

AN ALIVE CITY CHURCH DEVOTIONAL

# 21 Days of Deep Living



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# Eat. Sleep. Pray. Repeat!

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“DO NOT BE ANXIOUS ABOUT ANYTHING, BUT IN EVERY SITUATION, BY PRAYER AND PETITION, WITH THANKSGIVING, PRESENT YOUR REQUESTS TO GOD”  
PHILIPPIANS 4:6 NIV

Going deeper in prayer is all about being anxious for nothing, praying about everything, and being thankful for all things.

In order to go deeper in prayer, we need to understand that prayer is not simply an occasion or a task we complete on a checklist. Prayer is our life and our lifestyle and it's how we communicate with our Father, our creator and our best friend. Paul wrote that everything is the proper subject of prayer. God is concerned and yearns for us to share EVERY part of our lives and our thoughts with Him. In fact in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Paul writes “pray without ceasing” or “pray all the time”. When we think about praying all the time, on the surface it can seem laborious and almost impossible to do, because if I am praying all the time then when do I have the time or mental capacity to do anything else? How is it even possible to pray all the time, when I am here struggling to pray even some of the time?

Well first and foremost, we need to get this idea out of our head that the entirety of our prayer life needs to be done in solitude and being alone with him. Yes it is important to have alone time with God, but this is not the limit of the time you can spend with God.

Praying without ceasing means praying whilst you are shopping, driving, eating and performing other everyday tasks. All we have to do is invite God in to be a part of what we are doing and then to also stay aware of His presence. This is how we are able to pray in EVERY situation. We go deeper in prayer, not when we get away from our every day routine, but when we invite God INTO and talk to Him DURING our everyday routine. This is how we build intimacy and thus how we go deeper.

To go deeper in prayer, we need to simplify our language. We can psyche ourselves out of our own prayer life and prayer time if we think that prayer is mentally demanding because of the big words and complicated language we have to use. Practise shorter conversational prayer continually throughout the day as opposed to long complex prayers that increase the chances of wandering thoughts. We are living in an era of attention deficit, and this idea of shorter, more frequent conversational prayers is key for us to go deeper in our prayer life.

**Further Study:** Psalm 145:18, 1 Chronicles 16:11, Colossians 4:2, Jeremiah 33: 3, 1 Peter 5:7



# Two-Way Street

## “MY SHEEP HEAR MY VOICE, AND I KNOW THEM, AND THEY FOLLOW ME” JOHN 10:27 NKJV

Prayer is simply conversation with God - it's us speaking all the contents of our thoughts and our hearts, and (what we usually forget) it's also about us listening to what God has to say to us. In fact the depth of prayer can be determined by the ability to hear God back. We can often get carried away with verbal diarrhoea in prayer, but actually the deeper in prayer you go the more you can hear God. Many people ask, how do you know God said so, or told you to go or stay. This should not be a supernatural event that is reserved for the select few. God speaks to us all, and the deeper you are in your prayer life the more you will hear and know his voice.

There are many voices in the world which compete for our attention and audience. The key to amplifying the voice of God is done through mediation on the Word of God. When we are hearing from God, we can validate the message because it is in line with his will. It is not possible to go deeper in prayer without being able to continually meditate on God's word. Allowing His Word to dwell richly in your heart, so that when He speaks, it resonates with your spirit and settles in your soul. Prayer lets you speak to God, meditation let's God speak to you.

Going deeper in prayer is about knowing when to listen more than when to speak. It's understanding that God has more to say to you than you have to Him and the way He says it is the same as the way He has always said it, through His Word.

Meditation is not complicated. It is simply 'focussed thinking' which is a skill a lot of us use on a daily basis, but we are just not aware of it. We are VERY GOOD at focusing and thinking (maybe even sometimes obsessing) on our problems. In fact, you could say we meditate on our problems on a daily basis and this becomes a worry. So, if we know how to worry, then we already know how to meditate, because thinking about a problem over and over again is called worry, but thinking about God's word over and over again is called meditation. The secret is based on the question, "What are you focussing on?"

So, I challenge you, this season of prayer and fasting desire to hear the voice in God when you pray. Develop your ability to meditate on scripture concerning your everyday conversation with God, whether its prayer of thanksgiving or prayer for help. Clarity on the understanding of God's will, will give you clarity of God's voice.

**Further Study:** John 8:45-47, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Revelation 3:20, Proverbs 2:1-5



# New Heart, New Start

**“HAVE MERCY UPON ME, O GOD, ACCORDING TO YOUR LOVINGKINDNESS; ACCORDING TO THE MULTITUDE OF YOUR TENDER MERCIES, BLOT OUT MY TRANSGRESSIONS. WASH ME THOROUGHLY FROM MY INIQUITY, AND CLEANSE ME FROM MY SIN.” PSALM 51:1-2 KJV**

King David, a man who mostly walked uprightly with God and did everything the Lord had commanded him to do – had sinned. He hated the commandment of the Lord – not to commit adultery or murder – and did what was evil in God’s sight when he took Bathsheba to be his wife after having her husband Uriah killed. After Bathsheba mourned the death of her husband Uriah, David took her home to the palace and she became one of his wives. Bathsheba bore him a son and David thought everything in his own eyes had gone well as planned. But the Lord was unhappy with what David had done so He sent Nathan to him to confront him about his sins.

In our focus scripture, David realises how dreadfully he has sinned against God. He confesses his sins and asks God to blot out his transgressions and wash him from his iniquities. David was asking God to help him make a new start.

What dirt is to the body, sin is to our inner being. It was right for David to feel tainted because by committing adultery and murder, he had wilfully rebelled against God. David knew the truth of God’s word and loved it, yet he deliberately broke God’s Law.

For many of us today, although we might not go to the extent of literally committing adultery or murdering anyone physically, there are things we do and thoughts that we have in our minds daily that are not pleasing to God.

When we think about repentance, often we think of it as a term we use to say that we’re sorry for something that we have done.

For many believers, when we first come to know Christ, there is a realisation in us that we have done some bad things in our lifetime, and we’re often invited to recite a ‘sinner’s prayer’ where we acknowledge our wrongs and then ask Jesus to come into our hearts and forgive us. Repentance is more than feeling guilt or sorrow. We can say that we’re sorry for the consequences of our actions, but it does not always lead to our hearts and minds being changed.

It involves us:

Admitting that we are wrong  
Asking God to help us try to make things right  
Changing our thinking to avoid us making the same mistakes

Upon realising that we have sinned, do we ask for mercy from God like King David did? Or do we blame others, give all sorts of excuses, try to avoid God or try to cover up our sins?

Genuine repentance will involve us feeling pain, sorrow or regret for something we have done or said. When we genuinely repent to Jesus – not just with the words that come out of our lips but feeling heavy in our inner man, God hears us. As we draw closer to Him, although it may not seem apparent at first, He is at work in us and will help us to change our lives.

Using King David as our example, we should acknowledge our sins and cry out to God and ask Him for mercy, forgiveness and for the power of His Holy Spirit to help us lead our lives in a way that is pleasing to Him daily.

**Further Study:** 2 Samuel 11 and 12, 1 John 1:9, Matthew 3:1-2



# Mind The Gap

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**“WITH ALL PRAYER AND PETITION PRAY [WITH SPECIFIC REQUESTS] AT ALL TIMES [ON EVERY OCCASION AND IN EVERY SEASON] IN THE SPIRIT, AND WITH THIS IN VIEW, STAY ALERT WITH ALL PERSEVERANCE AND PETITION [INTERCEDING IN PRAYER] FOR ALL GOD'S PEOPLE.” EPHESIANS 6:18 AMP**

For many of us, prayer can be a struggle. When we do manage to get into a place of spending time with God, we can spend most of our time praying to Him about our own needs as opposed to praying for the needs of others.

Ephesians 6:18 is one of the Bible's amazing verses on prayer and intercession. When we examine it closely, we discover some guidelines on how to have an effective and exciting prayer life. The scripture tells us we are to pray without ceasing, but for many believers this is not understood in a practical sense. Prayer for each of us must become a daily, constant, and consistent habit – a bit like brushing your teeth. In any given moment we are only a thought and breath from communicating with God. In a day and age when we pride ourselves on having high-speed internet connections, we must remember that we also have a high-speed instant access connection with the Heavenly Father.

Intercession involves us as believers standing in the gap for someone else in prayer. Intercessory prayer is allowing the needs of others to take preference over our own personal needs.

When those that we know share their problems with us, instead of always trying to help them find temporary solutions to their problems, we're to pray for them, calling on the Father to help to grant them wisdom as He takes them through the situation.

When those around us behave in ways that are not pleasing to us, instead of trying to argue with them, we're to pray for them – asking the Lord to change their hearts and minds. When we hear about the government introducing new laws that go against our beliefs, we're not to moan about them but spend time interceding for those men and women in places of authority.

Prayers of intercession should be a constant for the believer. If prayer can become a consistent habit in our lives, then the way we look at the world and how we deal with others will change.

In praying for others, we are reminded that we're all in this life together. None of us can do everything on our own. We need each other. When we reflect on lives, where we are now, and the long way we have come, we should be thankful that somebody somewhere has stood in the gap for us. Be it our parents, grandparents, neighbours or friends.

When we pray, we should also remember that Jesus sent us the Holy Spirit who intercedes on our behalf to our Heavenly father when we don't know what to pray for. Think of it as being a cycle, as we intercede for others, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us and so all of our specific requests are being lifted up to God who does answer every prayer.

**Further Study:** 1 Timothy 2:1-6, Matthew 5:44, James 5:16, Romans 8:27, Ephesians 6:18



# Obeys Before You Pray

**“THEREFORE CONFESS YOUR SINS TO EACH OTHER AND PRAY FOR EACH OTHER SO THAT YOU MAY BE HEALED. THE PRAYER OF A RIGHTEOUS PERSON IS POWERFUL AND EFFECTIVE. ELIJAH WAS A HUMAN BEING, EVEN AS WE ARE. HE PRAYED EARNESTLY THAT IT WOULD NOT RAIN, AND IT DID NOT RAIN ON THE LAND FOR THREE AND A HALF YEARS”. JAMES 5:16-17 NIV**

We can learn a lot about effective prayer through the life of the Old Testament prophet Elijah. Elijah was a man whom, when he prayed, it was evident and unmistakable that God had answered. He prayed that it would not rain and God held the rain for over three years until he prayed again for rainfall. He prayed that God would show himself as God to the prophets of Baal and God answered by actual fire! A real tangible fire that consumed an offering and everything around it. The TPT version puts it like this: “...for tremendous power is released through the passionate, heartfelt prayer of a godly believer! Elijah was a man with human frailties, just like all of us, but he prayed and received supernatural answers”.

So how does a man with human frailties, just like us, pray so effectively to receive supernatural answers? The simple answer is obedience; effective prayer is prayed confidently and in obedience to God. A life of obedience is what puts us in a right standing with God, despite our frailties. And from this position, we can boldly go to the throne room of Grace and obtain mercy.

In 1 Kings 17, out of obedience to God, Elijah went to Zarephath where he was instructed to ask a widow to supply him food. In obedience, the widow makes Elijah food despite having barely enough for herself and her son.

Her obedience resulted in God providing enough food for her household for the duration of Elijah’s stay. However, over time the woman’s son became ill and died but because of the lives of obedience Elijah and the widow were living, Elijah was able to confidently pray this effective prayer. “Lord my God, have you brought tragedy even on this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?” Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried out to the Lord, “Lord my God, let this boy’s life return to him!” The Lord heard Elijah’s cry, and the boy’s life returned to him, and he lived.

Note that living a life of obedience does not negate hardship or challenges. Elijah and the widow were in a right standing with God yet still, her son died. You can see that Elijah was in constant communication with God because the first part of his prayer is him processing the tragedy in dialogue with God. He knows that God is not a spectator in our lives just watching it play it out. A life of obedience requires sacrifice and faith from us, trusting that the God we serve has our best interests at heart. When we acknowledge Him in this way we ought to be convinced, just as Elijah was, that our heartfelt prayers will not only be heard, but answered.

**Further Study:** 1 Kings 17:7-24, Psalm 125:4; Philippians 4:19, Luke 11:28



# Thy Will Be Done

**“MANY ARE THE PLANS IN A PERSON’S HEART, BUT IT IS THE LORD’S PURPOSE THAT PREVAILS.”**

**PROVERBS 19:21 NIV**

One of my earliest memories as a child growing up is being told by my family members and Sunday school teachers that if I ever needed anything all I needed to do is believe and pray to God. I saw this as an open cheque to present my wish list to God and ask for anything that I thought would make me happy and comfortable. I was often frustrated and started to believe that prayer doesn't work. I was asking politely, asking with faith and even using my negotiation skills to bribe God (if you do this I will do that for you in return). However, I was missing one crucial element of prayer which is praying according to the 'the Will of the Father'.

Jesus in Matthew 6:7-10 teaches us how to pray. He gives us an outline of how we must approach our Heavenly Father. In this model of prayer, Jesus mentions "Your Will be done" being the Father's will not our own will and desires. One may ask how do I discover the Will of God? This is obtained through a deeper relationship with God and His Word. In Psalm 34:4, David lets us know that he sought the Lord based on the authority of His word. Simply put, he prayed based on God's word and God answered him. That's an example of effective prayer. When you pray through the Will of God you are guaranteed positive results. No matter how difficult or complex your situation may be, remember there is a promise from God for every problem. If it's stress He's promised peace, if it's sickness He's promised healing, if it's lack He's promised provision. Praying through the promises of God is a form of effective prayer.

Another example to consider is when Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39). He started praying according to His own will but quickly realised that this prayer would be ineffective and so reverted back to the Will of the Father. Sometimes when the pressures of life cave in on us we tend to forget that being in the Will of God is the safest place to be. It's vital that we pray through the Will of God and also believe that His Will is best for us.

As we go deeper into prayer and seek to hear from God and as we study His Word during this fasting period, God will enable us to understand His Will for us and our families for 2023. Praying for the will of God to be done, means laying yours aside, which can seem scary at times because we have to mentally shift our perspective that God knows best and sees the bigger picture. Whose Will do you want to be done this year? God's? If so, let go and pray God's Will be done!

**Further Study:** James 5:16-17, Matthew 6:7-10, Psalm 34:4 AMP, Matthew 26:39



# Sleeping Policemen

**“AND HE CAME TO THE DISCIPLES AND FOUND THEM SLEEPING, AND SAID TO PETER, “SO, YOU MEN COULD NOT STAY AWAKE AND KEEP WATCH WITH ME FOR ONE HOUR? KEEP ACTIVELY WATCHING AND PRAYING THAT YOU MAY NOT COME INTO TEMPTATION; THE SPIRIT IS WILLING, BUT THE BODY IS WEAK.” MATTHEW 26:40-41 AMP**

Some people find prayer to be a daunting and mundane task due to a lack of understanding of what prayer is and its importance for our daily existence. The most important and refreshing conversation you can have in your day is the conversation you have with the Lord. However, we have an enemy who is fully aware of this and so will try everything in his power to block us from engaging in conversation with God to slow us down. It's essential for us as believers to know and understand the role of the Holy Spirit in our faith journey and how He helps us in our weakness especially in prayer. Jesus outlines this to us in John 14:16. He explains that the Holy Spirit is our comforter, advocate, intercessor, counsellor, strengthener and standby. He continues further by referring to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Truth who would be with us forever. Evidently, we can see that we are at an advantage by having the Holy Spirit in our lives however there are many blockers that stop us from connecting through prayer.

Blockers of prayer slow us down in our spiritual growth and may come from within. A weak flesh can block us from going deeper or even stop us from praying altogether. This is what the disciples experienced in Matthew 26:40-41 where Jesus required them to stand with Him in prayer at His darkest moment, but they were overcome by fatigue which resulted in spiritual weakness. Sometimes fatigue or even laziness and procrastination blocks us from having the most important conversation of our day with the Holy Spirit. Our spirit is willing, however our flesh is weak.

Another blocker is unbelief. We sometimes are weary in our faith because of disappointment, rejection and setbacks that we feel God is responsible for. Subsequently, we stop praying to avoid disappointment and our doubt prohibits us from receiving anything from God. Yet the Bible says that we should come to God knowing that He is God and thus is able.

Other blockers to prayer could be satanic influences. Daniel 10:12-14 reveals to us that spiritual warfare is necessary and should be part of our prayer life. Daniel in the Old Testament, experienced a delay to his answers from God. He was told by the angel of the Lord that his prayer had in fact been answered but there were demonic influences that held and frustrated the angel of the Lord to deliver the answers. We must have discernment and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit to know when we have been engaged in spiritual warfare. We should develop a closeness to the Holy Spirit to know when demonic forces are operating to frustrate and delay our prayers. As we stay in constant communication with the Holy Spirit we acknowledge that we have been given power and authority to eliminate these forces from blocking our prayers.

If you are tired of being blocked in your prayer life then make the intentional decision today to discipline your spirit man and go deeper in prayer. Shake off tiredness and weariness and press in. Get closer to the Holy Spirit so that you can remove all barriers to answered prayer, whether demonic forces are to blame or your own flesh!

**Further Study:** Matthew 26:40-41, John 14:16, Galatians 6:9, Daniel 10:12-14, James 4:7

# Hunger Pangs

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**"BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS, FOR THEY SHALL BE SATISFIED." MATTHEW 5:6 ESV**

During these 21 days of Deep Living and beyond, we as a church are seeking to hear God more, see God's plan for our lives and walk in His purpose. To do this, there must be a burning desire to be more righteous. Scripture states that God is holy, and the fall of Adam and perpetual shortcomings of mankind had caused a separation between us and God. But in Romans chapters 4 and 5, it outlines how we, through faith, have been made righteous, therefore gaining access to God's grace and presence in our lives. Because of Christ's righteous nature and our faith in His sacrifice being counted as righteousness, a close and intimate relationship with our Heavenly Father is now possible.

We can see when we look at passages like Matthew 6:33 that righteousness is paramount. For us to live a life pleasing to God, we need to be righteous. Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith it's impossible to please God, so faith and righteousness go hand in hand. We are made righteous by Christ through faith, and in Romans 10:17, we know that "...faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (ESV). So in essence, we attain righteousness by acquainting ourselves with the Word of God and living in faith.

With our physical bodies, we have a hormone called ghrelin that signals to our bodies that we are hungry. It's common knowledge that we need food and water to sustain ourselves in order to survive, so just imagine if we didn't have the mechanism that told us that we actually need to eat and drink. Disaster – even worse, death!

Similarly, in our spiritual walk, we need to go after righteousness on a regular basis and fill ourselves with the righteousness of God through His Word. Like in Psalm 42:1, we should have a thirst for God that only He can satisfy. A lack of God's righteousness in our lives is spiritual death, so our pursuit for righteousness goes beyond mere desire – it is a necessity! In fact, When Jesus was being tempted by Satan in Matthew 4, He told him that "it is written: that man should not live by bread alone but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God."

What an assurance Jesus gives us in Matthew 6:33, that if we prioritise seeking after His righteousness, the other things that we have as less important concerns or desires will be taken care of. David confirms this in his own account in Psalm 37:25, "I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread" (ESV).

As we fast from physical food in these next 21 days, we get an insight into the anguish and pain that our Spirit man goes through when we deprive it of the Word of God. Let the hunger pangs be a reminder that we must quench the thirst and satisfy the hunger of our spirit by pursuing righteousness through faith by going deeper with God.

**Further Study:** Psalm 42:1-3, Matthew 6:31-33, Psalm 37:25, Hebrews 11:6, Romans 10:17, 2 Corinthians 5:11-21



# Planted In The Word

**BLESSED IS THE ONE WHO DOES NOT WALK IN STEP WITH THE WICKED OR STAND IN THE WAY THAT SINNERS TAKE OR SIT IN THE COMPANY OF MOCKERS, BUT WHOSE DELIGHT IS IN THE LAW OF THE LORD, AND WHO MEDITATES ON HIS LAW DAY AND NIGHT. PSALM 1:1-2 NIV**

The Bible describes the Word of God as many things; food for our souls, a lamp for our feet, a sword to defend against the attacks of the enemy. No doubt, the inspired Word of God in the form of the Bible is the single most important tool we have in our Christian walk of faith. Even Jesus quoted scripture to ward off the temptation from Satan (Matthew 4:4). If we do not know the Word of God, we become like starved Christians, walking in the dark and without weapons to resist the enemy. We need God's word to grow spiritually.

Christians today are fortunate to have the Bible as a guide. The word of God feeds our spirit just like physical food feeds our bodies. Consistent study of God's Word teaches us about God's character, His desire and Will for us and also it corrects us. Just like studying a particular subject in school makes us more learned in that subject, studying the word of God increases our knowledge and understanding of Him. It also grows our faith. The Bible says in Romans 10:17, So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. The more we hear the word of God and open our hearts to it, the more we grow in faith and character. We must move from feeding on milk to stronger spiritual truths in order to grow in faith and succeed in our spiritual journey.

Meditating on God's word is another important practice worth developing, it goes hand in hand with studying the word. When we hear the word 'meditation' some of us think of people humming in a monastery somewhere remote, but meditation is simply focusing our minds on one thing for an extended period of time. Christian meditation is different from new age methods of meditation and we must be careful not to open a door to the enemy by confusing the two. Before meditating, pray and ask God to search your heart, listen for His voice and instruction. Next read and reflect on scripture, a little bit at a time always helps. Lastly, apply it. For the word to be truly effective in our lives we must do it.

Psalm 1 calls the man who meditates on scriptures blessed, like a tree planted by the riverbank who yields fruit in season. A tree planted by the riverbank is watered in all seasons. It is evergreen, always fruitful and doesn't lack. Likewise a Christian who studies and meditates on God's word is stable in different seasons, they are not shaken by crises around them and are fruitful always.

**Further Study:** Psalms 1:1-3; Hebrews 4:12; Ephesians 6:10-18; Psalm 119:105; 2 Timothy 3:16-17



# Off By Heart

## I HAVE HIDDEN YOUR WORD IN MY HEART, THAT I MIGHT NOT SIN AGAINST YOU. PSALM 119:11 NLT

The benefits of the love of learning are many, to name a few: your mind is kept active, you are creative, new skills boost confidence and self-esteem and the list goes on. This love of learning is also vital in our relationship with God, learning and memorising scripture is a powerful tool we must adopt as it will serve us well on this journey.

When children begin to learn their alphabet and connect them to their accompanying sounds, they are demonstrating their ability to think in abstract terms and recognize that symbols like 'A' and 'B' have a set meaning. Knowing the sounds associated with each letter in the alphabet helps children build a solid foundation for a variety of tasks from reading and writing and helps develop confident learners. Children begin to learn as soon as they can demonstrate understanding. Likewise, as believers it is important that we learn and memorise cornerstone scriptures of our faith, scriptures such as John 3:16, Galatians 2:20, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Romans 8:28 – these help us create a solid foundation for our spiritual growth. They are the basis we need to understand God's character and the basic doctrines that support our faith. These scriptures have a set meaning and having the ability to recall and declare them wherever and whenever arms us as believers for the inevitable spiritual battles, opposition from the world, temptations and confusion that we will face.

Circumstances and life will change, we will all find ourselves in valleys and on mountain tops but as we walk this journey let your heart be a store for God's word, for as Luke 6:45 says "A good person brings good out of the treasure of good things in his heart; a bad person brings bad out of his treasure of bad things. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of."

It is said that memorisation is a critical learning technique that builds lifelong mental abilities. It trains the brain to retain more information, focus, and work with better agility and speed. This type of learning helps us store foundational concepts to use in the future, freeing our brains to grasp new concepts. So when it comes to memorising scripture we have to get practical:

1. Try reading the scripture multiple times throughout the day and over a week (Try sticking up post-it notes of the scripture around your house so you can read it again and again throughout the day)
2. Try writing down the scripture multiple times
3. Play the scripture out loud via a bible app and listen to it on repeat.
4. Seek to have a greater understanding of the scripture and how it applies to your everyday life; this will also aid in remembering it

1 Peter 2:2 says "Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation..." for babies milk is the essential building block for growing strong healthy bones and in turn a strong healthy body. If we want to go deeper in God's Word, we must be intentional about knowing the Biblical basics – The ABC's of the gospel. We must desire to be good student's of God's word, by learning and mediating so that we can pass the many trials and tests we inevitably will have in this life.

Therefore do not neglect the act of knowing scripture off by heart, with it we are building ourselves up, we are strengthening our faith and we are allowing ourselves to experience the fullness of His Word and Will. Use this time of prayer and fasting to get up to speed and learn the Word without looking!

**Further Study:** Luke 6:45, Colossians 3:16, Psalm 119:9,16,105, Psalm 37:31, Jeremiah 15:16



# Dig Deep

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**“THEREFORE EVERYONE WHO HEARS THESE WORDS OF MINE AND PUTS THEM INTO PRACTICE IS LIKE A WISE MAN WHO BUILT HIS HOUSE ON THE ROCK. THE RAIN CAME DOWN, THE STREAMS ROSE, AND THE WINDS BLEW AND BEAT AGAINST THAT HOUSE; YET IT DID NOT FALL, BECAUSE IT HAD ITS FOUNDATION ON THE ROCK. BUT EVERYONE WHO HEARS THESE WORDS OF MINE AND DOES NOT PUT THEM INTO PRACTICE IS LIKE A FOOLISH MAN WHO BUILT HIS HOUSE ON SAND. THE RAIN CAME DOWN, THE STREAMS ROSE, AND THE WINDS BLEW AND BEAT AGAINST THAT HOUSE, AND IT FELL WITH A GREAT CRASH.” – MATTHEW 7:24-27 NIV**

In today’s anchor scripture, we focus on the wise man and the foolish man; the wise man being the one who builds their house, or their life, on the foundation of God’s word, whilst the foolish man is the one who does not. It is important to note that the foolish man was not ignorant of the Word of God, but rather chose not to put it into practise. It’s possible to be in spaces like church, or do your quiet time in scripture and not put what you have read or heard into practice. This faith walk requires intentionality. We become like the foolish man when we hear God’s word but don’t apply and walk in it.

Why must we build God’s word? Because it’s the truth. In whatever time, space or season we are in, his word will always remain true, it doesn’t change. It’s deeper than just words on a page – whatever Christ is, the word is also. That’s why building on the foundations of truth will always stand the test of time and in strength. Our feelings will never change the validity and truth of his word. Neither will our circumstance and what we see around us. Using physical buildings as an analogy, foundations play vital roles in supporting the load of the entire building for various seasons and weather conditions and for taller structures, it is imperative that the foundations are deep. Just like physical buildings must be built to stand regardless of the weather conditions, may we be like the wise man who chooses to build on a unshakable foundation by submitting, walking and trusting the authority of God’s word, despite the season, because we have come to know that God’s word reigns true regardless and is therefore best foundation to build on.

In Matthew 3, we witness Jesus in the wilderness being tempted by Satan at the end of a 40-day fast. In all three attempts to make Jesus fall, he begins each attempt with “if you are the Son of God”. In the previous scripture, just before Jesus is driven to the wilderness by the Spirit of God to fast, God announces and affirms his identity after his baptism by saying “this is my son who I love and I am well pleased”. What we see in the wilderness is Satan questioning the very word that God had spoken to Christ approximately 40 days before. In all attempts, Jesus’ response to Satan with a sentence beginning with “it is written”. After 40 days of fasting, it’s likely that Jesus might have been weak yet he didn’t give into the temptations of the enemy or attack Satan or come up with another strategy other than what had already been written, the final authority of his father’s word.

Like Jesus, let us make the active choice to build on the foundation of God’s word; to not be like the foolish man and to build on a foundation that can never be shaken. The result? We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

**Further Study:** James 1:22, Psalm 1:1, Jeremiah 31:33, 2 Corinthians 4:8



# My Lighthouse

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## “THY WORD IS A LAMP UNTO MY FEET, AND A LIGHT UNTO MY PATH” PSALM 119:105 KJV

We can all agree that light is vital to our everyday living because light illuminates. When driving at night, we rely on the streetlights and the lights on the car to give us the ability to see our way – to give us direction and to make us aware of our surroundings especially in the cases of any danger and/or to avoid accidents. For a moment, just imagine if we chose to drive without light or even operate in a world or space without light, the kind of trouble we would find ourselves in?

In the physical, we could never operate without light however there are times in our own lives, where we navigate life without light we need. If there is danger without it in the physical, how much more with our own lives? The anchor scripture teaches that the word of God is the lamp unto our feet and the light unto our path. Just as light is vital for our everyday living, more so is the word of God.

In John 1:1-5, we are introduced to Jesus from the perspective of John the Baptist. To summarise, he describes the Messiah as the following; he tells us that Jesus is God as well as the Word of God and that he has always existed, that through Him all things were made and that He is the life and light of all mankind. This scripture gives comfort and assurance in us trusting the word to lead us. Why? Because someone can only give you directions for a road that they are familiar with.

Christ, who has always been and creator of all things knows the path for you and I. Not only this, but Hebrews 4:15 tells us that we have a high priest who is able to sympathise with our weaknesses because he also has been through all temptations and overcome them. He knows the road ahead and is the best to guide us through it because he is the creator of the path, has experienced the path and carries the tools (truth) for us to navigate the path. He has already gone before us and because He is our light, He is the only one who is able to properly and accurately direct us. Nothing else will ever be able to correctly lead us because it's the created thing, not creator.

Everyone's individual paths will differ but when we rely on the Word to lead us, the destination will always be the same; we are led to Christ. The Word leads us to himself, where through our individual life experiences, are being conformed to His image through submission to His Word. As the Word provides direction, it cleanses, renews and transforms whilst at the same time providing the tools and strength to keep going. For the Word of God is alive and powerful!

May we not just be listeners of the Word but doers also, because our life depends on it. 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'

**Further Study:** Hebrews 4:12, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Luke 11:28, James 1:22



# The Word Is Our Weapon

**“FOR THE WORD OF GOD IS LIVING AND POWERFUL, AND SHARPER THAN ANY TWO-EDGED SWORD, PIERCING EVEN TO THE DIVISION OF SOUL AND SPIRIT, AND OF JOINTS AND MARROW, AND IS A DISCERNER OF THE THOUGHTS AND INTENTS OF THE HEART”. HEBREWS 4:12 NKJV**

As believers, God has equipped us with the ‘Armour of God’ which is our spiritual clothing that we should ‘put on’ every day. The Word (our Bible) is described as ‘our sword’ which we are able to use when we are on the ‘battle ground’ in prayer. In the Roman times when Paul was speaking to the people in Ephesus about equipping themselves with the armour, the sword served as an offensive weapon against enemies. When it was sharpened, the sword could pierce through almost anything making it a very dangerous tool.

The anchor scripture describes how powerful and direct the Word of God is. It has the ability to expose our innermost thoughts and desires. It also provides us with everything we need to know about the differences between being truly selfless and understanding spiritual deeds and acts which are selfish and ungodly. It can be used to attack the enemies within ourselves as well as the enemies outside.

Like a sword, that when it is sharpened, has the ability to do dangerous works when it is used, we should aim to sharpen ourselves in God’s word so that we’re able to do ‘dangerous acts’ in the spirit. We should use His words to speak over situations and to remind Him of His promises. The more that we fill ourselves up on the inside with His word, the more it will start to have a positive effect on the way we apply ourselves outwardly in our everyday lives.

.God has equipped us with everything that we need for this life but for many of us, because we’re not disciplined in dwelling in the Word, we don’t live the abundant life here on this earth that He has planned for us. Instead of spending time in His word, we get ourselves caught up in the busyness of life or spiritually blocked by the weakness of our flesh (laziness, procrastination or distractions). When we face situations, many of us default to speaking with our friends and family members hoping that they’ll be able to help us. Or we may run to our pastor to rely on his knowledge of the Word, rather than our personal revelation of God’s Word. We need to hide God’s Word in our heart so that when the challenges of life come our heart will not faint or grow weary.

The Word is the only offensive weapon we have in the armour of God, if we don’t have it, we simply can’t fight. We aren’t a threat to the enemy without our weapons. We are vulnerable and prone to attacks. We need to understand that there is power in our mouths and there is power in God’s Word. It never returns without having fulfilled its purpose. Let’s learn to fill ourselves with His word daily and speak it out over our lives.

**Further Study:** Ephesians 6:11-18, Matthew 4:4, Isaiah 55:11 and Proverbs 18:21



# The Bridge

**“FOR THE SPIRIT GOD GAVE US DOES NOT MAKE US TIMID, BUT GIVES US POWER, LOVE AND SELF-DISCIPLINE.” 2 TIMOTHY 1:7**

Self-discipline is the bridge between goals and accomplishment. It will take us to our desired place with God. To go deeper, means to be more disciplined. However, our human nature is to be undisciplined. This is why in Galatians 5:22–23, when Paul is talking about the Fruit of the Spirit, the last one he mentions is self-control and when translated from the Greek, it means self-mastery, self-restraint, self-control, i.e. discipline. Now the Fruit of the Spirit are nine specific behaviours that demonstrate evidence that we are living in alignment with the Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who bears these spiritual fruit (i.e. these nine behaviours) in our lives. Therefore, given that self-control/discipline is an element of the fruit of the Spirit, we are not responsible for being the source of our own discipline. Instead it is a behaviour for which we begin to exhibit when we are in deep fellowship with the Holy Spirit. We can not master our flesh without the Spirit. Therefore we need the Holy Spirit to be the source of our desired discipline and we need to put ourselves into the position of the object (i.e. that which receives). We receive the ability to be disciplined, we do not create it.

One such discipline we focus on today is the discipline of reading the Word of God (the Bible) daily. This discipline requires the help of the Holy Spirit because if we could do it ourselves, then we would already be doing it ourselves. The level of discipline needed for this goes a lot deeper than we can understand. If you are someone who likes to start the day with reading the Bible, then this requires the discipline of waking up at the right time to have enough time to read before the day starts (i.e. getting ready for and getting to work on time). In order to be able to wake up early enough, then this requires the discipline of being able to go to bed on time, which is also not easy.

If you like to do your Bible reading during lunch, then it requires the discipline of actually protecting that time and ensuring that there are no meetings/work that gets in the way or no errands to run. If you like to do your Bible reading in the evening, then this requires the discipline of being able to stop whatever it is you are doing and actually go and spend time reading the word. No matter how tired the day has made you or how bad your day has been, you still need the discipline to be able to put the day behind you and focus on the Word.

Now I don't know about you, but I can't imagine being able to sustainably do any of the above on a daily basis through my own strength and my own attempt at discipline. If I could I would be doing it already. This is exactly why the motivation and power to develop discipline comes from the Spirit and not from ourselves. The Holy Spirit is the one who will bear the Fruit of self-control within us so that we can develop and live a daily habit of reading the Bible. No longer do we need to become frustrated with ourselves for our own lack of discipline. Instead we simply need to stop trying to do the work of the Holy Spirit, and pray that the Holy Spirit will help us to bear this Fruit that is gifted to us from God through the Spirit.

Take a minute and pray the following prayer:

Dear God, I pray that with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in me, I can guard the minutes and hours you've given me. I pray for self-discipline. And I pray that you would do more with my minutes and hours than I can alone.

**Further Study:** Galatians 5:22–23, Romans 7:14–21, Proverbs 6:10–11, Proverbs 10:17

# Above All

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**“BUT SEEK FIRST HIS KINGDOM AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND ALL THESE THINGS WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU AS WELL” MATTHEW 6:33 NIV**

Have you ever gotten to the place in your life where it feels like you are trying everything in your own strength, trying to really figure out how you get from A to B but nothing seems to work? You are tired of waiting on God so you've almost, consciously or unconsciously, told God to take a back seat whilst you figure out your next steps.

In being in this place, you've probably also realised or will soon realise that moving in your own effort is useless as it almost feels like you keep hitting a brick wall. When we get to a place where we have taken situations into our hands, we no longer trust in the character of God. If the Father promises that he works things out for our good, why do we fail to believe this to the point that we believe our way is better? We must remember that our way, as a created being, will never be better than the creator's.

When it comes to God's kingdom, there is a clear priority order of how things work as shown in our anchor scripture. Christ first, everything else is secondary. For simplicity sake, it's the ingredients needed for a recipe – Christ has to be first. We must intentionally choose to walk in this truth. Where seeking Christ is our daily priority, meditating on His Word and walking with Christ throughout the day, in complete submission to him and attentive to the leading of the Spirit. May we get to a place where our decision making, our emotions and feelings, the way we treat others comes from the perspective of complete submission to Christ, where we walk with God despite the cost or despite what the situation looks like.

This is our worship. Oftentimes we are chasing or fervently seeking something other than God. It may be love, it may be acceptance, it may be money, it may be a new job, however there is a problem when we seek the gifts of God as opposed to the giver and creator himself, it becomes idolatry.

Prioritising the Father is us saying a few of the following things to the Father:

1. You are worth everything and I value nothing else above you.
2. In you, I have everything I need and I am satisfied with you.
3. I believe your way is better even if the situation looks contrary to what I am trusting you for
4. You are Jehovah Jireh – you provide.

The beautiful thing about seeking Christ first is that as much as He is worthy of it, there is also a work being done in us whilst we do so. Our desires are being realigned with the Lord's, so that our will begins to align with His. When we begin to bring our heart's desires before his feet and consult God first, he will begin to speak to us about them, sometimes realigning our "why" for wanting them, sifting away certain desires that do not align with His will or simply giving us the strength to wait – all for His glory. Without the seeking of Christ first, we may chase after things that aren't in accordance with His Will, which may lead to settling for second best, instead of seeking God first and waiting for His promise.

**Further Study:** Matthew 6:24, John 3:30, 2 Corinthians 8:5



# God-Reality

**“...STEEP YOUR LIFE IN GOD-REALITY, GOD-INITIATIVE, GOD-PROVISIONS. DON’T WORRY ABOUT MISSING OUT. YOU’LL FIND ALL YOUR EVERYDAY HUMAN CONCERNS WILL BE MET”. MATTHEW 6:30-33 MSG**

In the digital space, there are a number of artificial realities, one of the most common types is Virtual Reality (VR). VR is a computer-generated environment with scenes and objects that appear to be real, making the user feel they are immersed in alternative surroundings. This artificial environment is perceived through a device known as a Virtual Reality headset. However, there is a reality that is more real than the one we are surrounded by on a daily basis. A reality that is a Bible-generated environment with promises and supernatural experiences that are real and obtainable if the user immerses themselves in their word-based surroundings. This supernatural environment is perceived through a device known as faith. Introducing; God-Reality!

We look at the same scripture as yesterday’s devotion and read it in the Message version, where we read about a God-reality. In God-Reality, outcomes are not subject to earthly timeframes, or logical next steps. In this reality we are to expect the unexpected. At every turn, God can use our situations to show His supreme and infinite power. God-Reality is full of medical marvels, expedited blessings and unexplainable happenings. Nothing is impossible or too far-fetched. In fact, impossible does not exist in God-Reality. This is not imaginary or wishful thinking, but the correct order of the day as set out by God. In this reality, we cannot lean on our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5) because we have no idea how God will work His next miracle, but we can rest assured that all things will work together for our good (Romans 8:28).

A deeper level of faith is required for us to live in God-Reality where our real-life environment is overlaid with the power of God. Just as with a VR headset, when you put it on you see a digital experience rather than what is actually in front of you. Onlookers who cannot see what you are seeing may think you are crazy because your movements do not correlate with the reality they see around you. Likewise, when wearing the headset of faith, we see through a lens of God-initiatives and God-provisions, people who cannot see what you are immersed in may think you're delusional. Some of us fear looking delusional so much that we choose to not activate the headset of faith. Remember, faith without works is dead. If you’re wearing your headset of faith with a dead battery you might as well not be wearing it. Make sure your headset is fully charged with actions and works that demonstrate your faith.

So, what will you do the next time you get a vision, word of prophecy or scripture that seems too good to be true, or perhaps you’re waiting for God to act on a timescale that seems too soon to be practical? Instead of watering down your expectations, put on your headset of faith and immerse yourself, steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions and prepare to be blown away with what God is about to do in and with your life.

**Further Study:** 2 Corinthians 5:7, Mark 9:23, Hebrews 11:1-35



# The Sheep From The Goats

**“NOT SO WITH YOU. INSTEAD, WHOEVER WANTS TO BECOME GREAT AMONG YOU MUST BE YOUR SERVANT, AND WHOEVER WANTS TO BE FIRST MUST BE YOUR SLAVE— JUST AS THE SON OF MAN DID NOT COME TO BE SERVED, BUT TO SERVE, AND TO GIVE HIS LIFE AS A RANSOM FOR MANY.” MATTHEW 20:26–28**

This is what Jesus said to His disciples when they got angry with James and John after their mother asked Jesus to save a place at his left and right for her sons'. Their desire for position and status demonstrates a lack of understanding of the nature of Jesus in respect to leadership and power. In the Kingdom, status, money and popularity should never be the prerequisites for leadership. Humble service is the great prerequisite, as shown by Jesus' own ministry. Jesus came to serve for the benefit of those He ministered to and not the benefit of Himself. Our service needs to be focused on what we can do for others and by doing so we both honour and serve God.

In Matthew 25, Jesus explains that he will separate the people, one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. We see that the act of serving is the difference between the sheep and the goats. The sheep, the ones who live their lives serving others, are told to take their inheritance because of their service to God. They essentially ask "But Lord, when did we serve you?" Jesus responds, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." Matthew 25:40

The goats are not so fortunate as they are called cursed and are told to depart from God into the eternal fire. And when asking "Lord, when did we ever see the opportunity to serve you?", they are told, "*Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.*" Matthew 25:45

We are all called to serve, in the same way Jesus came to serve and not to be served. Therefore it is through our service that we become more Christ-like. A heart of servanthood will lead to a life of generosity because before we know it, we are focussed so much more on giving than receiving. We become faithful stewards of what God has given us (time, money, resources etc.), when we give it away to bless others and therefore honour God, and not when we simply keep it for serving ourselves.

Reflect on the following three questions:

- What is one way you are serving right now? What motivates you to serve in this capacity?
- How does it make you feel when someone serves you?
- When you help someone, you're actually doing it for Jesus. How does knowing that impact the way you serve others?

At the end of our lives, what we want to hear is God telling us "Well done my good and faithful servant". Hence, if being a servant is the highest calling, then serving is the highest action we can make.

**Further Study:** John 13:12–15, Philippians 2:3–8, Colossians 3:23–24, 1 Peter 4:10–11



# Developed

**“FOR YOU KNOW THAT WHEN YOUR FAITH IS TESTED, YOUR ENDURANCE HAS A CHANCE TO GROW. SO LET IT GROW, FOR WHEN YOUR ENDURANCE IS FULLY DEVELOPED, YOU WILL BE PERFECT AND COMPLETE, NEEDING NOTHING.”**

**JAMES 1:3–4 NLT**

If home is a life lived solely by faith, then walking with God on the road where our faith will be tested and developed is how we will get there.

The journey of making a physical photo which can be framed and displayed is not an easy one. Back in the day, we used to use polaroids and had to take a shot and wind, take a shot and wind then drop all the used camera rolls at a shop to be developed. A week later you had physical photos to keep for life. The process took time, but now technology has advanced so that you can take a photo on your mobile phone and store it forever in the cloud. No wait times, no processing, no journey... just instant! Technology like this has created an 'instant nature' in many of us and this is being played out in many areas of our lives. Modern technology has warped our minds into thinking that everything happens quickly or that everything can be compressed and shortened. However, the time it takes for development is often the key to the quality of the finished product.

When developing colour photos, colour print paper is sensitive to all parts of the visible spectrum, so it must be kept in complete darkness until the prints are properly fixed. The darkroom process gives the developer complete control over the medium. The developer must set the right conditions – after the high heats, lowlights and harsh chemicals, a beautiful, clear and fully developed picture emerges as a result. God's 'darkroom' is where He develops you into the image of Christ. Enduring the trials in the darkness gives the credentials to walk out into the daylight, being ready to receive what God has prepared.

The Bible in 2 Corinthians 3:18, says that we are progressively being transformed into Christ's image from glory to glory.

In order to become and look more like Christ's person, we will encounter persecution, temptation and suffering. We may find ourselves in places or situations that we don't want to be in, that aren't comfortable or put us under pressure. Let me encourage you that through those seasons, who God has created you to be becomes clear and clear. In fact in this process, the Bible says that we should consider it pure joy, whenever we face trials of 'many kinds'. Being closer to God, enables us to understand that God will not give us more than we can handle, nor is He allowing us to go through things to destroy us but actually rather to develop us. He does so, so that the full picture of our future becomes clear sooner rather than later according to God's timing.

When we look at monumental people of faith in the Bible, we recall Moses, Joseph, David, Esther, Daniel and many others that went through tough times. Yet in those times, they grew closer to God and stayed faithful. Joseph fled temptation detesting the thought of sinning against God, when he was pursued by Potiphar's wife; David resisted the temptation of killing Saul (more than once) to end his years in captivity fleeing from him; Esther fasted to stop the extermination of the Jewish people and Daniel prayed through the persecution of his people and stayed close to God even if it meant being thrown to lions. In their darkest hour, they were being developed which ultimately led to elevation and glory.

God will not just enhance you with quick fixes and cover ups, He will develop and build you up until He completes the good work that he has started in you and take you to where He wants you to go.

**Further Study:** Romans 5:1–5 NLT, James 1:12, Hebrews 11:17–19, 1 Peter 1:7, Hebrews 12:2



# Fatherly Love

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**BEHOLD WHAT MANNER OF LOVE THE FATHER HAS BESTOWED ON US, THAT WE SHOULD BE CALLED CHILDREN OF GOD! THEREFORE, THE WORLD DOES NOT KNOW US, BECAUSE IT DID NOT KNOW HIM. 1 JOHN 3:1 KJV**

I have often heard it said that we relate with God in the same way as our earthly fathers or the authority figures in our lives. Our earthly fathers are human and imperfect, and at their best fall short in so many ways. Even when doing their best, fathers can pass on habits, prejudice, and harmful ideas to their children. Many of us had to endure abuse, addiction, abandonment and sometimes more than one of these issues from our fathers. These negative experiences become a part of our lives and we find ourselves projecting them onto God.

The Bible says in Matthew 7:9-11 *'Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!'* God is not just good but perfect (Psalm 18:30) and not to be compared with our earthly fathers. Easier said than done, the key is in getting to know His character and understanding that His thoughts and plans toward us are always good.

Isn't it amazing that the Creator of all things calls Himself Our Father? What a wonderful truth. Unlike our earthly fathers we can count on God to provide our every need, to forgive us and welcome us with open arms when we repent, protect us from harm and even discipline us when we go wrong.

The best part is God will never abandon us, no matter how difficult things may be, how far away from His will we may have strayed, He remains faithful and is constantly waiting for us to return (Luke 15: 11-32).

Having God as a Father is also about intimacy, surrender, obedience, growth and more. Jesus models the perfect example of a relationship with Our Father God in His intimacy (John 10:30) and constant communion with God, obedience and surrender to God's will even to the cross (Mark 14:36). If we call God our father, we should also be willing to submit to His will and plan for our lives knowing that He is transforming us into the best version of ourselves. The invitation to relate with Our Heavenly Father is open to all through the belief in Jesus Christ who reconciles us to the Father.

Let us all strive for a deeper understanding of who God is and to know Him more as Father, a perfect Father. He is not a man to lie, he is always faithful even when we are not and there is nothing in the world that can separate us from the love of the Father.

**Further Study:** John 20:17; Mathew 6:9-13; Galatians 4:6; Mathew 6:25-34; Hebrews 12:3-11



# Time Out

**AND HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN THE EXHORTATION THAT ADDRESSES YOU AS SONS? “MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR BE WEARY WHEN REPROVED BY HIM. FOR THE LORD DISCIPLINES THE ONE HE LOVES, AND CHASTISES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.” HEBREWS 12:5-6 ESV**

God as Our Father takes on many roles. One fatherly role that we may not speak about often is that God is a disciplinarian. It is very important that a parent lays out guidelines and rules for their children so that they grow up in a way that is pleasing to them. Have you ever seen a child having a tantrum in a supermarket? In this situation, it's hard not to think, "That kid needs a good [insert disciplinary action of choice]". And although the child is the one misbehaving, oftentimes judgement is passed onto the parent. The parent shares responsibility for the child's actions and therefore has the authority to correct them. This is the same in our relationship with the Father; when we do things that we shouldn't - or fail to do the things that we should - God has both the responsibility and authority to correct us as it reflects on Him - we are His children, after all.

We feel so loved when we experience the blessings of God in our lives. However, to stop there and not acknowledge His discipline also, we downplay its necessity and diminish the limitless scope of God's love for us. It may be tough to take at times, but that's what it is - tough love! It won't always feel like it but as mentioned in our anchor scripture, discipline from the Father is a display of love. God's discipline could be allowing us to experience the consequence of your actions, as He wants us to learn from our mistakes and understand the biblical truths and principles necessary for us to grow in our faith. Hebrews 12:11 says 'for the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it'. Getting closer to God, means embracing His love but also His discipline.

We cry out to God to rescue us from messy situations that we have gotten ourselves into because of our sin. We can recall David who had murdered a man and impregnated his wife. David was disciplined by God when he experienced the death of that child that he begged God to save. It was painful and hard to bear, but God deemed it necessary. Yet we must remember that God is slow to anger and full of kindness, and as a father, after disciplining his child, shows that repentant child love, God then blessed him and Bathsheba with an heir, King Solomon. God saw that the heart of David had changed and that he truly saw his error. Note, God did not require him to leave Bathsheba but only to experience his discipline through their loss. Following that, they all moved on from there. Solomon became the wisest King to have ever walked the earth and also built the long anticipated Temple of God.

As children of God, we need to hear His word and obey His voice of correction because He's the one that knows best - not us, and His love manifests in more ways than we may be comfortable to accept. If we were to let our children have their own way, they'd become spoiled and come to ruin. We know what's best for our children as God knows what's best for us. Let us respond to His discipline so that as we grow we can avoid the consequence of wrong choices and poor decisions.

**Further Study:** Proverbs 13:24, Proverbs 22:15, Matthew 7:13-14, Proverbs 14:12, Isaiah 55:9



# Relationship Rules!

**'AFTER REMOVING SAUL, HE MADE DAVID THEIR KING. GOD TESTIFIED CONCERNING HIM: 'I HAVE FOUND DAVID SON OF JESSE, A MAN AFTER MY OWN HEART; HE WILL DO EVERYTHING I WANT HIM TO DO.' ACTS 13:22 NIV**

The Christian faith is not just a declaration of who we are, but who we are in relationship with. In our anchor scripture, the Bible tells us that David was a man after God's own heart, someone who sought not what God can do, but who God is. David was remembered here for his relationship with God. This is the difference in our 'religion' when compared to any other. God calls us into a relationship with Him, a deep intimate relationship. Interestingly, because David was after God's heart, the Bible goes on to say 'he will do everything I want him to do.' Loving God, and pursuing intimacy with Him is what enables us to be obedient to his Word. It is not fear that drives us to obedience or a set of rules that keeps us in check. Rather it is the love that we have for God that governs the way we live our lives.

Walking with God is about knowing the heart of God. The more we read and meditate on His Word, we begin to see who God is and what makes Him tick. There is a misconception at times, that being a Christian is about knowing God's rules and being careful not to disobey them. However, the anchor scripture reminds me of a relationship between a couple. When a man and a woman get married, after the wedding is done, they do not sit down and bring out the list of rules for one another to follow. Instead through relationship, they seek to know the heart of their spouse. They want to fully understand what brings joy to their spouse and similarly avoid the things that don't. They behave in a way that aligns with what their spouse wants, not because of coercion, manipulation or out of fear, but because of love.

When Jesus was asked what is the most important commandment i.e. what is the fundamental thing for us as Christians to do, He responded 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the greatest commandment because once you love God, you will do everything He wants for you to do. Everything else will follow. Consider the language Jesus uses here - he refers to loving God with the totality of your being.

1. All your heart; your desires, intentions, your words
2. All your soul; your emotions, your feelings
3. All your mind; your thoughts, your imagination

All of the above should be in line with what the Word says about the will of God on what the state of our heart, soul and mind should be. Relationship with God drives where we go, who we hang around with, what we say and what we do. This faith journey is not about dos and don'ts or religious guidelines because when there are rules and no relationship, it will ultimately lead to rebellion.

This year in 2023, let us fall so deeply in love with God that we know His heart, we know what pleases Him, and it pleases us to do everything He wants us to do. David was known as being a man after God's own heart and so he did everything God wanted him to do, will the same be said about you?

**Further Study:** 1 Samuel 16, Matthew 22:36-40, Luke 6:45, Philippians 2:5-11, Psalm 31:23

# 21 Days of Deep Living

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