



21 DAYS OF GROWING IN CHRIST



COME TO CHRIST GROW IN CHRIST

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Part 1: The Character of God	3
Part 2: Sin, and the Character of People	15
Part 3: Why do We Need a Living Sacrifice?	35
Part 4: Jesus: The Only Appropriate Sacrifice	48
Part 5: Disciples: What Do We Do Now?	73
Conclusion	78

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Day 1 CREATIVITY	4
Day 2 JUSTICE	7
Day 3 POWER	10
Day 4 FORGIVENESS	12
Day 5 JEALOUSY & ENVY	16
Day 6 REBELLION	19
Day 7 LUST	25
Day 8 WRATH & VENGEANCE	28
Day 9 SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS	31
Day 10 THE FALL	36
Day 11 THE OLD COVENANT	40
Day 12 THE SINFUL NATURE	44
Day 13 JOY	49
Day 14 GENEROSITY	52
Day 15 COMPASSION	55
Day 16 VISION	58
Day 17 LOVING THE UNLOVABLE	61
Day 18 FAITH	64
Day 19 PAYING THE PRICE	67
Day 20 LOVE	70
Day 21 TAKING ACTION	74

INTRODUCTION

If you're starting this devotional, congratulations! You've taken the next step in your faith. This may be the very beginning of your faith journey, and that's OK. It may be that you're an old pro at this stuff; you've attended church your whole life, gone to camp, served in Kids Ministry, and are very used to how ministry works for your age group. That's OK, too. The goal over the next 21 days is the same, no matter where you are on your walk with God:

GROW.

That's it. You've come to Christ, and now it's time to grow in Christ. Often times, physical growth is something we don't have to think about. We eat and rest, and the growing just happens on its own overnight. Mental growth is the same. We go to school to learn how to read, do math, and advance in whatever field we're studying. Even emotional growth is often automatic, at least during childhood. Most of us are more emotionally mature now than when we were toddling around with pacifiers and baby bottles; however, spiritual growth is different. Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, says, "Like babies who were just born, you should long for the pure milk of God's word. It will help you grow up as believers. You can do it now that you have tasted how good the Lord is." **(1 Peter 2:2-3)**

What Peter was trying to communicate was to have hope, to be holy, to let go of your old ways, and to crave what God has to offer. Calling for you to crave God's word, too! You just got baptized, making the decision to profess your love for Jesus publicly. So, the next logical step once you've said you love someone, you ought to get to know them a little better, right?

INTRODUCTION

Over the next 21 days, you'll be presented with a guide to your newfound relationship with Christ. Don't worry; we're pretty confident that, no matter where you are on your walk with God, you'll get something from this devotional, if you put forth the required energy and dedication.

Thank you for joining us on this 21-day spiritual journey. We can't wait to see how you've grown by the end of it!



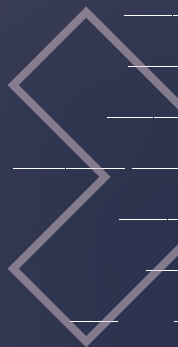
PART

1



*Creativity // Justice
Power // Forgiveness*

THE CHARACTER OF GOD



DAY 1 | CREATIVITY

“So God created humankind in His own likeness. He created them to be like Himself. He created them male and female.”

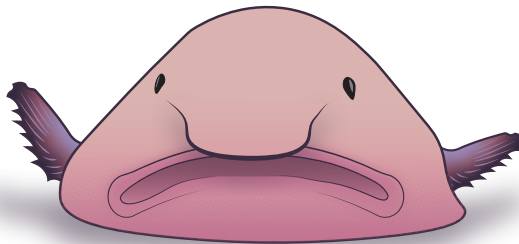
(Genesis 1:27)

There are around 650 ethnic groups in the world, according to Harvard University. There are currently over 7000 languages spoken in the world. There are almost 8 billion people on Earth, and every single one of them, even identical twins, has different fingerprints and unique DNA.

God is creative.

If you're not convinced, take a look at the animal kingdom. Look up the “blobfish” on the internet. It looks like a big piece of raw chicken with a face! Or how about the “bird dropping spider,” which camouflages itself by, you guessed it, looking like bird poop!

The book of Genesis is our Bible's oldest book, and it accounts for history dating back to the creation of man. And though we probably don't look like blobfish, thank goodness, we all are different. So how is it that God created us to look so different from one another, but we were also created in His image? Well, what this passage in Genesis (Genesis 1:27) means is, God created us in His moral, spiritual, and intellectual image. We, as humans, are capable of reflecting God in our actions, because of how He designed us.



DAY 1 | CREATIVITY

That's a pretty huge responsibility if you think about it. God made us in such creative ways that we are all capable of this in different ways, thanks to our specific strengths and weaknesses. We can't all camouflage ourselves like a bird dropping spider, but we have a variety of ways we can serve the Lord and advance His kingdom. The point of being part of God's family, made in His image, is that we're all on the same team, and we all have the same mission: to see more people develop relationships with Him.



(Search through the passage to find the answer!)

DAY 1 | CREATIVITY

CHALLENGE

How can you reflect God's image today?

How did God creatively design you, and how can you use that specific design to advance His kingdom?

Remember, we're all different, but we are all capable of reflecting Him in our actions.

INSTRUCTIONS

Below is a word search containing some terms and vocabulary from today's devotional reading. There is intentionally no word bank. Just as God designed us all uniquely, different words from the word search will stick out to each of us. Reflect on how the words that stick out to you fit your creative construction. Happy searching!

R	E	F	L	E	C	T	I	O	N	U	D	A	I
A	D	I	N	C	O	M	P	A	R	A	B	L	E
S	T	R	E	N	G	T	H	S	I	S	I	I	O
S	I	I	I	M	D	H	E	E	S	G	I	R	B
N	O	C	M	O	E	D	S	P	M	N	I	S	N
D	I	G	A	R	T	L	L	I	A	G	L	S	A
L	D	I	G	A	F	I	R	C	I	I	N	E	L
I	P	E	I	L	I	L	A	N	L	L	P	N	S
S	C	P	N	D	G	T	A	A	D	L	U	E	P
C	A	P	A	B	I	L	I	T	I	E	S	K	E
I	I	O	T	N	G	I	S	E	D	I	P	I	C
A	I	I	I	E	S	I	S	E	N	E	G	L	I
G	N	E	V	S	P	E	C	I	F	I	C	S	A
I	N	T	E	L	L	E	C	T	U	A	L	E	L

DAY 2 | JUSTICE

“So God said to Noah, ‘I am going to put an end to all people, for the Earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the Earth.’”

(Genesis 6:13)

Every great adventure movie has a hero or heroine up against an almost unimaginable evil. The odds always seem long; the bad guys seem to get away with so much death and destruction, causing us, the audience, to hate them more and more as the movie plays out. Then, at the height of the movie’s tension, the hero climbs out of the wreckage to deliver a fatal blow to the evil antagonist once and for all.

In Peter Jackson’s “Lord of the Rings” prequel trilogy, “The Hobbit,” probably the greatest good guy vs. bad guy fight is Smaug the dragon vs. Bard the Bowman. Smaug is a great and terrifying fire-breathing dragon, who has killed thousands of people over the years, just because he wanted to. He’s this overpowered, armor-plated beast who can fly and destroy whole towns, which he has just done in the movie “The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies.” But he has one weak spot on his belly, and Bard, who sees it, lets an arrow fly, killing the mighty dragon. The crowd goes wild! We love it when the bad guy finally gets what he deserves!

J.R.R. Tolkien, the author of “The Hobbit,” created Bard’s character specifically to kill Smaug because, according to him, no one else could do it. And we love the feeling of Smaug getting justice after years of tormenting innocent people.

Well, I’ve got some bad news for you...it turns out we’re Smaug. Well, we’re not fire-breathing dragons, but we commit a LOT of sin. And the more you learn about our history and our relationship with God, the more it becomes clear that we deserve a great deal more punishment than we get. But that doesn’t mean God is unjust. He surely gives us consequences for our actions.

DAY 2 | JUSTICE

In the story of Noah's Ark in Genesis 6, God explains to Noah why He decided to flood the Earth. It's because we turned out to be the bad guys this time! But don't worry; there's plenty of good news coming, and you'll really enjoy it if you like a redemption story.



What is the *BAD NEWS*?

(mentioned on previous page)

DAY 2 | JUSTICE

CHALLENGE

Who do you think of when you think about God's justice?

Are there people in your world today who are experiencing unfair treatment?

How can you pray for them right now?

DAY 3 | POWER

“While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. ‘Your daughter is dead,’ they said. ‘Why bother the teacher anymore?’ Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, ‘Don’t be afraid; just believe.’”

(Mark 5:35-36)

This scripture comes from one of God’s best lessons about His power, and how we ought to respond to it: with patience. But it’s not a lesson that many people realize is about patience. The story starts with Jesus getting off a boat and stepping onto the bank where a large crowd had developed. Crowds tended to form wherever Jesus was. Among them was a temple leader named Jairus, who had obviously been waiting for a while to see Jesus. I mean, he had to wait while Jesus’ boat came to shore. Then he had to wade through the crowd to get Jesus’ attention. When he finally did, he gave Jesus some urgent news: Jairus’ daughter was dying, and Jesus was her only chance at survival.

Can you imagine being patient in this scenario? Your loved one, maybe the person you care most about in the world, is sick and on the brink of death, and now you have to walk back to your house in order for her to be healed, after waiting for this guy’s boat to come in from sea. Jairus was probably just racked with excruciating anxiety.

As Jairus and Jesus begin their long trek back home, Jairus sweating nervously, probably praying under his breath, swearing to God that he’d become a whole new man if Jesus could just hurry up...someone grabs Jesus’ robe. It’s a woman on the street who needs to be healed. Jesus knows immediately what she needs and heals her. But in the time it takes Him to briefly stop, Jairus’ daughter tragically dies, and all hope seems to be lost, as Jesus’ decision to help the woman on the street seemingly costs Jairus’ daughter her life.

DAY 3 | POWER

But Jesus, undeterred, goes to Jairus' house anyway and tells her, "Little girl! I say to you, get up!" With that, Jairus' daughter, dead moments before, stands up and begins walking around!

CHALLENGE

In what areas in your life do you struggle to remain patient while waiting for God to act? The next time you're having a hard time waiting for something to happen, try to find the good work God is doing in you during that time.



DAY 4 | FORGIVENESS

“The Lord said to me, ‘Go show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress.’”

(Hosea 3:1a)

Hosea was a prophet of Israel, meaning he was a well-respected member of society and had a special connection with God. His wife, Gomer, left him to be with other men, which, in ancient Jewish society, would mean that she brought shame to their whole family and wouldn't be allowed back in Hosea's sight after that indiscretion.

Adultery, or “cheating” as we call it, is one of those things that typically ruins relationships. Many of us have experienced what cheating can do to a family; most often it leads to divorce. In fact, according to research firm YouGov, over half of Americans report that they have been cheated on at some point during their lives. That's why the U.S. divorce rate is so high; the U.S. Census Bureau in 2022 reported that almost 40% of marriages end in divorce. And since the start of the COVID pandemic in early 2020, that number has been on the rise. Infidelity (cheating) was among the three most common reasons listed for divorce.

So how did Hosea manage to forgive his wife for infidelity numerous times? The truth is, he not only forgave her, but she had been sold into slavery, and he used his own money to purchase her freedom. This is a beautiful picture of the way Jesus purchased our freedom on the cross some 800 years later. In order to understand Hosea's reasoning, you have to understand God's. God reminded Hosea that He had loved the Israelites, even though they spent generations turning from him. That's because love—at least the way God defines it—is not a feeling, but an action. It's, quite simply, doing what's best for another person, whether it feels good or not.

DAY 4 | FORGIVENESS

That's what God did for Israel. It probably didn't feel good to keep choosing them for a special place in His kingdom, even though they denied Him, but He did it anyway. That's what Hosea did for Gomer. It didn't feel good for him to purchase her freedom even after she'd betrayed him many times, but he did it anyway. And that's what Jesus did for us. It didn't feel good for Him to go to the cross for the same people who mocked and ridiculed him, but, of course, that's what He did anyway because of His love for us.

**BUT HE
DID IT
ANYWAY...**

CHALLENGE:

If Jesus can forgive the entire world's sins, even the sins of people who don't believe He is who He says He is, then you can forgive those who've wronged you. Pray this week about a specific person from whom you've been withholding forgiveness. Write their name on the brick wall however creatively you'd like!

DAY 4 | FORGIVENESS

FORGIVENESS

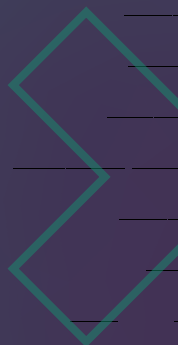
PART

2



*Jealousy and Envy // Rebellion
Lust // Wrath and Vengeance // Self Righteousness*

SIN, AND THE CHARACTER OF PEOPLE



DAY 5 | JEALOUSY & ENVY

“Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.”

(Genesis 37:3-4)

Have you ever had “haters?” Barbara Corcoran, business mogul and former star of ABC’s “Shark Tank,” once said, “You’re going to inspire envy and criticism if you’re super successful at what you do...I learned early on, the more people bad mouth you, the more jealous they are.” This was true in the Bible’s Old Testament story of Joseph and his brothers.

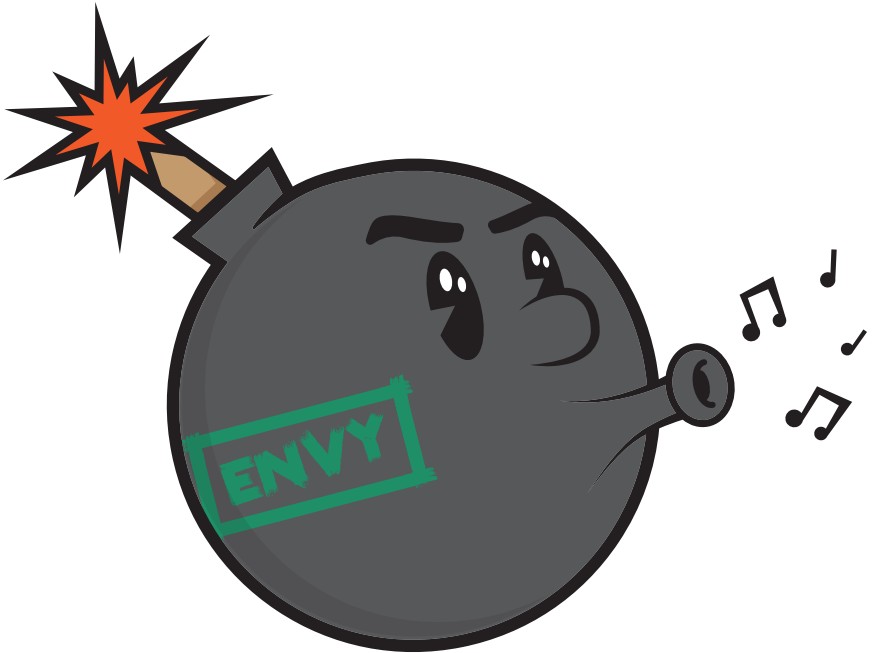
Joseph was the second-youngest son of Jacob (who was also known as "Israel" and was Abraham’s grandson and the patriarch of the modern Jewish faith.) Joseph was second only to his brother Benjamin. He was beloved by his father, but also blessed by God with the gift of prophecy; he had prophetic dreams, and his brothers didn’t appreciate them, as the dreams tended to depict the brothers as subordinate to their younger sibling, Joseph. Oh yeah, and Israel gave Joseph a really cool, multi-colored robe because he was the obvious favorite. This didn’t go over well either.

Well, as haters tend to be, Joseph’s brothers were full of jealousy and envy. They were so envious of Joseph, they actually planned to kill him and blame a wild animal, like a lion or wolf, for his death. Jealousy simply means an unpleasant and unhealthy rivalry, while envy refers to what happens when we long for someone else’s advantages. Joseph’s brothers were guilty of both. Have you ever been so jealous or envious of someone that you couldn’t even stand to look at them, and thought nasty, maybe even destructive thoughts, whenever they were around? If you have, you’re not alone.

DAY 5 | JEALOUSY & ENVY

Jealousy and envy are some of the most common conditions of the human spirit. Almost everyone sins in one of these ways at some point every day.

But, like Joseph's brothers, this sin can absolutely derail your entire life if you let it. Joseph's brothers actually debated whether or not they should kill him and ended up selling Joseph into slavery for 20 shekels! This equates to about \$5...in other words, not enough to purchase a human being! At the end of the day, Joseph triumphed over his haters; he survived slavery and became an advisor to the Egyptian Pharaoh. His prophetic dreams about his brothers bowing down to him even came true!



DAY 5 | JEALOUSY & ENVY

CHALLENGE:

Humans are all prone to feelings of jealousy and envy. But we're all blessed in different ways, at different times throughout our lives. How can you remind yourself to avoid this sin and count your own blessings instead? What if you've got "haters?" How do you keep them from derailing your spiritual walk?

Write your blessings in the categories below!

FAMILY

FRIENDS

LIFE

GOD

DAY 6 | REBELLION

“The word of the Lord came to Jonah, son of Amittai: ‘Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.’ But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish.”

(Jonah 1:1-3a)

Rebellion isn’t always a bad thing. In “Star Wars: A New Hope,” the evil galactic empire has a stronghold on the entire galaxy, and if it weren’t for a tiny little upstart rebellion, led by a few unlikely heroes, evil would reign supreme. Many of our most successful modern democracies, including that of the United States, were jump-started by rebellion. Social injustices throughout history, like racial and sexual inequality, have seen radical changes thanks to rebellions, both peaceful and not-so-peaceful.

But that’s not the type of rebellion we’re talking about here. People have a rebellious spirit. We are prone to do the opposite of what we’re told. And when we’re told something unjust or unfair, that spirit can propagate the greater good; however, when we use our natural inclination toward rebellion to disobey God’s directions, disaster tends to ensue. Don’t believe me? Check out how Adam and Eve fared after disobeying God’s orders to avoid eating fruit from the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1)!

Jonah is another perfect example of how disobeying God can lead to calamity. Jonah was a prophet of God, revered among his peers as someone close to the Lord, and knowledgeable of the Lord’s plans. Prophets like Jonah were known as people who could communicate directly with God and knew His will better than anyone else. That was literally their job!

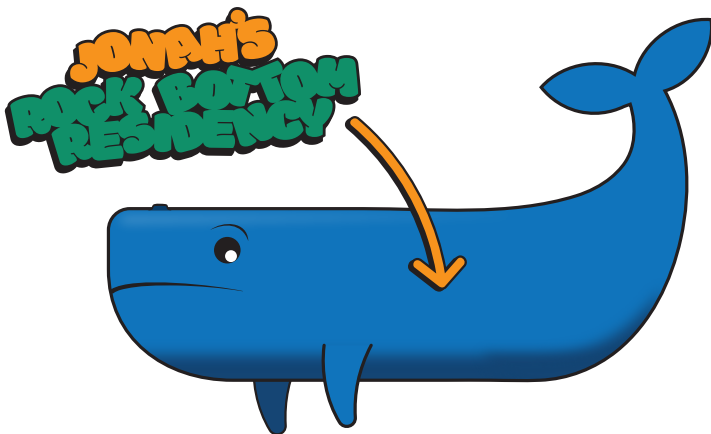
So Jonah, at the very beginning of his story, hears a clear instruction from God: go to Nineveh and warn them about their wicked behavior. But Nineveh must’ve been a pretty unsavory

DAY 6 | REBELLION

place because Jonah's immediate reaction was to disobey God and instead jump on a ship bound for Tarshish. If you're familiar with the story at all, God was having none of this; He promptly sent a storm to Jonah's ship. His shipmates had to throw him into the sea to keep from capsizing. God still wasn't finished and sent a "huge fish" to swallow Jonah, where he stayed for three days and three nights. Finally, the fish "vomited" Jonah onto dry land. Yuck!

So Jonah's rebellious spirit led him to literally rock bottom... the rock bottom of a giant fish's slimy belly! And if you read on, even though Jonah figured out how to follow God's directions, he did so begrudgingly and without a joyful heart, and the results never quite worked out how they probably could have.

Rebellion is great...sometimes. But rebellion against our teachers, bosses, parents, or other authority figures in our lives usually leads to heartache. Rebellion against God can be absolutely ruinous, as the story of Jonah helps to remind us. Even though it may seem easier to contradict God's authority than follow it, that contradiction is never good for our souls.



**REBELLION
AGAINST
GOD
=
RUN**

DAY 6 | REBELLION

SELF-DESTRUCT

REBEL

CONTRADICTION

SOMETIMES

WE REBEL

AGAINST GOD'S AUTHORITY

AND DISOBEY

DAY 7 | LUST

“You have heard it was said, ‘do not commit adultery.’ But here is what I tell you: do not even look at a woman in the wrong way. Anyone who does has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

(Matthew 5:27-28)

There are a few dictionary definitions of “lust.” But the one most discussed in the Bible is the top definition on dictionary.com: “an intense sexual desire or appetite.” Sex is not a sin. In fact, God encourages sex between a man and woman within the context of marriage. It can be a beautiful thing. An amazing, Godly display of affection, and quite frankly, the way we all came to exist here on Earth! However, as is the case with almost anything, an obsession with sex, always leads to destruction. Look around yourself if you don’t recognize lust as a societal problem. Check your social media feeds, your friends’ texts to you, and just about any advertisement images you see on the websites you visit. Pornography sells, and it has a pervasive grip on young people and old people alike, because lust is an easy trap for the enemy to set for all of us. It equates to using people for satisfaction and focusing on the pleasures of our flesh rather than focusing on pleasing God, which, quite honestly, doesn’t always feel as good.

Check out the numbers: According to CNBC, over 30,000 people are watching porn on the internet right this second. 3 million dollars are being currently spent this very moment on porn. Every day nearly 40 brand new pornographic videos are being created just in the U.S., and over 100,000 porn searches for child pornography are received. If lust is a weapon of the enemy, he’s winning this battle!

The Bible has plenty to say about lust, but no story is more famous and poignant than King David (yes, the guy who slayed Goliath) and his sexual obsession with Bathsheba.

DAY 7 | LUST

“even to look at a woman the wrong way is *adultery.*”

- *Jesus*

She was really nice looking, a “10” you might say. David saw her bathing, and that set his lust into full crazy mode. Unfortunately, Bathsheba was married to one of David’s soldiers, Uriah, and because David was king, he was able to not only get everything sexually that he asked for from Bathsheba, but once she became pregnant with David’s child, the king was also able to send Uriah away to the front lines of battle, where he was killed in combat. The most important part of this story is the very last sentence of the narrative: “but the thing David had done **displeased the Lord**” (2 Samuel 11:27b).

You might think the Bible doesn’t address pornography specifically, but Jesus very much talks about it in the gospel of Matthew when He tells us, “even to look at a woman the wrong way is adultery.” ***Sheesh!*** So, the standard is pretty high! The men and women who portray sex acts in pornographic videos and images are, in fact, real people. They are someone’s father, mother, brother, sister, husband, or wife. They are children of God, whether they know Him yet or not. So, by definition, Jesus tells us we are committing a sexual sin if we so much as view pornographic materials. And every time we succumb to this temptation, the devil, our enemy, wins a little bit of our hearts.

DAY 7 | LUST

CHALLENGE:

Do you struggle with lust? The next time you're tempted, meditate on Matthew 5:27-28 and ask God to help you redirect your thoughts. Remember, temptation isn't sinful; even Jesus was tempted. But sin occurs when we act on our temptations.

TEMPTATION
ISN'T
SINFUL.
ACTING
ON IT IS!

DAY 8 | WRATH & VENGEANCE

“Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom comes swiftly.”

(Deuteronomy 32:35)

Vengeance is one of the most common story ideas in Hollywood. Almost every action movie uses the vengeance story element as a motivator either for the hero or the villain. A good example is throughout the Marvel Cinematic Universe. You can see this play out in many MCU films, but one of the most famous and critically-acclaimed examples is the movie “Black Panther.” In the 2018 blockbuster, a young man named N’jadaka seeks revenge for his father’s murder.

In the backstory, T’Challa’s (the Black Panther’s) father kills N’Jadaka’s father, orphaning N’Jadaka as a child. He eventually grows into the villain Erik “Killmonger” Stevens, a trained assassin singularly obsessed with taking over the land of Wakanda and enacting his revenge upon T’Challa’s bloodline. While Killmonger’s vengeance seemed righteous to him, his nasty attitude and the way he bullied T’Challa and the Wakandan people made us as an audience fall in love with the idea of T’Challa’s own vengeance! And, of course, the payoff for us at the end was the good guy, T’Challa, dug himself out of the mud to take back his rightful place as the Black Panther.

As this film demonstrates, no matter which character with whom you identify, there’s usually a vengeance story line for you out there! Jesus’ most enthusiastic disciple, Simon Peter, knew something of vengeance and wrath or extreme anger. Like many Jews of the time, he hated his Roman oppressors, and would do anything to prove that he was Jesus’ most-trusted ally.

So the night before His crucifixion, when the Roman soldiers came to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter jumped to His defense, slicing off one of the soldiers’ ears!

DAY 8 | WRATH & VENGEANCE

How does Jesus respond to this rash act of revenge-fueled violence? Well, He heals the soldier's ear immediately, of course! You can almost see Him, God in the flesh, turn to Peter after this act and recite His Father's words, as told to the prophet Moses in Deuteronomy, "vengeance is mine, not yours!"

As Killmonger and Peter both learned, wrath will lead to your downfall. It is in God's time, and for His reasons, that vengeance shall be enacted upon your enemies. Don't forget that the next time you're angry and think a person may be getting away with something they shouldn't.



DAY 8 | WRATH & VENGEANCE

CHALLENGE:

Make a list of people in your life who you think deserve to be punished for something they've done to wrong you or one of your friends or family members. Then pray for healing, asking God to release you from the clutches of wrath, so that you can make peace with Him dealing out vengeance as He sees fit, even if that means not at all.

YOUR LIST:

YOUR PRAYERS FOR THEM AND YOURSELF:

DAY 9 | SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth. So you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

(Matthew 23:27-28)

Have you ever met a self-righteous person? Maybe you are a self-righteous person! Self-righteousness means that you believe yourself more important or morally superior to others. This characteristic tends to run rampant among Christians, especially those who've attended church for a long time. It's like the more we think we know about the Bible and Christianity, the better we think we are than others who aren't quite as well-versed. This was no different during Jesus's lifetime.

The Pharisees were a group of first-century Jewish social leaders who claimed “Mosaic authority” for their interpretation of Jewish religious laws. This meant that they taught that their interpretation of all the Jewish historical rituals was the only viable one, and they were very intimidating to average Jews of the time, who feared persecution if they disagreed or spoke out against the Pharisees.

Jesus, of course, the disruptor that He was, felt none of this tension and spoke out against them all the time; in fact, He sort of called them out! But don't worry, they needed it. They were probably the most self-righteous people around.

“It's like the more we think we know about the Bible and Christianity, the better we think we are than others who aren't quite as well-versed.”

DAY 9 | SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

In fact, Jesus called out the Pharisees so much that there's a whole Biblical catalogue of all the ways He did it called the "Woes of the Pharisees." The problem was, they were always following Jesus around like they were obsessed with Him, but not in a good way. They were always trying different schemes and logical traps to get Jesus to contradict Himself, one of the Jewish laws, or worse, one of the Roman Empire's laws. Their accusation that Jesus contradicted Caesar, it turned out, would eventually lead to His arrest and death sentence.

The gospel of Matthew contains a healthy section of criticisms Jesus levied against the Pharisees. It's a sermon-type environment, and, like all His sermons, there were plenty of Pharisees in the actual audience, so imagine how hostile this scene probably was. At the beginning of His sermon, Jesus tells the audience to be sure to do what the Pharisees say, but not what they do. This illustrates that Jesus was not an insurrectionist (someone plotting to overthrow the government), the crime for which He was eventually accused and sentenced to die on a cross, but He also had no problem telling the truth about injustice. The biggest injustice the Pharisees propagated was convincing people that they were the moral authority and, whether they said this or not, the only ones worthy of God's love. Jesus vehemently disagreed, comparing the Pharisees to a "whitewashed tomb." A whitewashed tomb, Jesus said, was pretty to look at on the outside, but full of death and decay on the inside, like any other tomb. Indeed, the Pharisees looked like they were following all the laws of Moses, but inside their hearts they were just as messy as all the sinners they condemned and punished for law breaking.

How many of our friends have been turned off and will never attend church, or worse, get to know Jesus at all because of our self-righteousness? For some of us, it's time to examine ourselves and stop being "whitewashed tombs."

**“I WANT TO BE
SELF-RIGHTEOUS.”**

**SAID NOBODY
EVER!**



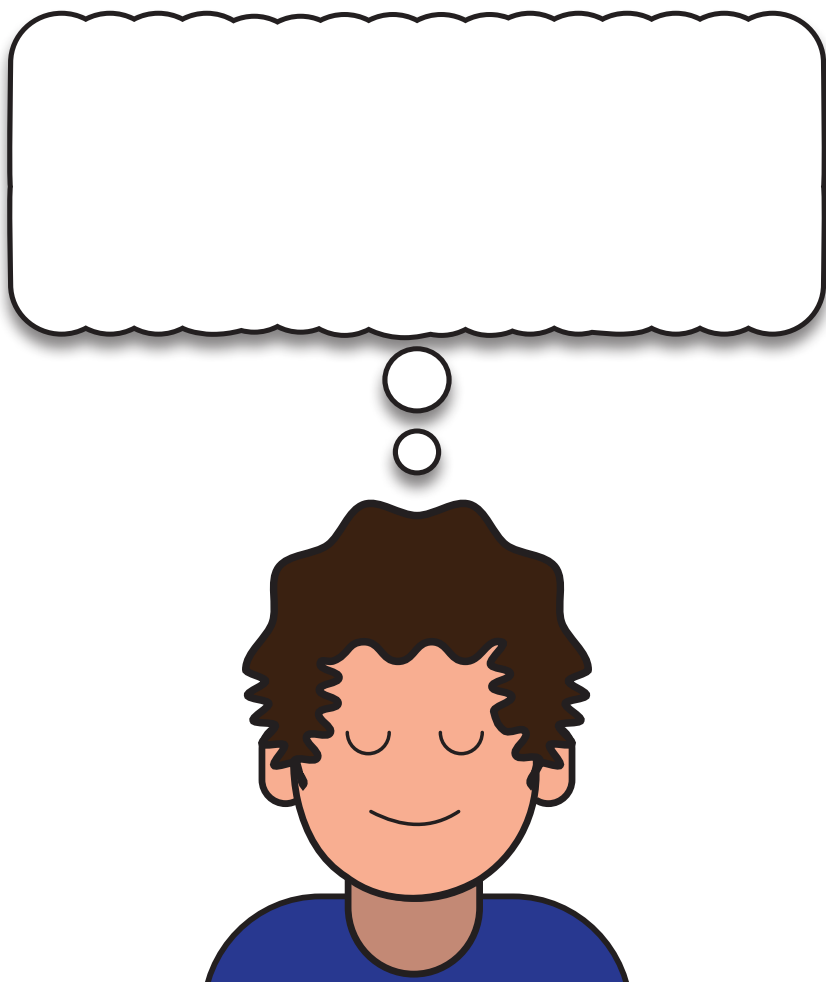
DAY 9 | SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

CHALLENGE:

Meditate on times where you have been self-righteous. Put yourself in the position of someone who does not know Christ and think of them the next time you're tempted to act like a "know-it-all."

Want to Know More?

Check out the book, "You Might Be a Pharisee if..." by R.T. Kendall.



PART

3



The Fall // The Old Covenant // The Sinful Nature

WHY DO WE NEED A LIVING SACRIFICE?



DAY 10 | THE FALL

“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.”

(Genesis 3:6)

IN THE BEGINNING

God made man and woman to watch over His creation. The first people, Adam and Eve, resided with God in His perfect garden, and for a whopping half a chapter, they lived there in perfect harmony. Then a deceptive, talking serpent convinced Eve to take fruit from the Tree of Knowledge against God’s command (many scholars believe this serpent was possessed by Satan himself). The rest is the mess we’re currently dealing with. The Bible refers to this big screw up as “The Fall.” Things were perfect, we fell out of grace due to a bad decision, and now, (almost) forever, things are broken.

Wait, what? So Eve messed up everything for everyone? Not exactly. Eve may have succumbed to the enemy’s temptation to disobey God and take the fruit, but where was Adam during this enormous indiscretion? It’s funny to imagine him taking a nap somewhere, not spending quality time connecting with his wife where he ought to have been.

DAY 10 | THE FALL

Then, once God asked Adam if he had taken the fruit, Adam, supportive husband that he was NOT, threw his wife, Eve, under the bus. In fact, he back-handedly threw God Himself under the bus with his reply: “The woman you put here with me, she gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it.” (Genesis 3:12) Yeah, Adam, way to own up to your responsibilities! God’s reaction was certainly a big one. He kicked them out of the garden and took away the immortality they would have enjoyed had they obeyed.

The question you might be asking is, how could the first people have made a mistake that ruined literal perfection for the rest of us, for the rest of eternity? Like, I’m not Adam or Eve. Why do I have to pay for what they did wrong? Unfortunately, if you’ve ever made a mistake, you’re just following in your ancestral footsteps. Sorry, but it’s true. Mistakes are in your bloodline. Your family tree is just covered with imperfections.

So we’re not perfect. Thankfully, that’s out of the way. What’s the more relevant question then? Why would God make us like this if He knew we’d be prone to mistakes?

Author Donald Miller once compared our relationship with God to a family dinner, with God (the father) at the head of the table. How weird and awkward would it be, Miller noted, if the father just controlled all the family members’ actions for them? He would point and tell each person when it was time for them to take a bite of food or share about their day. That’s not a relational God, but a task-mastering, micromanaging, controlling God. That’s simply not how He operates. God gave Adam and Eve free will to choose whether to believe the serpent and succumb to the temptation, just as He gives us freedom to choose. He’s not a puppeteer. He’s a caring Father, and, like a caring father, He desires for us to use that powerful tool, free will, to choose a relationship with Him.

DAY 10 | THE FALL

CHALLENGE:

How have the mistakes in your life defined your future? Journal about some things you wish you'd have done differently and pray to hand God your regrets.

DAY 10 | **THE FALL**

GOD IS NOT



A PUPPETEER

DAY 11 | THE OLD COVENANT

“If you will fear the Lord and serve him and heed His voice and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God, it will be well; but if you will not heed the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you and your king.”

(Samuel 12:14-15)

THINGS WE DON'T LIKE:

VEGETABLES

BED TIME ZZZ

EXTRA EFFORT

FOLLOWING RULES

DAY 11 | THE OLD COVENANT

Have you ever been given a conditional rule? Maybe when you were little, your parents told you, “If you eat your vegetables, you can have dessert.” Or maybe you’ve worked a sales job that paid with commission, meaning your pay depended on your performance. Conditionality is a typical convention of the human experience, and the same was true with the ancient Jews, who are our ancestors and the first practitioners of our faith.

Because we modern Christians tend to discount the relevance of our Jewish history, we often forget that God Himself used a very conditional arrangement with them, His own chosen people. This was called “the old covenant,” and you can find it throughout the Old Testament of the Bible. Essentially, the short version of the old covenant goes like this: “You Jews get to be my chosen people, with all the benefits that entails, as long as you follow all of my rules.”

Did you catch the caveat? As long as you follow all of my rules...

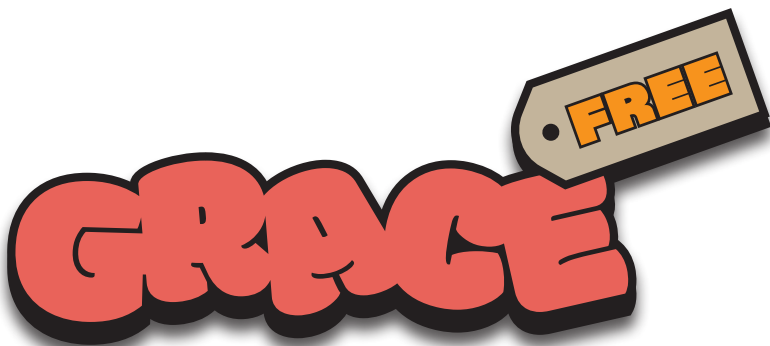
Here’s the problem: we don’t like vegetables. We don’t want to go to bed on time. We don’t like putting in all the extra time, effort, and sacrifice it takes to follow all the rules. And Israel was no different. Talk about time...God expected Abraham and Sarah to wait until they were 100 and 90 respectively before they had their first son, Isaac, whose lineage can be traced all the way to Jesus. Effort? God wanted Nehemiah to rebuild the temple from the ground up, and he was expected to coordinate each part of that huge construction project with thousands of Jewish families. And when it comes to sacrifice, the Jews had that market cornered. God’s requirements for sacrifice were numerous and listed in painstaking detail in the Old Testament book of Leviticus. But like us, the Jews were disobedient, and each time, as they broke the conditions of God’s promise, they were punished.

DAY 11 | THE OLD COVENANT

Only instead of grounding the Jews or firing them from their jobs, God sometimes enacted generations of punishment upon them for not meeting His conditions. A new oppressor would show up to conquer and enslave them, or they'd be forced to wander in isolation for 40 years!

You may be thinking that this doesn't seem fair and maybe doesn't resemble the faith arrangement you agreed to. Well, you're wrong...and you're right. You're wrong that it isn't fair. God giving you a consequence for disobeying His condition is the definition of fair. But you're right that it may not be in line with what Jesus tells us; however, make no mistake: Jesus is both God and a man, but not just any man...a Jewish man. And as such, He understands and respects the history between His Father and the chosen people. Your faith as a Christian is inextricably linked to Jewish history.

Luckily, the condition God gave His people a few thousand years ago isn't the same condition you've been given as a Christ follower. Jesus only requires that you believe He died for your sins, accept His free gift of grace, and establish an ongoing relationship with Him here on Earth. That's it. No Levitical laws, no wandering in the wilderness, no temple building...just Jesus. Just wait and see what this new arrangement will look like in your life!



DAY 11 | THE OLD COVENANT

CHALLENGE:

The next time you make a mistake or a bad choice, and must deal with a consequence at school, work, or home, ask God to help you remain obedient. Remind yourself that despite your mistake, no matter how big it seems, Jesus accepts you. Pray for Him to transform your life so that you can learn from this mistake going forward.

<i>Mistakes I have made</i>	<i>How did I learn from them?</i>

DAY 12 | THE SINFUL NATURE

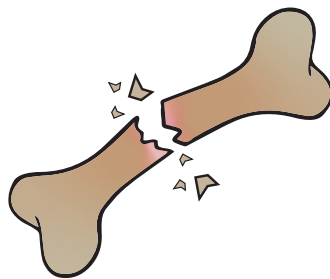
“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate, I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I, myself, who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.”

(Romans 7:15-19)

Gina, a heroin addict, reports that she used from the ages 13-33. In the year 2005 she was out partying and fell 20 feet off a building, breaking bones in her back and her wrist, but she was so high that she just stayed out the rest of the night. “In addiction,” Gina says, “you live in the past of what it was like when you were a kid, standing on the corner drinking or hanging out in the bar. It’s the only disease that convinces you that you don’t have a disease. It’s cunning, baffling, and powerful.”

(The Recovery Centers of America)

Such is our enemy, the devil. He’s cunning, baffling, and powerful. The Apostle Paul is the author of today’s scripture, and you can feel the frustration in his voice as you read his words: “I do not understand what I do!” Paul refers to the pull on his heart that goes contrary to God’s will as the sinful nature. And he speaks about it often in his letter to Christians in Rome. Thanks to the fall in the Garden of Eden, Paul writes that humans are, by default, sinful in their very core. He discusses man’s sinful nature, equating it to “the flesh.” As Paul tells it, our flesh, or things that make us feel good, dominates our thoughts and minds, causing us to do things we eventually regret.



DAY 12 | THE SINFUL NATURE

In his letter to the Galatians, he cites idolatry, sexual immorality, drunkenness, and many other “sins of the flesh.”

Things that make us feel good aren’t necessarily bad. But worshipping those things and seeking them over a relationship with God is definitely bad. The lie the enemy tells us, however, is that living in full community with God is hard and not worth it. On the other hand, if it feels good, the devil says it must be good.

Recovering addicts would disagree. Jules, whose drug of choice was alcohol, describes the power her addiction held over her. “My alcoholism progressed to the point in which I couldn’t get drunk anymore. The solution I found to deal with life had failed me. I had a miscarriage; I was so out of touch I didn’t even know I was pregnant. I felt alone, confused, and broken. My university asked me to leave, and everything came to a halt. It was the catalyst that led me to surrender.”

Gina, Jules, and anyone else who struggles with addiction all have the same thing in common. At some point, the sinful nature grips their hearts in such a way that breaking free becomes more difficult than just, as Paul writes, doing what they hate and will ultimately regret: succumbing to the addiction.

Maybe you don’t struggle with drug or alcohol addiction, but your sinful nature makes you pre-disposed to destructive habits such as lust, gossip and slander, overeating, or an obsession with technology or social media. Because we are each sinful by nature, we all risk prioritizing our flesh over our relationship with God.

It turns out you can love Jesus as much as is humanly possible and focus all your attention and thoughts on doing the right things, but you will never be able to do enough good to make up for your sinful nature. There is no sacrifice you can make that is big enough for such inherent nastiness. Piling up your good deeds, as Christian rapper Propaganda says, “is like spraying cologne on a corpse.”

DAY 12 | THE SINFUL NATURE

The good news is, Jesus doesn't expect you to be perfect. In fact, He asks that you come to Him with all of your burdens and lay them down at the foot of the cross, surrendering to Him so that He can carry the weight of your sin for you.

Want to Know More?

Check out Propaganda's poem "G.O.S.P.E.L" on YouTube.

Need a Resource on Addiction?

Call 1-800-RECOVERY to reach The Recovery Centers of America.

Need a Counseling Resource?

Check out Emmanuel Church's free counseling center at eclife.org/counseling.



List people in your life who can encourage and help hold you accountable for your behavior.

DAY 12 | THE SINFUL NATURE

CHALLENGE:

What does your sinful nature compel you to do that you wish you didn't? Make an inventory of your behaviors that you think may be "of the flesh" and not of the Spirit. Give them to God and, if you feel the confidence, confess them to a trusted accountability person such as a friend, student pastor, or small group leader.

BEHAVIORS	
FLESH	SPIRIT

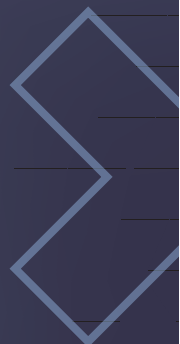
PART

4



*Joy // Generosity // Compassion // Vision
Loving the Unlovable // Faith // Paying the Price // Love*

JESUS: THE ONLY APPROPRIATE SACRIFICE



DAY 13 | JOY

“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.’”

(Luke 2:13-14)

Christian author and motivational speaker Bob Goff says correctly that God cannot be surprised, but the angels can. This is a concept we don’t usually think about, but it’s true. Angels are divine beings, but they’re not all-knowing and all-powerful like God. He created them, just like He created us, and just like us, they can experience feelings like joy and excitement. There may be no better example of angels experiencing pure joy than when Jesus was born. But why were they so excited?

From what we can tell through scripture, the angels have gotten to reside in Heaven with God and watch human history. They’ve even gotten to participate at times. They are obviously invested in our collective condition, so imagine how heartbroken they must be, watching us continually screw up over and over again, seeming to never learn and always suffering the consequences.

God often had His angels work in intricate ways to intervene on behalf of humanity throughout history. Check out the Passover story for more details on one such famous example. After the Passover, after all that elaborate work God sent his angel to do, the angel was promptly subjected to watching the humans he just saved wander aimlessly in the desert for 40 years as a punishment for whining. That’s right, they whined to Moses that they wanted to go back into Egyptian slavery! God, fair and just as He was, handed out a fair and just consequence, and the angel probably felt like all that work went to waste. Have you ever been there?

DAY 13 | JOY

When God was planning Christ's birth, I'd like to think that in their humanness, the angels were skeptical, but then when He finally arrived on Earth, they could do nothing to contain their joy and surprise.

Have you ever gotten the privilege of delivering amazing news to someone? Is there a better feeling than getting to be the person who tells a friend about an awesome win they're getting ready to experience? An amazing surprise coming their way? A blessing they weren't expecting? The joy on their face when they make the realization that they're about to experience something great is usually contagious; you can't help but smile, and you're only the messenger!

The angels who delivered the news of Christ's birth were saying effectively this: "You Jews have been waiting forever for a hero to come save you, and guess what...He's coming! Tonight! The rules are all going to change, and you're getting ready to experience a freedom like you've never imagined!"



DAY 14 | GENEROSITY

“Taking five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He gave thanks and broke the loaves. They all ate and were satisfied.”

(Matthew 14:19b-20a)

Think of your student pastor or your faith mentor or possibly the person who baptized you. You probably have a pretty close relationship with this person and respect them a great deal. How would you feel if something bad abruptly happened to them? That is exactly what happened to Jesus according to the gospel of Matthew.

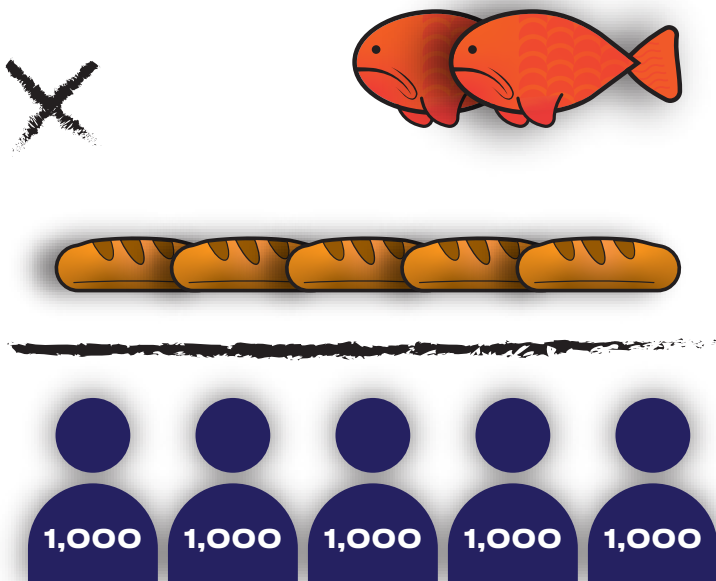
John the Baptist was not only the person who baptized Jesus, but he was Jesus’ cousin. So, it’s safe to say they had a somewhat special relationship. The story goes that John was imprisoned for speaking out against King Herod Antipas’ relationship with his wife, Herodias. Herodias was originally married to Herod Antipas’ brother, Phillip. Once, when visiting his brother, King Herod Antipas began an extramarital affair with Herodias. They each decided to divorce their spouses and marry one another. This went against Jewish law, and Herod, raised a Jew and in charge of a bunch of Jewish subjects in Judea, wasn’t too popular for his little indiscretion with Herodias (among other things). When John called Herod Antipas out, Herod had him arrested for speaking out against the government. Then, upon the request of Herodias and her daughter, Herod had John executed by decapitation.

Today’s story is about generosity, so why discuss John’s tragic fate? Well, it literally happened on the same day that Jesus performed one of His most famous miracles. Jesus was preaching to a large group of poor, starving people, after which he promised them all a meal. His skeptical disciples told him that they only had five loaves of bread and two fish, not even enough for their own party, let alone 5,000 hungry Christ followers. But as He always seems to, Jesus provided.

DAY 14 | GENEROSITY

He miraculously turned the small amount of food into an abundance, after thanking His father for the great bounty, and all were fed with some to spare.

But the sad part is, Jesus probably did this only hours after finding out His cousin, John (the man who baptized Him) had been unjustly murdered by King Herod Antipas. Imagine how focused on His Father's priorities Jesus must have been to redirect His sorrow and anger into grace and patience for 5,000 men (plus all their wives and children) who had no idea of the tragedy He was enduring. How many times have we used negative circumstances in our lives to create excuses to avoid the work God has for us? Jesus' example is to be generous, even if we are feeling down and discouraged.



DAY 14 | GENEROSITY

CHALLENGE:

Make a commitment of weekly generosity. If you are working, set up a recurring automatic gift. God asks us only to give 10% of what we earn back to the church (Deuteronomy 14:22).

However, your gift doesn't have to be 10%; it can be anything you feel comfortable giving. If you aren't working or don't have enough extra money to spare, consider donating your time every week to a volunteer opportunity, free childcare for a parent in need, or even extra chores around the house. An easy action step would be to join Emmanuel's Impact Team, if you haven't yet. There are always needs, especially in Kids Ministry.

INSTRUCTIONS:

Budget your average weekly income to see how much you will be able to give. Trusting God with what He is going to do with your finances is a distinct honor. Don't be alarmed by the size of the gift, but the heart posture behind it. Your generosity can make an unimaginable impact, no matter the amount of your specific gift. There are two sets of the table to budget different weekly income amounts!

INCOME	TITHE	BILLS	REMAINING
INCOME	TITHE	BILLS	REMAINING

DAY 15 | COMPASSION

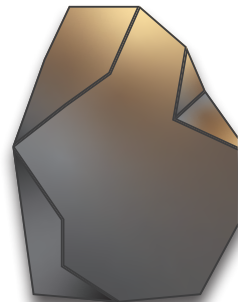
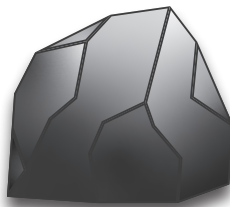
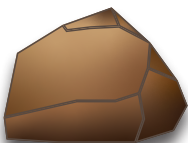
“When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, ‘Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.’”

(John 8:7)

Jesus made it a point to heal people wherever He went. He even did it probably when He had no intention of doing it; the Scriptures tell us that every time He came into towns and villages, people lined up, and He healed their sick. He did this out of compassion. We can imagine that looking at these poor people and seeing their afflictions just broke His heart. Remember, Jesus was God, but He was also a man, and He was a man without sin, meaning that He was full of empathy and never ran out of time to help.

But physical ailments weren't the only things Jesus healed. He also healed people's souls. Today's story comes from a time Jesus turned a situation on its head, as He often did. And, as usual, the Pharisees were involved, trying to trick Jesus into condemning Himself.

It all starts in the morning when Jesus approaches the temple, where He often enjoyed teaching and praying. But this time, the Pharisees are preparing to stone an adulteress. According to the law of Moses, they tell Jesus it is required because of her specific sin. “What do you say?” they ask Him. They know that if He advocates for this violent punishment,



DAY 15 | COMPASSION

He'll be exposed as cruel, but if He tells them the punishment is too cruel, He'll be in violation of the Jewish law.

Little did the Pharisees know, Jesus was not playing games that morning! After drawing something in the dirt (the Scriptures don't tell us what he was drawing, but it's funny to think it might have been just something silly to pass the time because He was so bored by what the Pharisees were telling Him), Jesus makes one of the most famous and poignant responses in the entire Bible. He tells them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." This disperses the Pharisees, who are defeated, probably muttering sheepishly to each other as they walk away. And then the real healing happens!

The woman, obviously publicly shamed, and feeling as exposed, broken, and unloved as possible, is left standing there, alone with Jesus. After a moment, He looks up at her and asks, "Where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She replies, "No sir," and His response delivers the healing her soul needs.

"Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin."

CHALLENGE:

As you work on your tasks this week, be mindful of how you can prioritize compassion, even while completing everything you need to get done. If there is someone getting in your way or challenging you, ask God for the compassion you need to treat them with love that reflects Jesus.

INSTRUCTIONS:

We're all working toward goals, and sometimes challenging people stand in our way. On the road block signs, write the names of these people who may be blocking you from your goals and ask God to help you have compassion for them.

DAY 15 | COMPASSION

WHO IS IN MY WAY?

GOALS



ROADBLOCKS

(People)



DAY 16 | VISION

“If anyone causes these little ones – those who believe in me – to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”

(Matthew 18:6)

Jesus doesn't talk about children often in His ministry, but they are the subject of one of His most famous object lessons. The topic is brought up because the disciples, always stumbling over each other to determine which one of them was the best, point blank asked Him, “Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?” It's unclear what kind of answer they were looking for, but in some translations, they ask, “Who is the most important person in the kingdom of Heaven?” This implies that they thought there would be a lieutenant, or “right hand man” in Heaven with Jesus. But, of course, Jesus, always looking for an opportunity to not only teach but also challenge the disciples to think a little bit before speaking, turned it into a humbling lesson.

He found a child in the audience of people who seemed to always be in His orbit, and He brought that child forward, saying, “Unless you change and be like children, you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest...”

In Jesus' time, children and women were not valued very highly like they are today. There were no “equal rights.” Instead, unless you were a grown man, you were at best ignored most

of the time, and at worst mistreated, unless you were of noble birth or a part of a wealthy family. This child that Jesus calls forth is most likely a poor, common person,



DAY 16 | VISION

maybe tagging along for a day's chores with his or her parents.

Jesus chose a child as an example to show His disciples, and anyone listening that these earthly things we think are so important are really meaningless in the end. A humble spirit like that of a young child, who doesn't know enough to ask silly, ego-driven questions, is the only spirit capable of achieving the kingdom of Heaven. Jesus then adds an extremely important point. Not only are His followers to be humble like children, but they must pay attention to teaching the children. He goes so far as to say that if you don't teach them, and instead cause them to stumble, you'd be better off on the bottom of the ocean!

The next time you get a chance to positively influence a young person, take it. That young person may one day make extremely important decisions based on your example.



**FIRST LIEUTENANT
OF JESUS**

DAY 16 | VISION

CHALLENGE:

Consider serving in Kids Ministry, if you don't already. Jesus asks us to be like children, so we ought to spend time with them. He also asks us to keep them from stumbling. What better way is there to keep them from stumbling than to teach them on Sundays or during a summer camp?

Want to know more?

Check out season 1, episode 3 of "The Chosen," entitled "Jesus Loves the Little Children," for a fairly accurate depiction of Jesus and how He probably treated children during His time.

INSTRUCTIONS:

There are several ways you can serve in Kids Ministry at Emmanuel. Which of the following is your best fit? Check out eclife.org/impactteam for more info on signing up to serve.

KIDS MINISTRY SERVING OPPORTUNITIES:

Large Group Host
Small Group Leader
Kids Ministry Production
Worship
Supportive Services/Buddy

KIDS MINISTRY CAMP SERVING OPPORTUNITIES:

Worship Leader
Small Group Leader
Supportive Services/Buddy
Production

DAY 17 | LOVING THE UNLOVABLE

“On hearing this, Jesus said, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’”

(Matthew 9:12-13)

When Jesus first started assembling His group of 12 disciples, He called them from various walks of life. Like most able-bodied men of the time, they all probably had jobs, and the Scriptures tell us specifically what some of those jobs were. For instance, Andrew, Peter, James, and John, were all fishermen. Some disciples didn't necessarily have regular jobs, but the Bible tells us how they spent most of their time. Simon, for example, was a “zealot” (basically a protestor and borderline terrorist) and Judas was most likely a common thief. And Paul, who wasn't one of the 12 disciples, but who was probably history's most influential missionary, worked as a tent maker. But none of those professions, not even that of Judas the thief or Simon the terrorist, held a candle to Levi's despicability. Levi, otherwise known as Matthew (the same Matthew who wrote the gospel we're studying from today), wasn't a murderer, rapist, or child abuser...no, he was worse...he was a tax collector!

You see, according to Jews of the time, there was no bigger traitor than a Jewish tax collector, which is exactly what Levi was. The Romans employed Jewish leaders such as Herod Antipas to rule their Jewish territories, and, logically, most of the tax collectors they used were also Jews from those territories. It wasn't like working for the IRS today; many Jews suffered from extreme poverty, and they lived in fear as subjects of a cruel, tyrannical Roman empire. Compounding the natural feelings of bitterness this likely caused, tax collectors were paid directly out of the taxes they collected. So, in theory, whenever Levi wanted to line his pockets, he could simply charge the people from his community more in taxes.

Obviously, he wasn't the most popular cousin at the family reunion! In fact, you can tell how despised tax collectors were just by reading the subtleties in the gospel Levi eventually wrote. He says, in Matthew 9:10, "While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's (Levi's) house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples."



Did you catch that? "Tax collectors and sinners?" So, we can tell by the language here that while there were plenty of sinners to pick from at the dinner table, the tax collectors stood out and were in a class all on their own!

But still, there Jesus was, enjoying dinner with these despised, hated, unlovable characters. And the Pharisees wasted no time questioning Jesus' legitimacy. To them, He must not have been righteous Himself if He was willing to hang out with such terrible sinners. "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" they ask the disciples incredulously (Matthew 9:11b). And then Jesus drops one of the most explosive truth bombs in the whole New Testament when He says, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick" (Matthew 9:12b).

Jesus' point wasn't that the Pharisees were righteous or "healthy," and thus didn't need His salvation. In fact, it was the opposite. He was saying that we are all unwell. We've all sinned and equally fallen short of God's glory, whether we're murderers or we just cheated on our homework. It doesn't matter. Since the fall at the Garden of Eden, when sin entered our world, we've been sick. And there's no way we can cure ourselves; we need a "doctor." The tax collectors who pursued a relationship with

DAY 17 | LOVING THE UNLOVABLE

knew that about themselves, and thus they were blessed with the privilege of sitting down literally with God for dinner.

CHALLENGE:

Jesus doesn't label anyone. He invites us all into a relationship with Him, no matter what we've done. What are some ways you can emulate that attitude in your day-to-day life? Are there "sinners" that you know who just maybe need to feel welcome? Pray and journal about becoming more approachable to them. Write down their names and pray over them daily...you'd be amazed at what God can do!

WHO CAN I WELCOME?

NAMES

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

DAY 18 | FAITH

“So then he told them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.’”

(John 11:14-15)

“Then Jesus said, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?’”

(John 11:40)

The ancient Jews believed in the messiah. It’s a common misconception that Jews don’t think that Christ is coming back to save them today. Jews today don’t believe that Jesus was Christ, but they do believe Christ will come as a great king, uniting everyone. And it was no different 2,000 years ago. Ancient Jews idolized rich, powerful Jewish kings like David and Solomon. And they naturally assumed Christ, when He finally came to Earth, would be similar.

But Jesus, a humble carpenter who spent much of His life homeless and without many possessions, was nothing like what many of them had expected or hoped for. And when He performed miracles, He would often instruct people to keep quiet about them. And if people did make a big scene about the miracles, Jesus would remind the crowd that it wasn’t just His power that healed the sick, or blind, or even dead...but their faith.

Why was Jesus so against promoting His brand? If He was truly the Messiah everyone had been waiting for, God in the flesh with immeasurable power at His fingertips, why do everything on such a small scale? He could have healed everyone, erased every tragedy, reunited every family, and fed every starving child.

DAY 18 | FAITH

One of the most common arguments against Christianity from atheists is quite simple: Why would a supposedly all-powerful God, who is always working for our good, let all these bad things happen to us? And the answer can be found all throughout Jesus' ministry: faith.

Yes, faith. Jesus could have saved everyone and everything here on Earth, but He didn't because He wanted us to have faith to believe He was working for our good, even when we couldn't see it in action. Yes, we get to go to Heaven after we die as long as we believe in Him, and when we get there the suffering we have had to endure here will be a distant memory. So let's get back to that "as long as we believe in Him" clause. Having faith that He is who He says He is can only be developed when we believe without seeing. After His resurrection, Jesus even tells His disciple Thomas, "because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who believe without seeing." (John 20:29)

One of the most amazing stories in the entire Bible is the story of Jesus bringing Lazarus back from the dead. Lazarus was close with Jesus; his sisters were Jesus' good friends Mary and Martha. Jesus is described as "loving" Lazarus, which probably meant they were very good friends. And to this point in His ministry, Jesus had raised a little girl from the dead (Jairus' daughter found in Mark 5, Matthew 9, and Luke 8). But she had only been dead for a very short period. By the time Jesus gets to Lazarus, he'd been in the grave for four days! It even says he was starting to decompose and smell bad!

As was usually the case when Jesus decided to do something seemingly impossible, no one seemed to believe He could really do it. But like always, He reminded them, just as He reminded Jairus, that all they had to do was believe. And, of course, Lazarus walked out of that grave! And so can you.

DAY 18 | FAITH

CHALLENGE:

Challenge: Read John 11:1-44. It really is an amazing story! Put yourself in the position of Mary, Martha, or one of the disciples who witnessed Lazarus' resurrection. How would you respond?

**HOW WOULD
YOU
REACT?**

CIRCLE ONE!



DAY 19 | PAYING THE PRICE

“Jesus said, ‘It is finished.’ With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

(John 19:30b)

Think of how you have gotten to know God over the past three weeks throughout these devotional readings. God made humans. He punished them for their disobedience. He taught them about patience, justice, and forgiveness. But they continued to sin. They were jealous; they rebelled against God; they committed sexual sins; they were self-righteous; and they hated one another.

They went over the line time and time and time again. They never learned. They never stopped sinning. God repeated the cycle of giving them freedom, watching them squander it, then giving them consequences and watching them fail to grow.



FINISHED...

As much as God desired a meaningful, personal relationship with them, He knew it had to be a two-way street. God could force people to love Him, but then it wouldn't be genuine. As strange as it sounds, He had to convince them of His love.

But how? How do you convince someone to love you when they don't even know how to love...when they don't even know what love is exactly? It was a logic problem so deep, only God could figure it out. He had taught them that sacrifice was their route to atonement. This means His chosen people understood that when they desired to be close to God, they had to offer some kind of sacrifice. This was their law and tradition, handed down by the forefathers of their faith from God. The different types of sacrifice were very specific.

DAY 19 | PAYING THE PRICE

They were animals, grain, or money. Each type of sacrifice had a different level of significance, but the basic idea was the same: God’s people wanted to become “holy” or closer to Him, and they could not on their own, so they sacrificed something. But, as we already discussed, it wasn’t working. They weren’t getting any closer. Their sins kept piling up and repeating. Their choices spiraling through the same patterns. They weren’t convinced. They were going through the motions. So, God took matters into His own hands.

However, God is perfect and His people are not (obviously). So, in order to atone for all of their sins, He had to provide an absolutely perfect sacrifice. But there’s no such animal, grain, or amount of money that meets that requirement. The only perfect sacrifice that could meet God’s standard was...God. He had to sacrifice Himself.

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ acted as the greatest persuasive argument for faith in God. God gave up His only son to the most horrendous death sentence the world has come up with. He did this because, in the end, God is the only thing powerful enough to erase all your past and future sins. And while the real-world consequences of sin remain, the shame, regret, and hopelessness of sin were stricken from your record some two thousand years ago when Jesus – God Himself – said, “It is finished.”



DAY 19 | PAYING THE PRICE

CHALLENGE:

Jesus' crucifixion is covered in detail in every gospel. Read each account and compare the stories. They can be found in Matthew 27:11-55, Mark 15:1-40, Luke 23:1-27, and John 18:28-19:37

INSTRUCTIONS:

In the chart, write the number of the event in the corresponding gospel where it is described. Numbers are allowed to repeat as some of the gospels may align.

P.O.V	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
EVENTS				
1. CRUCIFIXION				
2. PETER'S THREE DENIALS				
3. JUDAS KISSES JESUS				
4. BODY IS WRAPPED IN SHROUD				

DAY 20 | LOVE

“Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here!”

(Mark 16:6a)

Oftentimes, modern Christians get uncomfortable around the supernatural elements of their faith. Being nice to one another, being inclusive, even loving our enemies...those are practices we can get behind. But miracles? Those are trickier to believe. We don’t want anyone to call us “fanatics” or think we’re crazy.

But here’s the thing...Jesus did a bunch of extremely crazy things. And if He wasn’t the Son of God, He said some pretty crazy things. Like, crazy enough to get Him institutionalized today. On the other hand, if He was the son of God, He was just telling it like it was. But how do we know for sure that Jesus was who He said He was?

Pastor Andy Stanley once said, “If a guy can come back from the dead, I tend to listen to what He has to say.” And that’s really the central idea of the Christian faith. You can’t just love your enemies and follow the golden rule. In order to follow Christ, you have to believe that He went in the tomb dead and came out alive. It’s the ultimate comeback story, the moment in the movie where you get goosebumps because you realize your favorite character is getting ready to kick some butt. Because that’s what He did. All that sin that He offered Himself up as a sacrifice for...your sin...everyone’s sin...He literally destroyed it. He wiped it off your ledger. He took on the pain and the darkness and emerged on the other side, alive. And you became, for the first time, free...no longer a slave. But what if He would’ve stayed in that tomb? The sacrifice wouldn’t have been complete. Atonement couldn’t happen. The ledger would stay full, and you’d still be in there, rotting.

DAY 20 | LOVE

Of course, that's not what happened! The enemy wished Jesus stayed in that grave, but His love for you was too strong, so He walked on out. And that means everything.



DAY 20 | LOVE

CHALLENGE:

If you haven't done so, it's time to write down everything you're ashamed of about yourself and give it all to God. Take the paper and put it into a paper shredder. Throw it into a fire pit. Bury it in your backyard. Do whatever it takes to remind yourself that you're no longer held hostage by that shame when you follow Christ.

Want to Know More?

Read, or watch, Lee Strobel's "A Case for Christ."

INSTRUCTIONS:

What burdens remain on your heart that still need to go into God's "paper shredder?"



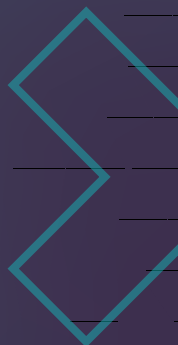
PART

5



Taking Action

DISCIPLES: WHAT DO WE DO NOW?



DAY 21 | TAKING ACTION

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on Earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.’”

(Matthew 28:18-19)

Well, here we are. You’ve completed all 21 days of this devotional. Along the way you’ve learned about the nature of God, the nature of people, and the ministry of Jesus Christ. What next?

That question is exactly what the disciples were probably asking after Jesus ascended to heaven, following His resurrection. Jesus remained on Earth, walking amongst His disciples, teaching them and hanging out with them, for over a month after the resurrection. Hundreds of eyewitnesses saw Jesus after His resurrection. There is actually a pretty accurate historical consensus that He walked among His followers after dying and being placed in His tomb. During this time, He spoke several times to His followers, giving them instructions on exactly what they were to do once His physical body was gone again. This time period must have been incredibly intense for them. Imagine being there, as one of Jesus’ followers. They gave up everything to walk around with Him for three years! Then, they watched Him get crucified; many of them felt hopeless after He died, even though He warned them that this would happen and He would return. Now that He had actually returned, they were most likely feeling a mix of emotions ranging from disbelief to utter joy, literally all the time. Think about it...they must have just been emotionally overwhelmed!

“One of the advocate’s jobs is to inspire us toward decisions that will bring us closer to God.”

DAY 21 | TAKING ACTION

Jesus left the disciples with the same thing He left us: the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is just as much God as is Jesus. Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as “the advocate” or “helper.” One of the advocate’s jobs is to inspire us toward decisions that will bring us closer to God, in the physical absence of Jesus Himself. Another job Jesus left His advocate to do is to call us to action!

Have you ever felt compelled to do something important to advance God’s kingdom, and you don’t know why? That’s the Holy Spirit. Maybe you got a “gut feeling” to go to camp or serve in Kids Ministry or help a friend. Maybe because of a hunch, you felt an urge to go one way instead of another, and in the process, you avoided a potentially disastrous situation. This may very well be The Holy Spirit advocating for you, pushing you along toward God, instead of away from Him.

Today’s scripture is called “The Great Commission.” Jesus’ last assignment for His disciples was for them to go make more disciples. Simple? Yes. Easy? Not so much. But the command exists today. Now that you are so well-versed in the Bible and how it relates to your daily life, what kind of disciples can you make?



DAY 21 | TAKING ACTION

CHALLENGE:

Pray that The Holy Spirit convicts you to spread the gospel and make more disciples. Ask God to reveal who in your life He wants you to pursue. Write that name down and put it somewhere you'll see often. The next time you're at school, think of ways you can relentlessly pursue that name you wrote down. Share Bible verses with family and friends, invite others to church and to Student Ministries. Don't give up...Jesus didn't!

MY RELENTLESS PURSUITS



**COME TO CHRIST
GROW IN CHRIST**

CONCLUSION

You have now finished your 21-day devotional. But what next? You are hopefully on fire for Christ, but you're also now equipped with the tools you need to take specific actions to grow even closer to God and advance God's kingdom.

Here are some possible next steps:

- Come check out Student Ministries at your local Emmanuel Church campus.
- Join a student small group and make an effort to participate in as many small group activities as possible.
- Contact your Student Pastor about applying to your local campus' Student Leadership Team.
- Sign up for the next student camp or retreat. See your Student Pastor for more information.
- Join the Impact Team, serving in Kids Ministry, Kids production, or many other serving opportunities around your campus.
- Apply to be a small group leader or assistant at the next summer Kids Camp or 56 Camp opportunity.
- Invite a friend to church and relentlessly pursue those around you who are far from God!
- Continue to read scriptures daily as you have in these 21 days.



Welcome to your 21-day faith journey! This devotional will guide you as you embark on your pursuit of the greatest hope the world has ever known. In this interactive journal, you will discover the good, bad, and ugly sides of growing in faith. It is packed with fun activities and relevant examples to assist believers, both new and experienced, in gaining a deeper understanding of Jesus and His will for your life.

However, the pursuit of a relationship with Christ doesn't stop after you finish this 21-day devotional. The hardest part of being a Christ follower is living out your faith every day. These readings and activities can seriously alter the trajectory of your faith journey if you take them seriously.

Heaven is celebrating your decision, and congratulations on taking your faith to the next level!

REJOICE!

