, it may look like prayer, intercession, or legacy-building. The way we live out our calling changes. The call to intimacy does not.

Some of the most powerful women in the kingdom are those who quietly, steadily loved God for decades. No viral platform. No spotlight. Just steady, faithful devotion. That kind of life has the power to change the trajectory of lives for eternity.

Trying to walk our calling without joy in the Lord becomes a burden. But biblical joy is not happiness rooted in circumstance. It is settled confidence that God is in control. Joy is choosing to trust Him in every season. It is possible to live wholeheartedly called even when our body is tired, our prayers feel unanswered, or when our plans unfold differently than we imagined. Wholehearted calling is not dependent on perfect conditions. It is rooted in fixed eyes.

Hebrews 12 doesn't say fix our eyes on the outcome. It says, "Fix our eyes on Jesus."

Eugene Peterson once described discipleship as "a long obedience in the same direction." That is what wholehearted calling looks like. Not constant

reinvention. Not dramatic pivots every year. But consistent devotion.

Loving God when it's easy.

Loving God when it's costly.

Loving God when it's confusing.

Loving God when it's beautiful.

When we live this way, we become steady anchors for families, churches, workplaces, and communities. Not because we are perfect. But because we are rooted.

Today you may feel tired. You may feel your calling is smaller than it once was. You may wonder if you have anything significant left to give.

Hear this gently: Wholehearted calling is not about size. It is about surrender.

If all you can offer right now is, "Lord, I still choose You," that is wholehearted. If all you can do is show up and pray honestly, that is wholehearted. If you keep loving faithfully in unseen spaces, that is wholehearted.

Purpose and calling are embodied by women who refuse to quit loving God.

Prayer

Lord, I don't want a moment of calling — I want a lifetime of wholehearted devotion to You. Guard my heart from drift and align my affections so that every part of my life reflects surrender. Give me endurance, deepen my joy, and keep my eyes fixed on Jesus.

Amen.

WEEK FOUR
Shalom



written by
Rebecca Maxwell

DAY ONE

Passing the Peace

Rebecca Maxwell



²²The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²³“Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them,

²⁴The Lord bless you and keep you;

²⁵the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

²⁶The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

²⁷“So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.” - Numbers 6:22-27

Reflection

I grew up going off and on to a denominational church, and when I married, we landed in a Presbyterian church. One ritual that was common in our order of worship was the “Passing of the peace.” At the time, it felt like a strange practice that gave me a little anxiety. To complete strangers, we would stick out our hands and say “Peace (of the Lord) be with you,” and the stranger would reply “And also with you.” I was always worried it wouldn’t come out right, or we would both talk at the same time. I didn’t understand the significance, and frankly, I didn’t think to inquire. As I reflect on it now, there is much rich meaning and significance in that ritual. We were participating in a ritual or habit that was practiced by Jesus himself (see John 20:19, 26). Being that Jesus didn’t do anything without intention, it begs us to take notice. When we extend our hand to one another, we participate in the work of Jesus. We symbolize how he extended his life to the point of death to make peace with humanity.

The Hebrew word for peace is “shalom.” Sometimes

in the West, we tend to oversimplify words for speed and efficiency. In their original Hebrew form, words have much more fullness of meaning and nuance. In fact, there are four levels of meaning in the Hebrew language. Hebrew words contain a surface/basic meaning, a deeper meaning, a contextual meaning, and a mysterious/divine meaning. Hebrew definitions give us a much broader, multidimensional picture, almost like an experience, with a word.

“Shalom” is taken from the root word shalom, which means “to be safe in mind, body, or estate.” Shalom speaks of wholeness, fullness, the type that includes a communal aspect. When you greet someone in Israel with “Shalom,” it is like bestowing a blessing on them: “may you be full of well-being.” In these verses in Numbers, God is giving instructions that the people of Israel would be blessed with an inner peace and wholeness brought on by sharing in His presence and protection, within the context of community. This greeting, quite literally, is “passing the shalom.”

In the New Testament, shalom indicates the reconciliation of all things to God through the work of Jesus, making all things right. God made peace through the blood of Christ, shed on the cross (Colossians 1:19-20). Reconciliation involves putting things right between us and God, within ourselves, and also with others. Author and Theologian, Tim Keller, says that shalom experienced is multidimensional, complete well-being — physical, psychological, social, and spiritual; it flows from all of one’s relationships being put right — with God, with(in) oneself, and with others.

So essentially, shalom comes in the form of an embodied person, and that person is Jesus Christ. He is Emmanuel, God with us: the perfect peace, wholeness, and full countenance (or face) of God, embodied and available to us for relationship, salvation, sanctification, and healing. Jesus is the perfect shalom. When we talk about “experiencing God,” we are experiencing the shalom that is Jesus embodied.

We see in our Scripture reading, Numbers 6:22-27, that the Lord, Yahweh himself, wants to grant us the shalom that is available through him, and in relationship with him. The Lord is instructing Moses to have his brother, Aaron, and his sons deliver a very specific blessing. This blessing comes as the Israelites are preparing to leave Mount Sinai after being encamped there for a year. This is a fairly common blessing and is referenced in other places in the Old Testament (see Psalm 67:1). The Israelites are getting ready to continue their journey in the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. This blessing is for their journey ahead!

In addition to the blessing of his peace, the Lord is offering a complete blessing of multiple angles that address body, mind and spirit. In “keep you,” he offers safety and security in Him. In “make his face to shine upon you,” God looks at you, rather than hiding from you. The glow of God’s face is the face of his grace. Then we receive the blessing of his act of graciousness toward us. The Lord lifting “up his countenance upon you” is a move of pursuit. God graciously pursues us, lifting up his face to us so we can respond in a

personal way. And he gives us peace, “shalom.” It is as if shalom ties it all together—God making everything right under the name of Yahweh (verse 27).

Next time you pass the peace, remember that you are bestowing a blessing of shalom—the fullness, goodness, wholeness, and graciousness in the name of the One True God that pursues us, shines on us, and keeps us, in perfect peace with ourselves, God and others.

Reflection

Make a point of passing the peace when you are out and about today. It may be a simple “God bless you” or “May God’s peace be with you today.” Or consider your own way of passing the peace, sharing in the shalom of Christ.

Prayer

Lord, help us look only for peace in You and You alone. I know that You are the only one who can truly provide it, but I look for it in so many places. Help me understand and experience the wholeness, goodness, and well-being that characterizes Your shalom.

In Jesus’ name.

Amen.

DAY TWO

Shalom Begins With a Set Mind

Rebecca Maxwell



“You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts you.” — Isaiah 26:3

O Lord, you will ordain peace for us,
for you have indeed done for us all our works. —Isaiah
26:12

Reflection

When I was a kid, my dad was the best at teaching us the mechanics of sports. And he looked forward to joining us outside as soon as he got home from work for a game of catch before dinner. I’ll never forget the image I have of my dad and me in my driveway as he slowly taught me the steps to throwing a softball. We started at a short distance, and he showed me how to stand, pull my hand back, point at his chest, and follow through with the other hand holding the ball. He explained that where my shoulders and eyes were pointing, there the ball would go. And he was right. I could hit the target every time if I set my shoulders and eyes in the right place.

So it goes with your minds; they will go where we direct them. Our mind is very powerful. The mind is the part of us that thinks, feels, chooses, and makes meaning of our experiences. You can’t see it like you can the brain, but you see its impact in our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. It works closely with the brain and even helps shape it over time. Our minds are constantly being formed by what we focus on, what we experience, and the relationships we engage in. The great part about the mind is that we can actively

choose what to think about and focus our attention on. And this focus will impact what we do and how we feel.

From a psychological standpoint, what we attend to repeatedly shapes our internal world. From a biblical standpoint, the mind is meant to be stewarded. Shalom emerges when the mind is no longer running the show alone but is submitted to the steady presence of God. What Isaiah offers in this verse is a way to more fully experience the perfect peace that God is offering: to stay, fix, focus, and direct your mind on the Lord. We learned in the last devo that the embodiment of peace is the person of Jesus Christ. God is the source of all peace for us—the ONLY source of peace!

Biblical peace is not fragile or fleeting. Remember, shalom speaks to wholeness, stability, health, and alignment—things being as they were meant to be. Isaiah does not promise peace to a mind free of trouble (this is quite impossible!), but to a mind stayed—anchored, held, and intentionally fixed—on the Lord. An anxious mind is often a fragmented mind. It is pulled in many directions at once: fear of the future, regret over the past, pressure in the present. When our minds are repeatedly oriented toward who God is—His goodness, sovereignty, and nearness—we experience not only emotional relief but also internal integration and true wholeness.

Our minds will stay in the place that we trust. Do you trust him? Do you truly trust that he is good, his plan for you is good, even when it doesn’t feel like it? Do you believe His promises that he is near, fighting for you, and shining His face upon you? Do you trust

what he says about you, O child of God?

Reflection

Notice one recurring thought that disrupts your sense of peace. Ask: *Is this thought moving me toward shalom or fragmentation?* Then intentionally replace it with a truth about God's character.

Prayer

Lord, gather my scattered thoughts. Help me to focus on the goodness right in front of me, all that You have provided. Teach my mind to rest in You so my whole self may experience Your shalom.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

DAY THREE

Shalom is Not Dependent on Circumstances

Rebecca Maxwell



“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” – Philippians 4:4-9

Reflection

This passage is commonly known as a “prescription for anxiety.” The writer, Paul, gives readers some tangible ways to deal with the anxieties of life. It includes a promise that in doing these things, we will receive the perfect peace, or shalom, of God that doesn’t make sense apart from him.

It is likely that you all know someone who has that observable peace all over them that just doesn’t make sense. Take a moment and consider someone you know who seems to have peace in the midst of overwhelming or unbearable circumstances. I have several friends who have lost children. Anytime

someone loses a child, it is something out of order, and the pain is unbearable. It changes you, and you don’t just move on from it. You blame yourself, you blame others, you blame God. In my observation, the pain is completely all-consuming and often disorienting, too. Yet with the power of the Holy Spirit, these parents received the peace of the Father, which goes beyond our ability to comprehend.

Paul describes peace as a guard—a protective presence that stands watch over both heart and mind. This is more than emotional comfort; it is divine containment. This shalom is a feeling of being “held,” wrapped up tight in the arms of the Father. Shalom does not deny the reality of anxiety, but it prevents anxiety from ruling the inner world by guarding the heart from despair and the mind from chaos.

Paul’s instructions—prayer, supplication (petition or pleading), thanksgiving, and truth-focused thinking—engage the whole person. Spiritually, these practices remind us of who God is, as well as his power and goodness. Neurologically, they calm the nervous system and interrupt fear-driven patterns. Shalom comes from God and emerges when we direct our prayer, petitions, gratitude and thinking in the right direction, toward the one who can do something about both our circumstances and our anxious hearts. Spiritual truth and embodied practice work together.

As we commonly read this passage, we often leave out verses 8-9. But these verses give us great insight

into how we can maintain the peace God gives us. When we actively think about any situation that is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy, our hearts and minds are guarded and kept from chaos, catastrophizing, despair, and the like. We must practice all that we have received and learned from the Word of God, because it is the wellspring of life (Proverbs 4:23). We can experience the fullness of shalom when we practice and think on the truth of the Word of God—all that he has shown us about who he is, how he cares for us, his goodness, mercy and presence.

This peace “surpasses understanding” because it does not rely on circumstances changing first. It is a peace that we can participate in, a peace that holds us steady when life remains uncertain, and when reality doesn’t change.

Reflection

Bring one specific concern to God in prayer today. Thank Him not for the outcome you want, but for His presence and faithfulness in the middle of uncertainty.

Prayer

*God of shalom, stand guard over my inner world.
Protect my heart and mind from living and operating
in fear. Quiet my anxious thoughts with Your steadfast
presence and allow me to experience the shalom
that You intend for me.*

In Jesus’ name.

Amen.

DAY FOUR

Remembering Restores Shalom

Rebecca Maxwell



¹“As a deer pants for flowing streams,
 so pants my soul for you, O God.
²My soul thirsts for God,
 for the living God.
 When shall I come and appear before God?
³My tears have been my food
 day and night,
 while they say to me all the day long,
 “Where is your God?”
⁴These things I remember,
 as I pour out my soul:
 how I would go with the throng
 and lead them in procession to the house of God
 with glad shouts and songs of praise,
 a multitude keeping festival.
⁵Why are you cast down, O my soul,
 and why are you in turmoil within me?
 Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
 my salvation ⁶and my God.
 My soul is cast down within me;
 therefore I remember you
 from the land of Jordan and of Hermon,
 from Mount Mizar.
⁷Deep calls to deep
 at the roar of your waterfalls;
 all your breakers and your waves
 have gone over me.
⁸By day the Lord commands his steadfast love,
 and at night his song is with me,
 a prayer to the God of my life.
⁹I say to God, my rock:
 “Why have you forgotten me?
 Why do I go mourning
 because of the oppression of the enemy?”
¹⁰As with a deadly wound in my bones,
 my adversaries taunt me,
 while they say to me all the day long,
 “Where is your God?”

¹¹Why are you cast down, O my soul,
 and why are you in turmoil within me?
 Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
 my salvation and my God.” — Psalm 42

Reflection

If you know me, you know that one of my favorite places on earth is Park City, Utah, and the surrounding areas. It doesn't matter if I go in winter or summer, I am always mesmerized by the majesty of the mountains, the rugged terrain, the wildlife, and the billions of stars that paint the sky at night. Whether skiing, horseback riding, or just sitting by the fire, I always feel my shoulders drop when I am visiting. While I am there, I can usually be found flipping through photos of past trips, remembering the family fun and sabbath we've had in that place. Remembering the past experiences in this place further deepens the experience of being in this beautiful piece of God's creation.

The Book of Psalms shows us a process where peace comes to the writers through honest emotional expression, followed by intentional remembrance. Here in Psalm 42, we see the writer thirsting for God because his soul is in distress. In verse 4, the writer sets an intention to remember some very specific things to address the state of his soul. The writers of Psalm 42 do not suppress distress; they speak it aloud, and then they reorient their attention toward God's faithfulness. The first part of this process should not be skipped over, and that's the active expression of the writers'

distress. You'll see that the writer uses a word picture to describe their internal state: "As a deer pants for flowing streams" (verse 1). This word picture is so rich if we just sit with it for a moment and consider this deer, because the deer is us!

We should consider why the deer is panting at the water. Maybe she has been outrunning a predator or fighting off a predator to protect her young. Maybe she has been searching for water for a long time. Like the deer, maybe we are searching for rest and refreshment because we have been running hard in this life, been chased by the enemy, or weary of doing things in our own strength. Maybe your soul is thirsting for the living water (John 4:10), because the circumstances of your life just can't seem to quench your soul.

Pour out your heart and soul to God as the writers do here. Tell God what it feels like right now as you come to him for refreshment. Say it out loud if you need to, but make sure you express it. Use a word picture, as the psalmists do, to really express the fullness of your emotion. There is a phrase that I like to use with my clients: "Better out than in." Emotions are meant to move, to be expressed. And as we express them, we gain clarity of thought and a more regulated nervous system. The Psalm writers show us that we can express these emotions directly to the Father.

Once you've expressed your current state, the writers show us what to do next: to redirect our attention toward the truth of how God has shown up for us. They actively choose to shift the focus from despair to remembering the faithfulness of God. From a spiritual perspective, it is an act of trust. The writers are saying that, despite the emotional state they are experiencing, they will choose to trust God based on the number of facts about his activity that they express

in the Psalm. Memory of what God has already done becomes a bridge from despair to hope, helping the soul return to wholeness when emotions threaten to overwhelm.

Shalom is restored as we express whatever normal human emotions are present, and then remember that our current pain does not erase God's past faithfulness—or his future promises. Just like the deer, we can be physically and psychologically refreshed and come back to a peaceful state in both body and mind. THIS is shalom: body, mind, and soul at rest.

Reflection

Write about one season when God sustained you. Write out the situation and the facts of what he did to restore you. Revisit it when your emotions feel unmanageable. Include some biblical promises that will anchor you in times of distress.

Prayer

Faithful God, help me remember what fear and overwhelm make me forget. Restore my soul to wholeness through truth. Quench my thirst with the living water that only You can provide.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

DAY FIVE

Shalom Is Sustained in Presence

Rebecca Maxwell

“My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”
— Exodus 33:14

“For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!” — Ecclesiastes 4:10

Reflection

“The Lord still considers me,” Will said as his eyes got wide and filled with tears. “I’m going through a divorce, and I can’t believe the Lord still considers me.” He just kept saying these words as I prayed for him in the hotel that night. Will was the night attendant when my husband and I got in late. As I was getting ready for bed, I heard the Lord say, “Give him that money you’ve been saving.” I wrestled with the Lord in that moment because it was 12:30am and I knew my husband would not be okay with me going downstairs in the middle of the night.

But God.

It just so happened that we didn’t have a remote control for the TV in our room. We searched high and low, in every drawer and even in the mini fridge. We desperately wanted to turn off the TV and go to bed. My husband called downstairs, and Will offered to bring one up right away. “Yes!” I thought. I can give him this cash and hopefully pray for him. When I was checking in, Will had told me that he was working



extra shifts to save for a daddy-daughter trip with his 13-year-old coming up this summer. We talked about cooking at home and pinching pennies. Now, I would have the chance to speak life into him.

“You’re gonna think I’m crazy,” I said as I handed him a twenty, “the Lord told me to give this to you for your upcoming trip with your daughter.” As Will started to cry, I asked to hug him, and we began to pray. I could tell that the Lord wanted him to know that he is a good dad. Will sobbed on my shoulder. He told me it wasn’t about the money, but he was moved that God would still consider him. He left the room that night in amazement, as if he had come face to face with the Father. He kept saying, “I just can’t believe it.” And for me, I got to experience the perfect peace that comes from being a conduit of God’s grace to one of his image bearers.

Shalom is cultivated in ordinary faithfulness. Shalom begins with the Lord and can flow through the community of believers if we stay attuned to his prompting and obedient to his call.

Shalom is not reserved for mountaintop moments, but grows through daily awareness of God’s presence in the mundane rhythms of life. And we can be a vessel of this peace to the community around us. True peace is not found by escaping reality, but by facing it and recognizing that the God of everything seen and unseen is in it with you.

In a book chronicling his letters, Brother Lawrence

understood this well: God's presence transforms routine tasks into sacred encounters. (See *The Practice of the Presence of God*). Mental health, emotional regulation, and spiritual vitality are all shaped by small, consistent practices that orient the self toward God. This could look like praying as you clean or put away dishes. Maybe you begin a practice of listing gratitude at the end of each day. Is there a daily task that doesn't require much thought in which you could intentionally turn your attention toward God's presence with you?

Shalom is sustained when we live WITH God, not just for Him. Shalom can be experienced in recognizing God's nearness to us (Philippians 4:5). It can be experienced in the presence of others who remind us of God's care and faithfulness to us. And shalom can be experienced as we allow ourselves to be a conduit of God's grace to others.

Reflection

Choose one ordinary task today and intentionally acknowledge God's presence as you do it.

Stick some cash in your wallet specifically to give away. Be sensitive to the prompting of the Lord and then be obedient when he tells you to give it away.

Prayer

God of peace and wholeness, meet me in the ordinary. Teach me to live integrated and aware of You. Remind me that Your peace is perfect, You have given it freely, and we can realize it in You.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

"My peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled. Neither let them be afraid."

— *John 14:27-28*

WEEK FIVE

New Creation in Christ



written by
Gretchen Martin

DAY ONE

This World Will Never Satisfy

Gretchen Martin



“For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ²For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling. ³if indeed by putting it on[a] we may not be found naked. ⁴For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.” — 2 Corinthians 5:1-5

I hate camping. I'd rather stay in a roach-infested hotel than camp. The thought of tents, no bathrooms, dirt floors, and bugs crawling on me at night does not scream good times! But there is something in particular about camping that I hate the most. The tent. It feels suffocating and claustrophobic to me. Almost like someone is zipping me up in a plastic bag, depleting me of all my oxygen. I am thankful I do not have to live in a tent. And I am grateful that Joby doesn't love camping unless there are very large animals with antlers attached to it. And I know a tent is not meant to be comfortable, which is why Paul's metaphor is so perfect. Paul was a tent-maker, so he knew everything there was to know about tents. He uses a tent to describe this temporary body in this temporary world. We all know a tent isn't a permanent structure. It's meant to be torn down. It is flimsy and unstable. It might keep the rain off for a little while, but when the rain and winds become too strong, the tent will fall. Our flesh, our temporary bodies, and this temporary existence on earth will fall. But Paul

is actually giving the Corinthians, these new baby Christians, a hope beyond the pain and suffering that they were experiencing. He was saying yes, everything around us is failing, our bodies included. But this is temporary, and we have a hope and a future that will be for eternity, and we will be made perfect one day. So, although in this world, we will face hardships and burdens and even death, he reminds us that it is temporary.

C.S. Lewis says in *Mere Christianity*, “If I find myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.” We are not meant to be comfortable in this world. Why? Because we were not made for this world. Therefore, we will always feel out of place and uneasy, groaning and longing for what's next! In verse two, Paul says, “For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling.”

Paul addresses the Corinthians with so much passion. Most likely because he is getting older and feeling his earthly tent failing. In chapter 4, verses 16-18, Paul says, “*So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. As we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*”

So why do Christians work so hard just to be comfortable if we know this is temporary and we have an eternal promise beyond anything we can imagine? We idolize comfort. We spend way more money on

being comfortable in our bodies and in our safe spaces than we spend on being disciples. We spend way more time being comfortable than we spend on feeding His sheep. We spend way more energy on being comfortable than spreading the gospel to the ends of the earth. We chase feelings because the world tells us our feelings are most important! We obsess with the things that are seen and so quickly forget the promise of the things that are unseen, the eternal promise. And all that chasing still leaves us empty, all because of exactly what C.S. Lewis said: We are made for another world.

Tom Brady, years ago, after winning a Super Bowl, said to a journalist, “Why do I have three Super Bowl rings and still think there’s something greater out there for me? A lot of people would say, “Hey man, this is it.” I reached my goal, my dream, my life. Me, I think: God, it’s gotta be more than this. I mean, this can’t be what it’s all cracked up to be. I mean, I’ve done it. I’m 27. And what else is there for me?” The journalist asked him, “What’s the answer?” And Tom Brady, the GOAT of NFL quarterbacks, said, “I wish I knew. I wish I knew.”

Just like Tom Brady, we chase the temporary things of this world expecting them to hold us up and satisfy our longings. And we are let down every time. We groan and long for the next thing, only to be disappointed with an overwhelming emptiness. This

world will never satisfy us because we were not made for it. And whether you’ve won 7 Super Bowls or you are sitting on a couch right now with baby throw up all over you, folding laundry, or you are feeling the weight of a broken down, beat up, and worn-out body, there is good news for you. Verse 5 says, “*He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.*” God has given us the Spirit, living inside these broken and beat-up, tired bodies as an eternal promise of a forever home that will fully and finally satisfy.

So, what are you chasing? Are you chasing temporary satisfaction? Or are you chasing the things that will make an eternal impact?

Prayer

Jesus, I pray that we do not dwell on what is seen and lose sight of what is unseen. Thank You for the promise that one day, after our earthly tent is destroyed, there will be a permanent building made perfectly by You.

Amen.

DAY TWO

Walk by Faith

Gretchen Martin

“So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight.⁸ Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 9 So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” – 2 Corinthians 6-10

Tim Tebow was on a podcast recently, and I don't remember what the specific question was, but his answer made my stomach hurt a little. He said, “I just dream and pray, maybe I will have the blessing of showing up to heaven exhausted. It would be a really bad day to get there well rested.” Wow! I listened to that over and over. And I wrote it down. There was conviction and passion in his voice as he said it. And I thought, “Oh no, I think I may be getting to heaven well rested!” Immediately, my head started spinning with “am I doing enough”, “what am I doing to get to heaven exhausted,” “will Jesus look at me and say, ‘well done, good and faithful servant,’” “Am I being complacent and getting too comfortable in my faith?” And on and on my mind raced with worry and conviction. And in that momentary state of affliction, I heard Jesus gently remind me of Hebrews 12:1-2, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” Jesus said to me in that moment “daughter, you run the race set before you. Knowing that I have paved the way for you. You run your race looking to Me, the founder and perfecter of your faith. No one else's race, no one else's faith.”

So, when that day comes, and you stand before the Lord and “receive what is due for what you have done in the body, whether good or evil,” how do you see that



going? Are you “running with endurance the race that is set before you, looking to Jesus”? Or

are you running the race set before you, looking to the world? The world's race is much easier. It will be full of temporary highs and fleeting feelings of accomplishment and pride. But that race will end in disappointment and eternal darkness. Or are you trying to run someone else's race? Maybe you see a fellow Christian and think they are doing so much more for the kingdom than you are.

Jesus's desire isn't for us to reach higher goals and make much of ourselves. His desire is for us to walk by faith and not by sight. That faith to just make it 10 more feet. Then 10 more feet after that. And 10 feet after that. He knows it may feel like you can't make it one more inch. But then, you look to Jesus, and He carries you through that race toward the beautiful finish line, which is eternity with Him.

My race looks a little different than Tim's. And that's ok. Because it is my race, perfectly designed by my heavenly Father, who knows me, and His desire is to use all of my strengths and my weaknesses for His glory and His purpose.

Prayer

God, it is so easy to veer off into a race that You did not design for us. The shiny things of this world are so hard to ignore. God, that is when we need You most. Pick us up and put us back on the right path when we've lost our way. Give us the courage to walk by faith and not by sight. God, when our fleshly desires take our eyes off of You, strengthen our faith, and no matter how big or how small, use us for Your glory and Your purpose.

Amen.

DAY THREE

Compelled by Christ's Love

Gretchen Martin



“Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. ¹²We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. ¹³For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. ¹⁶From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.” – 2 Corinthians 5:11-16

In verse 11, the Greek word translated in our Bibles as “fear” or in some translations, “terror,” means “reverence” or “profound respect.” Paul wasn’t talking about fear like a child who fears the boogey man. He was proclaiming that everything he did in this world was because of who God is and what Jesus did for us on the cross. His reverence for the Lord was the only thing that drove him to speak boldly about Jesus Christ. And Paul’s desire was for everyone to have that same devotion and drive to bring as many people to Christ as they could possibly reach. Because there will be a day when unbelievers and believers will stand before God. And there will be those who bow down to their maker with a healthy fear and reverence for Christ their Savior. And there will be those who bow down before their maker with a different kind of fear and terror because they never knew Jesus Christ as

their Savior. Paul speaks with urgency and concern for the lost and for those who have professed to know Jesus but have become suspicious and complacent.

Paul faced considerable judgment and scrutiny in his ministry. The Corinthians had a group of naysayers who opposed Paul’s teachings. They tried to say he was crazy and didn’t make sense, and that he was too radical. In verse 13, Paul says, “For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.”

If you’ve ever heard someone use the phrase “he’s beside himself,” they’re saying he’s crazy. Have you ever seen someone walking down the street talking to himself? That’s exactly what that person is doing. He’s just walking with himself beside himself, talking to himself. That’s how this group of people saw Paul. And Paul said, Hey, if what I’m teaching makes me beside myself, that’s all God. Because everything I say and do is from Him and for Him. But if I’m doing and saying what you want me to say and what you want to hear, that’s not from God. That’s me trying to please you.

Paul continues in verses 14 and 15, saying that it is Christ’s love that “controls us.” Some translations use the word “compel”: Christ’s love compels us. Our motivation cannot be impure if Christ in us is driving it. When we are filled with the Spirit, that motivation and drive are directed only toward gospel-centered things. When we seek the Lord and are driven by the Spirit, we are compelled to love lost people and share the gospel with them. Remember, Paul’s desire was to bring more people to Jesus. Because of Jesus’s

sacrifice, their purpose shifted from self-centered, self-saving works to a new, Jesus-centered, eternal purpose. Because of that shift in focus from self to gospel, Paul says in verse 16 that we should also not look at others according to their flesh, their worldly appearances, or their failures. We are called to see others as Christ sees us.

Do you find yourself constantly facing trials? Maybe there are people who think you're crazy because of your radical faith. I'm not just talking about non-Christians. Christians can be the worst. Just listen to any celebrity who publicly proclaims their faith in Jesus. Thousands of Christians will raise alarms, blasting them on social media and podcasts, doing everything in their power to debunk their faith. Instead, they should be cheering them on, encouraging them, and choosing to walk alongside them, even when they fall.

I am challenged by Paul's love for the lost and his desire to do whatever it takes to win souls for Christ. Pray over these questions and ask God to enter into any dark places in your life.

Do I see others the way God sees them?
Am I quick to judge the radical, seemingly "beside himself" believer? What is it in me that is stirring that negative judgment toward them?

Am I immediately suspicious of the new believer, or do I celebrate their newfound faith in Jesus Christ? Do I feel a responsibility for nonbelievers to know Jesus? Do I seek after them with desperation and longing to have what I have?

Prayer

God, give us a conviction to reach the lost as Paul had. Don't let me miss an opportunity to proclaim your name to someone who so desperately needs you. Don't let me sit complacently in the shadow of other believers. Give me the strength, the words, and the power to make much of You.

Amen.

DAY FOUR

A New Creation

Gretchen Martin



“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.
[c] The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”
– 2 Corinthians 5:17

Verse 17 is one of the most powerful verses in the Bible. Being “in Christ” means we are one with Christ. And being a new creation means we are brand new. We aren’t just fixed up and mended by what Christ did for us on the cross. Our salvation isn’t just a better version of our old selves. To be a new creation means we have been completely reborn. The old self, all of it, is gone. We don’t have to carry around that baggage any longer. It doesn’t exist in God’s eyes. And we are a new creation, in perfect union with Christ.

We are given a new life. And with that, new life comes many beautiful things. Most importantly, we get Jesus. We get to share in His eternal glory forever and ever. We let go of our worldly mindset and adopt a new kingdom mindset. We join a new family of believers. We begin to see through a biblical lens rather than a worldly one. We see others differently, longing for them to be part of this family too. Sounds like all cotton candy and roses, right?

Being a new creation in Christ is the best of the best; there is no doubt about that. But this new life can also feel like the worst of the worst. Before you were a Christian, there was no struggle. There was no war within you battling the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. You simply indulged and gave in to whatever temptations you wanted to entertain. When you became a new creation in Christ,

the battle began between your fleshly desires and the Holy Spirit living within you. And sometimes the gift of the Spirit doesn’t feel much like a gift. It feels more like a gut punch or a stomach virus. Being reborn is just the beginning. Being a new creation in Christ is a process.

RC Sproul says, “Regeneration is the first step in the total experience of redemption that God takes us through.” I love the distinction he makes between new birth and new life. We are reborn in Christ once. That is the beginning of our faith. Think of it as a newborn baby fresh out of the womb. Then we begin our new life, learning and growing, making mistakes and reaching milestones. This is exactly what the progressive sanctification process looks like as Christ followers! When we are reborn, we immediately become a new creation, maturing in our faith. We fall down and get bumps and bruises along the way, but eventually, with every stumble and fall, we gain strength and wisdom through God’s Word and the growing personal relationship we have with Jesus Christ.

Our spiritual growth is a lot like a child’s growth chart. There are periods when the growth line spikes upward very quickly, and there are times when the line levels off, and growth seems to slow or even flat-line. In the beginning, the growth is dramatic with many spurts, but as we grow and mature in our faith, the lines become less dramatic and eventually we fall into a steady rhythm with Christ as the Holy Spirit continues to guide us and mold us, progressively sanctifying us toward the perfect likeness of Christ.

All of our stories look different. Some transformations and rebirths are more radical than others. But we are all in this sanctification journey together, no longer being conformed to this world, but being transformed by the renewal of our minds, that by testing we may discern what the will of God is, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2)

Being a new creation in Christ means we are made new again; the old has passed away, and nothing can reverse that. But we are still living in a broken world full of sin. The conflict within us will continue because of the evil that surrounds us. And the enemy will try to steer us back into our old ways, especially targeting the things from our past. We fix our eyes on Him because we know that He is with us and carries us through the joys and the sorrows of our journey. Just as Hebrews 12:2 says, “*looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.*” He is perfecting us, and we will be made perfect one day. That is a promise.

It is only by grace that we are saved. And it is the

continuous outpouring of God’s grace that we get to be a new creation maturing in our faith. From the infancy of our faith, God carries us through this beautiful and messy process of progressive sanctification until one day we are perfectly and fully transformed and sanctified with Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

Prayer

God, thank You for making me a new creation in Christ. Thank You for taking away the old and giving me a new life. Let my new life continue to be used for Your glory and let me walk in the fullness of Your love, Your forgiveness, and Your grace. And when I struggle with things of this world, remind me that I am in Christ and that it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

Amen.

DAY FIVE

Ambassadors of Reconciliation

Gretchen Martin



“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling[d] the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” – 2 Corinthians 5:18-21

Our relationship with God was severed when sin entered the world. We were separated from Him for eternity. But God, through the shedding of His Son Jesus Christ’s blood on the cross, restored the relationship between us. This reconciliation was given to us. There is nothing that we could have done to earn it. And God made the great exchange. He took the gross things that separated us and exchanged them for the perfect likeness of Jesus Christ. Now He sees us just as He sees Jesus, perfect and without blemish. No further reconciliation is needed with God when we fully put our trust and faith in Jesus. It is completely restored, and no matter how many times we screw up, He still loves us and sees us as perfect. But somehow, I am so guilty of continually trying to restore or reconcile my relationship with God, forgetting that He already washed all that sin and shame away. The hardest part is believing the unbelievable and knowing that God loves me and nothing will ever separate me from Him again.

This ministry of reconciliation is not only in our relationship with God, but also in our relationships

with others. Our vertical relationship will determine our horizontal relationships. How we see God will determine how we see others. How we treat God will determine how we treat others. It is impossible to expect the relationships around us to be ok if the relationship with the One who created us is distant and rarely pursued. In the same way, it is impossible to see others the way Jesus sees them if we haven’t completely surrendered to the knowledge and complete truth that we are reconciled through Christ and no longer slaves to our sin and shame.

Reconciliation is not my forte. Mainly because I avoid conflict and confrontational situations, which are typically what is required to achieve reconciliation. I avoid it at all costs. Not because I don’t want to be reconciled with the other party, but because I don’t want to go through the process required to get there. So, I usually avoid and deflect. This is not an attribute I am proud of, and honestly, I need to work on it. These verses make me think, “What if God treated reconciliation like I do? Where would I be?” Not here, I can assure you.

The problem with my conflict-adverse behavior is that I see confrontation as negative. I assume all confrontations will lead to conflict and end in defeat or separation rather than reconciliation. In reality, confrontation is good. It will probably lead to conflict. There is no need to confront something that doesn’t require reconciliation. Jesus was confronted by many who despised him and faced all kinds of conflict before He died on the cross. He died for a world full of people who hated and mocked Him. But to reconcile

His relationship with us, He had to endure it all.

In verse 20, Paul says, “We are ambassadors for Christ.” Being an ambassador would be a nightmare job for me. The conflict they have to endure, not to mention the discomfort. They live on foreign soil, within a tiny space called an embassy dedicated to their home country, surrounded by walls for their “safety”. As if those walls are actually safe! But ambassadors are there to keep the peace, negotiate, make deals, and manage diplomatic relations. I don’t know about you, but that sounds like they endure a lot of confrontation and conflict, all in the hope of reconciliation.

As Christ followers, we are first called to reconcile with one another, as Christ has reconciled with us. What does this look like? First, within our community of believers, we are called to build up our brothers and sisters in Christ, spurring one another along because we are all on the same page. That means putting away the differences and preferences that merely annoy us. It means laying down our pride, serving our partners in ministry, and seeing others the way Jesus sees them. Second, we are called to reconcile with those who aren’t like us. Our new heart, or the new creation we are living is commanded to be Christ-like. What does that look like? It looks like loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And out of the overflow of this love for God, love your neighbor as yourself. (Mark 12:30-31) It means loving your enemies and doing good to those who hate you. Blessing those who curse you and praying for those who abuse you. (Luke 6:27-28)

Ambassadors for our country don’t work from home. They are called to the hard places, sent to reach a group of people that don’t speak like us, believe like us, think like us, or live like us. God has called us to be ambassadors for Christ. To see others as Christ sees them and to teach them about Jesus. We are the vessel to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

This starts at home. Before anything else, are you spending time with the Lord? Is your life and your relationship with Jesus that which looks reconciled? Is the old gone, and are you a completely new creation?

And do you truly believe it? Second, are you Christ-like with your loved ones? For out of the abundance of the heart your mouth will speak (Luke 6:45). How you speak to your spouse, children, parents, and siblings is a good test of the condition of your heart. Third, are you taking the gospel to those who don’t look like you, believe like you, or love like you? This doesn’t have to be 4,000 miles away. But it can be! And it can be right down the street. In your school, your work, or even your own home. “The light that shines farthest shines brightest near home.” C.T. Studd said that. He was a missionary all over the world in the late 1800s and early 1900s. He was born into a very wealthy family and was a gifted cricketer. He could have had everything he could have ever wanted handed to him. But he chose to leave all that behind and serve as an ambassador for Christ all over the world. He died in the heart of the Congo, one of the most dangerous places in the world. He was serving the Lord. A friend of mine leads a ministry for survivors of sexual exploitation and human trafficking right here in Jacksonville. Many women have not only been freed from the bondage of sexual exploitation and trafficking, but they have surrendered their lives to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. That is a freedom that lasts for eternity. God has called you to a ministry of reconciliation. You are an ambassador for Christ. Now go and be the light that shines brightest!

Prayer

Jesus, we are so blessed to do Your work and be Your ambassadors. Guide us, whether it be near or far, so that others may come to know You.

Amen.

WEEK SIX

Forgiveness



written by
Lysa TerKeurst

DAY ONE

An Unexpected Gift For Your Broken Heart

Lysa TerKeurst



Do you ever find yourself defining life by “before” and “after” the deep hurt?

The horrific season. The conversation that stunned us. The shocking day of discovery. The divorce. The wrongful death so unfathomable we still can’t believe they are gone. The breakup. The day our friend walked away. The hateful conversation. The remark that now seems to be branded on our soul. The day everything changed.

That marked moment in time. Life before. Life now. Is it even possible to move on from something like this? Is it even possible to create a life that’s beautiful again?

I deeply understand this kind of defining devastation in such a personal way.

I also know different seasons of life, anniversaries, and even social media can magnify all of the pain. We miss the people who are no longer a part of our lives. Memories that were once sweet now only serve to widen the chasm between what was and what is.

Like you, I wish I didn’t have such an intimate understanding of those feelings. But I do.

When your heart has been shattered and reshaped into something that doesn’t quite feel normal inside your own chest yet, a word like “forgiveness” feels a bit unrealistic to mention.

But, friend, can I whisper something I’m learning?

Forgiveness is possible, but it won’t always feel possible.

It’s a double-edged word, isn’t it?

Forgiveness is hard to give. It’s amazing to get. But when we receive it so freely from the Lord and yet refuse to give it to others, something heavy starts to form in our souls.

It’s the weight of forgiveness that wasn’t allowed to pass through. And for me, that’s mainly because I’ve misunderstood something so incredibly profound about forgiveness.

Forgiveness isn’t something hard we have the option to do or not do. Forgiveness is something hard-won that we have the opportunity to participate in.

Our part in forgiveness isn’t to muscle through desperately with gritted teeth and clenched fists. It isn’t sobbing through the resistance of all our justifications to stay angry and hurt and horrified by all the other person did. This is what I once thought forgiveness was, and after already being hurt, I couldn’t imagine having yet another painful process to work through.

But when I wrongly think forgiveness rises and falls on all my efforts, conjured maturity, bossed-around resistance, and gentle feelings that feel real one moment and fake the next, I’ll never be able to authentically give the kind of forgiveness Jesus has given me.

My ability to forgive others rises and falls on leaning into what Jesus has already done, which allows His grace for me to flow freely through me (Ephesians 4:7).

Forgiveness isn’t an act of my determination.

Forgiveness is only made possible by my cooperation.

Cooperation is what I've been missing. Cooperation with what Jesus has already done makes verses like Ephesians 4:32 possible: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

Forgiving one another just as Christ forgave you. God knew we couldn't do it on our own. So He made a way not dependent on our strength. A forgiving way. A way to grab on to Jesus' outstretched arms, bloody from crucifixion and dripping with redemption. He forgives what we could never be good enough to make right. He makes a way for us simply to cooperate with His work of forgiveness ... for us to receive and for us to give.

What if this is actually the kindest, most unexpected gift you can give to yourself today?

That person or those people — they've caused enough pain for you, for me and for those around us. There's been enough damage done. And you don't have to be held hostage by the pain. You get to decide how you'll move forward. If you're knee-deep in pain and resonate with the feelings of resistance I have felt, let me assure you: Forgiveness is possible. And it is good.

So I just want you to sit here for a moment today and consider the possibility around this double-edged word "forgiveness." Not because your pain doesn't matter. Not because what they did was right. Not because it fixes everything. But because your heart is much too beautiful a place for unhealed pain. Your soul is much too deserving of freedom to stay stuck here.

Prayer

God, thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, so we don't have to do life alone. Thank You for caring about my pain and meeting me in this place. Show me how I can cooperate with forgiveness today, even when it's hard. Help me continue to take steps in this healing journey with You.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

DAY TWO

When Unchangeable Feels Unforgivable

Lysa TerKeurst

It's amazing to be forgiven, but it can feel so very complicated to forgive. Forgiveness can feel very unreasonable when people hurt us deeply, won't acknowledge their wrongs and refuse to apologize.

I'll never forget walking into my counselor's office so consumed with pain that I could barely breathe. I hadn't washed my hair in days. I couldn't think straight. I was afraid if I started crying, I might never stop. Betrayal hadn't just broken my heart; it had shattered my family.

I wasn't just hurting because of the unexpected rejection — I was grieving that my life would never look like what I had pictured it to be. Grieving is dreaming in reverse. Instead of looking forward to the days to come and imagining how amazing the future will be, you desperately wish you could go back to the way life once was, but fear it will never be that way again.

This kind of deep grief causes many questions to surface: Does God not see what they did? Do I have to forgive them? How can I forgive them when they aren't sorry for what they did? How can I trust that the Lord will provide justice?

I've asked all of these questions and wrestled through them myself. I was desperate to have my pain acknowledged and for someone in the world to recognize that what happened was wrong. Otherwise, I felt like my forgiveness might give the impression that what happened to me wasn't that big of a deal and that my feelings didn't matter. It did matter. It was wrong. But attaching my ability to heal and move forward to the choices my offender may never be willing to make will just compound my suffering.

Here are a few truths I've been learning to hang on to in my heart when I'm struggling to forgive:

Forgiveness is more satisfying than revenge.

You may think revenge will make you feel better in the short term, but in the long term, it will always cost you more emotionally and spiritually than you'd ever want



to pay. Forgiveness doesn't let the other person off the hook. It places them in God's hands (see Romans 12:19-21).

Our God is not a do-nothing God.

Just like we see in Joseph's story in the Bible, there is never a single moment when God is doing nothing in our lives. Joseph's story ends, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good" (Genesis 50:20, NIV). This brings such hope to a girl like me whose heart longs for justice.

The purpose of forgiveness is not always reconciliation.

Forgiveness doesn't mean trust is immediately restored or hard relational dynamics are instantly fixed. The point of forgiveness is to keep your heart swept clean, cooperating with God's command to forgive and keeping yourself in a position to receive God's forgiveness.

Oh, friend, your heartbreak is so real. And your desire to undo what has been done is so very understandable. Forgiveness requires deep dependence on the Lord, and trusting God is a hard step to take, especially when you're hurt. But I'm also convinced it's the only step that leads to anything good. So if His Word instructs us to forgive, I believe we can trust His leading in that.

Today, let's take a step toward forgiveness ... together.

Prayer

Lord, help me not just make peace with unchangeable things but truly move forward. I know You are not a do-nothing God, and I trust You with all the heartbreak I'll face on this side of eternity.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

DAY THREE

Finding the Freedom to Move On

Lysa TerKeurst



I am a soul who likes the concept of forgiveness ... until I am a hurting soul who doesn't.

Left to my own deep woundedness, forgiveness can seem offensive, impossible, and one of the quickest ways to compound the unfairness of being wronged. I cry for fairness. I want blessings for those who follow the rules of life and love. I want correction for those who break them.

Is that too much to ask?

And it's that exact spot where I like to park, stew, focus on everyone else's wrongs and rally those who agree with me to join in and further help me justify staying right there.

But that's like the time in college I stayed in the parking lot of a beautiful vacation spot just to make a point. A small offense happened with my friends on the drive up. When we got to our destination, they all piled out of the car and spent the day making incredible memories together. All the while, I walked around the parking lot with vigilante strides in the sweltering heat, letting my anger intensify with every passing hour.

I relished the idea of teaching my friends a lesson by staging this solo protest.

But, in the end, I was the only one affected by it. I'm the only one who missed out. I'm the one who rode home in silence, knowing no one had been punished by my choices but me.

Please know, I want to acknowledge that much of

the pain you and I have been through is way more complicated and devastating than that day at the beach. But in all of my offenses, both big and small, I've learned to recognize what I've come to see as the soldiers of unforgiveness.

Bitterness masquerades like a high court judge, making me believe I must protect the evidence against all those who hurt me so I can state and restate my airtight case and hear "guilty" proclaimed over them. In reality, though, it's a punishing sentence of isolation, out to starve my soul of life-giving relationships.

Resentment cloaks itself in a banner marked with the word vindication, making me believe that the only way to get free of my pain is to make sure those who caused it hurt as badly as I do. In reality, though, it's a trap in disguise, with dagger teeth digging into me, keeping me tortured and unable to move forward.

Delay sneaks in like a theater attendant, offering popcorn and a comfy chair made of my sorrow and sadness, making me believe it's just fine to stay there, replaying old movies of what happened. And that, by doing so, I'll one day understand why it all happened. In reality, though, I'm in a torture chamber, with each replay only ratcheting up the pain but never providing the answers I keep thinking will come.

And, lastly, trust issues disguise themselves as private investigators, making me believe they will help me catch everyone out to hurt me and prove no one is truly honest. In reality, trust issues are toxic gas that,

instead of keeping away the few who shouldn't be trusted, choke the life out of everyone who gets close to me.

These are the soldiers of unforgiveness that havewaged war against me.

The soldiers of unforgiveness are waging war right now against every hurting person.

The ones who will always lead us to isolation, the emotional darkness of broken relationships, spiritual darkness with heaped-on shame, and a darkened outlook where we are unable to see the beauty that awaits just beyond the parking lot.

What if I'd been able to release the offense and move forward that day at the beach? What if we could all do that? I'm not talking about excusing abuse or allowing someone to traumatize us. I'm talking about small offenses that we refuse to address properly.

Colossians 3:13 reminds us, "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

This isn't about diminishing what we've been through or making light of the anguish we've cried a million tears over. It's knowing that those who cooperate most fully with forgiveness are those who

dance most freely in the beauty of redemption. And what exactly is this beautiful redemption?

It is sweeping our hearts clean of little offenses before they cause us big problems.

And it's finally finding the freedom to move on.

We don't have to stay stuck here, friend. Forgiveness is the weapon. Our choices moving forward are the battlefield. Being released from that heavy feeling is the reward. Regaining the possibility of trust and closeness is the sweet victory. And walking confidently with the Lord from hurt to healing is the freedom that awaits.

Prayer

Lord, help us learn to forgive as You have forgiven us. Freely. Completely. Not to excuse what's been done to us, but to set us free. You are good. Your ways are good. And that means we can trust that forgiveness is good too.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

DAY FOUR

But They Seem to Get Away with Everything

Lysa TerKeurst



I was sitting in the sand, watching the salty water inch closer and closer. The tide was coming in, and I knew if I didn't move, the water would soon wash over me and my stuff.

The beauty of the ocean comes with the reality of the tide.

Many things in life come as a package deal like this. When we choose to participate in part of it, we participate with all of it. Relationships. Jobs. Homeownership. Even vacations are this way.

All these things come with fun parts and hard parts. And sin is no different. We must remember this about our own sin and also about other people's sins against us.

When others intentionally wrong us and blatantly hurt us but never seem to face consequences for any of it, the apparent lack of fairness stirs up bitterness, unforgiveness and even retaliation.

The truth that helps me manage these hurtful situations is that when people sin against us, they also unleash into their lives the consequences of that sin. We may never see it. In fact, it may look like they just got away with everything. But there are many Scriptures throughout the Bible, like Proverbs 1:31, that show "they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes."

And as a girl whose heart is wired for justice, that brings me so much relief.

You see, we can trust God with others' consequences while making sure we don't get lured into sinful choices by our own bitterness and unforgiveness. And when feelings start rising up inside of us, we must get honest with ourselves and call those feelings what they really are.

Bitterness, for example, does not protect us from getting hurt again. It also doesn't hurt the person who hurt us. It is the very place where the enemy can lure us into his schemes and where we can be so very tempted to sin.

Friend, I don't know what relational hurt you may be carrying today, but let me encourage you with this: Your strength is found in humility. When we are humble, it doesn't mean we are bowing down in defeat. It means we are rising up to declare no one has the power to make us betray who we really are in Christ. We can stand up for what is right, have hard conversations, and even confront things that need to be addressed — in equal measures of grace and truth — all without losing the best of who we are.

Your heart is much too beautiful a place to be tainted by hurt, haunted by resentment or held back by bitterness. We may feel hurt, but that doesn't mean we have to live lives that perpetuate that hurt.

Prayer

Father God, today I bring my difficult relationship situations to You. I know You see me struggle and have not left me to figure this out on my own. When unforgiveness, bitterness, resentment and judgment rise up in my heart, please help me healthily process those feelings.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

DAY FIVE

Do You Want to Heal From This?

Lysa TerKeurst



A few years ago, I walked into an appointment with my counselor, Jim, wishing I'd canceled. So much felt unsettled in my life. I felt utterly unmotivated to talk and overly motivated to cry.

"Lysa, do you have the desire to heal from this?" he asked.

Of course! But how could I possibly start healing when there was so much still unresolved in my life?

I thought those who did wrong things would realize they were wrong. And then surely they would say they were sorry and seek to make things right between us. Then I would consider forgiveness. And then I could possibly heal.

But as Jim kept talking, I started to realize I might never feel like things were fair. Even if the people who hurt me suddenly became repentant and owned all they'd done, that wouldn't undo the past. That wouldn't instantly heal me or make any of this feel right. Therefore, I had to separate my healing from their choices. My ability to heal cannot depend on anyone's choices but my own.

It reminded me of something I learned during a trip to the Holy Land, when my guide taught me about the two healing miracles Jesus performed in Jerusalem. The first was a healing at the pools of Bethesda.

In John 5, we read about a man who couldn't walk. "When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, 'Do you want to get well?'" (John 5:6). The man's response was surprising. He gave Jesus an excuse based on the fact that no one would help him. Isn't it amazing that the man was so focused on what others needed to do that he almost missed what Jesus could do?

Jesus instructed him to get up, pick up his mat and walk — and "at once the man was cured" (John 5:9, NIV). The healing didn't involve anyone but the man and Jesus.

The other healing miracle is found in John 9 and focuses on a blind man. In this story, the disciples wanted

to know whose actions caused the man's blindness. Surely someone was at fault.

But Jesus said, "This happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:3, NIV). Jesus then spat on the ground, mixed up some mud, rubbed it on the blind man's eyes, and instructed him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. Notice that Jesus didn't make healing contingent on other people doing or owning anything.

Jesus gave the instruction. The blind man obeyed. Jesus healed. The man moved forward.

My guide in Jerusalem said, "One of these miracles shows us a new way to walk, and the other shows us a new way to see." I couldn't grab my journal to record this revelation fast enough.

Moving forward and seeing beyond our current darkness is between us and the Lord. We don't need to wait for others to do anything. We must simply obey what God is asking of us right now. God has given us a new way to walk. And God has given us a new way to see.

My healing is my choice. And your healing? It's with the utmost compassion that I say your healing is your choice, too. I know how incredibly hard all of this is. But we can heal. We can forgive. We can trust God. And none of those beautiful realities can be held hostage by another person.

Prayer

Lord, thank You for inviting me to see and walk in a new, healed way today. Forgiveness and healing may feel incredibly hard to choose, but I know You give me the strength to walk through these processes. Thank You for making me more like You.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.