



# Morning Watch

20 STEPS TO GROW SPIRITUALLY

**Dean Ridings**

A BIBLE STUDY FOR MEN AND WOMEN



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“Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord,  
so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established  
in the faith, just as you were taught,  
abounding in thanksgiving.”

—Colossians 2:6-7



# What Others Are Saying

**Morning Watch** has been a profoundly timely and valuable resource. Rich in Scripture and sound in doctrine, this study serves as a powerful guide for believers at every stage of their walk with Christ—whether someone just beginning to explore who Jesus is or a seasoned believer.

I wholeheartedly recommend this Bible study for personal discipleship, one-on-one mentoring, or in larger group settings. I've witnessed its transformative impact—Christians freed from guilt, released from unforgiveness, and growing in authentic fellowship with one another.

It has truly been a blessing to watch hearts change and faith deepen through this study. —K.F.

**Morning Watch** is well designed to engage men and women seeking to study and discuss biblical principles. The topics and questions are applicable and relevant for these times. The challenge to memorize key verses in the Bible reminded me how important it is to know God's Word. —J.N.

An excellent study! **Morning Watch** has given me the foundational steps to renew and strengthen my walk with the Lord.

Prior to the **Morning Watch** study, I rose early each day, fed our cats and dogs, then read the online news. After starting **Morning Watch**, I continue to rise early and take care of the animals, but I now go to my quiet place and get into the Word. What a difference this has made in my daily life! —R.T.

Gathering together [as a small group] makes us strong, and the unity of the group grows each time we meet. The topics address so many of the day-to-day struggles we face—not just face but overcome as we walk the Christian walk. In times like these, we need the practical lessons of **Morning Watch**. —J.S.

*Morning Watch: 20 Steps to Grow Spiritually*  
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# Introduction

Welcome to **Morning Watch!** It's said that the “morning watch” begins at 4:00 a.m., when darkness is heavy, yet the sky slowly starts to brighten, the stars disappear, and the sun emerges.

It's also the time of the day when Jesus' disciples follow His example: “And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed” (Mark 1:35).

When we take that first step of faith and come to Father God through His Son, Jesus, we become Christ-followers—disciples or learners of His—as well.

Everything changes! Jesus said that all who have done so are “born again” (John 3:3). He added: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”

What's more, the Bible calls followers of Jesus “new creations”: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Just to make sure you've committed your life to Christ, here are a number of Bible verses that help us understand what some might call “the bad news” and “the good news.” They are from a plan called the **Romans Road** that uses verses from the Bible's book of Romans as a road map that leads to this destination—salvation!

- ➔ Romans 3:23 – *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. . . .”*
- ➔ Romans 6:23 – *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*
- ➔ Romans 5:8-9 – *“but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.”*
- ➔ Romans 10:9 – *“because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”*

- ➔ Romans 5:1 – *“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*
- ➔ Romans 8:1 – *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*

If you haven’t prayed in light of these verses, or if you think you may have but aren’t quite sure, why not pause and pray the following prayer right now?

*“Dear God, I know I’m a sinner, and I ask for your forgiveness. I believe Jesus Christ is Your Son. I believe that He died for my sin and that you raised Him to life. I want to trust Him as my Savior and follow Him as Lord, from this day forward. Guide my life and help me to do your will. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.”*

Now that you’re sure you’ve taken that crucial first step of faith, you’re ready to embark on this Bible study’s **20 steps to grow spiritually!** You’re ready to begin what’s called a **Morning Watch**, a daily appointment with God. As the psalmist David put it, “O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch” (Psalm 5:3).

As you go through this Bible study—on your own, alongside another Christ-follower, or in a small group—submit yourself afresh to God, calling upon Him to help you go ever deeper in your walk with Him.

It’s said that “God loves you just as you are, and He loves you too much to let you stay that way.” The Holy Spirit is with you; He’s at work in you. He will help you become more and more like Jesus every day.

As for you, you’ll want to put yourself in the very best position to grow as a Christ-follower. As God’s Word says, “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (Colossians 2:6-7).

Making a “morning watch” a regular practice will help you to do just that, and this Bible study will enable you to take those first foundational steps.

*May the Lord richly bless you on the journey that is the Christian life!*

STEP 1

# Path Light

## Getting into God's Word

*“For the word of God is living and active,  
sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of  
soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning  
the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”*

—**Hebrews 4:12**

Where would we be without the Bible? We would have an ache in our hearts that there's a God who made us, loves us, and cares about us, but we wouldn't know how to know Him personally. We wouldn't know how mankind once walked and talked with God the Father, up until the day man's sin put a barrier between the two. We wouldn't know His Son, Jesus, and the love that compelled Him to seek and save the lost. And we wouldn't know about the Holy Spirit, who leads us into all truth.

Ah, but we *do* have the Bible, the guidebook for all who desire to grow in our walk with God. Like so many faithful men and women through the centuries, Jesus' followers live in and by the Bible. It's not only our daily bread, it's the air we breathe.

We hear the errorless, infallible Word of God and do what it says (James 1:22). We make it our practice to study it, memorize it, meditate on it, for we know that it is in fact “breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). It is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path (Psalm 119:105). Yes, the Bible gives us the direction we need to walk in a God-pleasing manner in everyday life.

Who gave you your first Bible? What was the occasion? (If you don't have a Bible, where can you pick one up?)

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Talk about your attempts to read and apply God's Word.

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What's your favorite portion of Scripture, and why?

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### **Stepping Up**

Most of us own one or more Bibles. Sadly, for so many, it merely sits on a shelf collecting dust. Not for those of us who long to grow our walk with God. We make it a practice to get into God's Word every day! It truly is the Word of God, relevant to everything in our world today. The Bible's full of information about who God is, what He has done, and what He is doing. It's filled with inspirational encounters with the living God. *It's alive!* And it tells modern-day God-followers how to get and stay on the right path. It's the faithful Christ-follower's complete guide for everyday living, and when He uses His Word to open our eyes, we'll never be the same. The story of Philip and the Ethiopian is an apt example:

*Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:*

*"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth."*

*And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good*

*news about Jesus. And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?"* —Acts 8:26-36



How often do you read the Bible? What do you get out of it?

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Have you ever felt like the Ethiopian, reading but not *getting* God's Word? If so, how did God help you understand?

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Tell of a time when you were in the Scriptures and suddenly realized God wanted you to do something right away.

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### **Stepping Out**

So often we pray to know God's will when we would in fact know His will if we read His Word regularly. Sometimes He says it outright, "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not." Sometimes it's by example, such as the lives of Jesus' followers in early church times.

It's been said that the BIBLE stands for "Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth." How do you seek to know and follow these instructions?

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Since the Bible is from God and useful (2 Timothy 3:16), what parts are you least familiar with? What needs to change?

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How confident are you that the Lord could use you to help someone else benefit from His Word?

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### **Way to Grow**

Here's proof positive you're a Jesus follower, if you "hear the word of God and do it" (Luke 8:21). The faithful Christ-follower ruthlessly rids his or her life of anything that would hinder the seed of God's Word from taking root and flourishing. Consider memorizing this lesson's key verse, Hebrews 4:12, as a way of remembering to walk in God's Word every day.

### **Pause to Pray**

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### **Next Steps**

The following additional Bible verses will help you to go deeper on what it means to pursue God's Word:

- ➔ Deuteronomy 6:5-9
- ➔ Joshua 1:8
- ➔ Isaiah 55:10-11
- ➔ 2 Peter 1:20-21
- ➔ Psalm 119

## STEP 2

# God's Got This

## Trusting Moment by Moment

*“ . . . do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

—**Philippians 4:6-7**

The question for most Christians is not whether we worry and are anxious about things. It's how often we worry, and whether such anxiety prevents us from deeper relationships with God and others. We worry about money, school, family, work, church, neighbors. We get caught up in the anxiety of what tomorrow will bring. But think about it: Are we ever fully in control of our destiny? God calls us not to rest on our own understanding but in Him. Time spent with God is time invested in eternal matters of great importance.

As people who desire to grow in our walk with God, it's time we made Him Master—you know, the Lord-of-the-universe kind. Let's give Him control of our lives. Let's trust that He will lead us in the right and best way.

Difficult situations arise, but the All-Powerful One who conquered death can transform any situation for His glory and our good. Since we asked Jesus to be our Master, will we trust Him fully with our lives each day? Will we take Him at His Word, regardless of outer circumstances?

How often do you worry about things? What things?

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What is keeping you from giving these areas to God so that He can lead your life and be in control? Fully and completely?

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When have you failed to grasp that God's in control?

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### **Stepping Up**

Jesus knows our hearts will never be calm and content apart from Him. So He calls us to lives of trust and desperate dependence upon Him. He cautions it's easier to trust such things as money, position, and power, because the world's systems place value in things not of heaven. You'll find Jesus' perspective on all this in this portion of the Sermon on the Mount.

*“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

*“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”*

—Matthew 6:25-34



Notice how the story talks about food, possessions, and work. Describe times when these have caused you to worry.

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What's more important, more money or a better relationship with God?  
What are you spending more time pursuing?

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How much anxiety is caused by comparing yourself to others? Ask the Lord to give you His fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), especially joy, peace, patience, and faithfulness.

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### **Stepping Out**

Trusting God is a moment-by-moment walk that begins anew each day. Some days we walk confidently in faith. Other days we get tripped up, relying on our own strength and understanding. Every day we are free to choose to follow Him or resort to our old, natural, self-preservation ways.

In light of Jesus' words about trusting that God is in control of your life, if you're going to live in a way that honors Him, what needs to change?

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What's your plan for worry in your life?

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Is Jesus your Savior and Lord, the ultimate authority, owner, and master of your life? If you're not quite sure, what would your life look like if He were?

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### **Way to Grow**

The faithful Christ-follower walks by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). We know that all-powerful God the Holy Spirit lives inside of us and won't let us down. We believe—and we ask God to help us overcome any unbelief (Mark 9:24). Consider memorizing this lesson's key verses, Philippians 4:6-7, as a way of remembering to trust that “God's got this!” every day.

### **Pause to Pray**

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### **Next Steps**

The following additional Bible verses will help you to go deeper on what it means to trust moment by moment:

- ➔ Psalm 55:22
- ➔ Luke 12:11-12
- ➔ Philippians 2:12-13
- ➔ Hebrews 11:6
- ➔ 1 Peter 5:7

STEP 3

# Let Us Pray

## Talking with God

*“And this is the confidence that we have toward him,  
that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.  
And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask,  
we know that we have the requests  
that we have asked of him.”*

—1 John 5:14-15

You jump out of bed and into your morning routine. You shower, “dress for success,” grab a quick bite. Soon you’re out the door and into the whirlwind of everyday life. You sense something’s missing—*Someone’s* missing. . . . You haven’t connected with God. You’re an accident waiting to happen.

Amazing how we can take for granted that the God of the universe—the Alpha and Omega, beginning and the end—longs not merely to be on speaking terms but in a vital relationship with us! “Call to me and I will answer you,” He says to each of us, “and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known” (Jeremiah 33:3).

Start each day by trusting your life afresh to God in prayer, then keep the lines of communication open all through the day. Give everything, everyone, and every need to Him. Be a person of prayer, honest to God. Stay “connected” with your loving, faithful heavenly Father during the good and bad times of the day. He invites us to pray in different ways, from talking to singing to writing in a journal. It’s all prayer when it’s pointed to the Lord.

When do you tend to touch base with God in prayer? What do you talk about?

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God's Word tells us to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).  
What does that look like?

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Can you express unbridled emotion, such as great joy or fierce frustration, to God? Why or why not?

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### Stepping Up

There used to be a major roadblock between you and God: namely, sin! Yet God, in His love for and desire to have a vital, walking and talking relationship with the people He created, sent Jesus to "take out your spiritual trash" and demolish that barrier (1 John 1:9). Now God invites us to "draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). God's ever ready to hear what's on our hearts—we can be completely honest with Him. Whether we pray silently or aloud, with hands clasped or raised to the sky in submission, God is there, He cares, and He listens with an ear to respond for His glory and our good. As Jesus' words reflect, He expects us to pray!

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

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

*"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." —Matthew 6:5-13*



How many times did Jesus say “when you pray”? What do you make of it?

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What things did Jesus say to do and not to do when you pray?

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Look at what Jesus said His followers should pray for in what we’ve come to call the Lord’s Prayer. How many requests are for spiritual needs, and how many are for physical needs?

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### **Stepping Out**

Don’t be an accident waiting to happen. Make a plan to intentionally invite the Lord into your life first thing your feet hit the floor. Start your morning time with God (“quiet time,” “devotions,” “daily appointment”) with prayer, and then read the Bible and listen for the Author’s reply. (Did you know that the Bible is the only book where the Author is always with you and eager to talk to you about what He’s saying?)

What needs to change for prayer to become the priority you long for it to be in your life?

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It’s said that a balanced prayer life includes a time of Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication (ACTS). How might your prayer time become more balanced?

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How can your prayers better reflect the deepest desires and emotions of your heart?

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### **Way to Grow**

God longs to be in an abiding relationship with you (John 15:4-5). He will help you remove every roadblock in the spiritual realm to make that a reality. Remember as you request things, sometimes He will say “yes,” sometimes “no,” sometimes “wait.” Trust that your heavenly Father knows best. No matter what, keep your conversation with Him honest, open, intimate. Consider memorizing this lesson’s key verses, 1 John 5:14-15, as a way of remembering to pray every day.

### **Pause to Pray**

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### **Next Steps**

The following additional Bible verses will help you to go deeper on what it means to engage with God:

- ➔ 2 Chronicles 7:14
- ➔ Ephesians 6:18
- ➔ Matthew 7:7-8
- ➔ John 15:7
- ➔ Luke 18:1-8

STEP 4

# Fearfully & Wonderfully Made

## Tending God's Temple

*“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

—Romans 12:1-2

Some people live in all-out abandon when it comes to their bodies. They take physical adventure to wild extremes. They aim to *take that hill, ride that wave, run that race!* No doubt, walking with God isn't a “casual stroll.” Whether we're running a marathon, mountain biking, skiing or snowboarding, or engaged in such less strenuous outdoor activities as pickleball, disc golf, hiking or fishing, we love adding *life* to our years!

Yet all who seek to walk with God are keenly aware that our lives and bodies are not our own. God Himself has carefully crafted and graciously redeemed us. While the world tempts with things that ultimately destroy the body—drugs, alcohol, smoking, overeating, even couch-potato-living—Jesus' followers will have nothing to do with it. We dedicate our bodies to the Lord. We know we're living, breathing temples of God because the Holy Spirit lives inside of us. So we take care of our bodies and are not perilous about it. Daredevils? Hardly! Living the great adventure as a beloved child of God . . . *absolutely!*

How do you keep yourself physically fit?

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Besides everyday life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, what “adventurous activities” do you participate in?

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So your body’s a temple of God. What’s the condition of His temple?

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### Stepping Up

Jesus referred to the ancient holy temple in Jerusalem as inferior to His physical body as a holy temple. Later, all believers’ bodies were included as temples of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Think about it and take it to heart: What you do with your body affects how useable it is for holy purposes. In light of this, fill in the blank: “Since God lives in me, I will not do \_\_\_\_\_ to my body.” Paul the apostle reflects this as he speaks of the disciplined life—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually—all Christ-followers are to imitate.

*Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.* —1 Corinthians 9:24-27



This passage likens the spiritual quest with an athletic race. Having read this passage, how do the two pursuits compare?

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How often have you pursued “a crown that will not last” in life? What’s been your experience?

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What can you better do to discipline your body and “keep it under control”?

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### **Stepping Out**

We can’t all be world-class Olympic athletes, medalists, sports heroes. Let’s be honest, some of us tucker out easily at the Valentine’s Day dance or would have trouble making the church softball team! Yet we can discipline our bodies for peak performance. And we can make that our aim spiritually as well!

What’s your plan to stay in shape physically—including eating right and keeping fit?

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What’s your plan to stay in shape spiritually—making sure God’s temple remains pure and holy?

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What bad habit (or habits) is God prompting you to get rid of? Who can help spur you along?

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### **Way to Grow**

Take care of your body, for God the Holy Spirit lives inside of you! Be sure to worship Him and not the body itself. And remember, your body will carry you only so far—one day it will fail you. Still, determine to care for your body and live vibrantly for Him until you breathe your last breath. Consider memorizing this lesson's key verses, Romans 12:1-2, as a way of remembering to walk in a manner worthy of being “a temple of God.”

### **Pause to Pray**

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### **Next Steps**

The following additional Bible verses will help you to go deeper on what it means to tend God's temple:

- ➔ Romans 6:11-13
- ➔ Romans 6:19
- ➔ 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
- ➔ 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4
- ➔ 1 Timothy 4:7-8

STEP 5

# The Spirit-Empowered Life

## Obeying God's Spirit

*“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”*

—Galatians 5:22-23

We want to live the best, most blessed life. Never forget that the Source of such a life is God the Holy Spirit who lives inside of all who come to the Father through His Son. In this life we will face many obstacles—everything that goes along with living the victorious Christian life and taking back occupied territory from the enemy—yet don't go it alone. May Spirit power be your strength! What does this look like?

Great athletes often say that they never force themselves into game situations; rather, they “let the game come to them.” Once they get into the flow and rhythm of it, good things start to happen. So God calls us to face life and its skirmishes in His power, not striving to make things happen, but praying, trusting, and allowing Him to make things happen for us.

Remember that when the disciples walked with Jesus, they stumbled from time to time. But when they were all filled with His Spirit, He enabled them to overcome the mighty Roman Empire and establish His church! This universe-altering power abides inside and is available to Jesus' present-day followers who seek to walk with God moment by moment, day by day.

Okay, you've made Jesus your Lord. How do you “seek to walk with God moment by moment”?

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As you face daily temptations, do you call on the Holy Spirit's strength to give you the power to overcome it? What is the result of your call—or failure to call—upon God's Spirit?

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To what extent do you listen to the indwelling Holy Spirit's voice in your walk each day?

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### Stepping Up

In Romans 8, Paul speaks of a new power that's at work inside Jesus' followers, the Spirit of life in Christ. As Paul puts it, if we simply try to do right and avoid wrong, we still stumble and fall. Living God-honoring lives isn't something we "work up" or "make happen" by ourselves. No, faithful Christ-followers do not live our lives, work our jobs, or strive to make a difference for God in our own power. We simply yield. We respond to the Holy Spirit's leading. That's when He does what we cannot otherwise do: He enables us to walk in a manner worthy of the name of Jesus Christ.

*If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.*

*So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"* —Romans 8:11-15



In what ways do you catch yourself relying on your "do-it-yourself" life?

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How can you pursue the “back-from-the-dead” life Paul talks about?

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Tell of a time when you truly sensed God’s Spirit working in and through you, one of those benchmark times you come back to as a reminder that the Holy Spirit lives inside you and you are your Father’s child.

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### **Stepping Out**

It is impossible to live the Christian life in our own strength, ability, and power. Let’s make it a habit to give each moment of our lives to God, to do what the Scriptures say and endeavor to “pray without ceasing.” Let’s take God at His word and rely on the Holy Spirit to lead us as He deems best.

What needs to change if you are to die to sin and self and live by the Spirit today?

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Knowing the Spirit is in control, what difference does that make (or will it make) in your everyday life?

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How might relying on the Holy Spirit’s leading affect your prayer life?

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### **Way to Grow**

While every Christian is already “filled” with the Holy Spirit, pray every day for the Holy Spirit to “baptize” you afresh. Pray that He sits at the

control panel of the control room of your life, and that He not only works in but through you. Consider memorizing this lesson's key verses, Galatians 5:22-23, as a way of remembering to be Spirit-filled and Spirit-led every day.

### **Pause to Pray**

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### **Next Steps**

The following additional Bible verses will help you to go deeper on what it means to live life guided by God's Spirit:

- ➔ Zechariah 4:6
- ➔ John 14:26
- ➔ Romans 5:5
- ➔ 1 Corinthians 3:16
- ➔ Ephesians 3:20-21

# The Greatest Commandment

## Loving God

*“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.*

*For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.”*

—1 John 5:2-4

When someone asked Jesus what was the greatest commandment, He didn't hesitate: “Loving God” (see Matthew 22:37-39; Luke 10:25-37). It's a response anyone who grew up with the Scriptures would've given, directly from Moses: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart” (Deuteronomy 6:5-6). So how does today's Christ-follower make this a moment-by-moment reality? How can we truly love God in everyday life?

Out of deep gratitude for salvation through Jesus Christ, we aim to live “all-in-for-Him” lives. We know that to love God is to seek Him with all of our heart (Jeremiah 29:13), to trust and obey Him in small and big things (1 John 5:3). This radically affects our every move.

Think about every ounce of passion you've ever invested in all sorts of affections—romance, family, hobbies, cheering on your favorite sports teams. Now mix that together and express it all to God. Do that and there would be a mighty explosion of energy. . . . Loving God with everything you've got has to be something like that!

What does the world love? What do you love?

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Of all the gifts you've ever received, which one or ones are you most grateful for? Why?

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What kinds of activities are you involved in or things are you doing these days that truly reflect your love for God?

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### Stepping Up

Why is it that so many Christians live under the impression that the Christian life is free from problem or pain? Take a stroll through the Bible and look at the lives of men and women who loved God so much they pursued, trusted, and obeyed Him no matter what. Take, for instance, the apostle Paul, a man who loved the Lord his God with his all. Everyone who seeks to walk with God makes every effort to live a Paul-type life, as reflected in this passage.

*Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?*

*If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.*

— 2 Corinthians 11:23-33



To what extent does this passage speak of Paul's love for God?

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Think about everything that Paul endured, all that he went through. What kept him going?

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How does your love for God motivate you to press on even through tough times?

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### **Stepping Out**

A sure sign that you love someone is that you long to spend time with that person. Is God looking for more of your moments? A sure sign that you love God is that you carry out His commands. Do you know His commands? Does He long that you spend more time in His Word to better understand what He desires of you and how to live accordingly? Be a Christ-follower who takes God's Word to heart!

How does your life truly reflect your devotion to God? What needs to change?

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What would your life look like if people could tell just by looking at you that you loved God with your all?

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Is the Holy Spirit affirming or convicting you when it comes to the measure of your love for God and how it makes a day-to-day difference in your life?

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### **Way to Grow**

Can you imagine what heaven must have been like for Jesus before coming to earth, and what it meant to leave the comforts of heaven for life on earth? Jesus willingly left it all for the love of God and His love for mankind. He “humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (see Philippians 2:1-11). So today’s Christ-followers look to the Lord to find spiritual strength to obey God no matter what. May your love for God lead to obedience, and may He use you to do even greater works than the Lord Jesus did on earth while you yet have breath (see John 14:12). Consider memorizing this lesson’s key verses, 1 John 5:2-4, as a way of remembering to live a life that exudes love for God every day.

### **Pause to Pray**

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### **Next Steps**

The following additional Bible verses will help you to go deeper on what it means to love God:

- ➔ Deuteronomy 10:12-13
- ➔ Luke 9:23-24
- ➔ John 14:21
- ➔ John 21:15-17
- ➔ Philippians 1:20-26

# The Second Greatest Commandment

## Loving Others

*“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.”*

—1 John 4:11-12

Someone asked Jesus what was the greatest commandment. He quickly answered, “Loving God,” then added: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (see Matthew 22:37-39; Luke 10:25-37). What was Jesus getting at? What does “loving others” look like in the day-to-day life of we who long to walk with God?

Simply put, loving others is being “Jesus” to people—without consideration of their gender, the color of their skin, where they’ve been or where they are. It’s a deep, passionate care and concern for others that is ever giving and sacrificial. We’re called to “walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:2). Jesus loved others with open arms, nailed to the cross.

Once again, Jesus is our example for life and ministry: May we not merely love those who love us back but everyone in our lives, for God loves and values each one of them. We who have experienced God’s incredible love have so much love to extend to others!

Tell of a time when someone loved you at just the right time, whether or not you were lovable.

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What are some of the practical needs of men, women, and children in your family, city, and state?

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Describe how you endeavor to love others in tangible ways.

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### **Stepping Up**

Jesus didn't merely talk about love, He loved others—even to the point of death (Matthew 20:28). Remember, we're to be "Jesus in the flesh" to those around us. His mission is our mission. His love is our love. While there are many people in Bible times whose love for others reflects Jesus', the following passage spotlights two of them, Timothy and Epaphroditus. They well imitate the Master and are worthy of our imitation.

*I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.*

*I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.*

—Philippians 2:19-30



We honor all kinds of people in our society—athletes, actors, and the like. What kind of people do you believe deserve honor among men and women? Why?

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If there was no one like Timothy, what was so different about him over other people? Compared to the people you know, how many match up to Timothy?

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To what extent did Epaphroditus serve God by serving others? What did it cost; what did he risk?

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### **Stepping Out**

The second greatest commandment has great implications on how you treat others, no matter who they are, where they've been, what they've done. To whom does God want you to express His love, regardless of how unlovable they are? Think of those where you live, work, play, and worship. Perhaps you need to love someone “no one” loves, or thank someone who loved you when you weren't lovable.

In what ways must you grow in your love for people—family members, the needy, yourself?

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Make a list of people you see in a given day or week. What would it look like for you to truly show them Jesus' love?

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God loved the world so much He sent His only Son (John 3:16). He loved those in your life so much He sent you, a “little Christ.” How might He use you to love your neighbor to life (John 10:10)?

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### **Way to Grow**

The faithful Christ-followers in early church days—like Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus in this passage—cast the shadow of Jesus wherever they went, and those who didn’t know Jesus took notice. And so it is with you. Jesus says, “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). Every expression of love you show is Jesus loving others through you. Consider memorizing this lesson’s key verses, 1 John 4:11-12, as a way of remembering to love like Jesus every day.

### **Pause to Pray**

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### **Next Steps**

The following additional Bible verses will help you to go deeper on what it means to love others:

- ➔ John 15:13
- ➔ Romans 13:8
- ➔ 1 John 3:16
- ➔ 1 Peter 1:22
- ➔ Galatians 5:13-14

# The Devil Is Real

## Battling Evil

*“Submit yourselves therefore to God.  
Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”*

—James 4:7

You are a Christ-follower but may be far from living a victorious Christian life. You wrack your brain for the source of things that hold you back from a vibrant walk with God. The Bible says you can get a grip on your thought life, yet your mind wanders freely. You know God’s perspective on lying but sidestep the truth when it’s convenient. How easy it is to declare God’s glory on Sunday but deny His Son on Monday—maybe not with your words, but what about your thoughts and actions?

Truth is, there are three powerful forces dead set on taking you out, to keep you from living a life that honors God: the world, the “old man” of your former nature, and the devil. In our society, where our senses tell us what’s “real,” some scoff at the mere mention of Satan, demons, and hell. The Bible sets us straight: “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). The devil “incited” David to take a census (1 Chronicles 21:1), “prompted” Judas to betray Jesus (John 13:2), and “filled” Ananias’ heart to lie (Acts 5:3). If you give this “roaring lion” an opportunity, he will rip you apart, too. If Satan fears anyone, it’s the person who walks with God and trusts Him to successfully battle evil.

What are one or two things that keep you from living a God-honoring life?

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What would you say is your weakest link? Where are you the strongest? Why is it important to keep an eye on both?

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If Satan can influence the minds of David, Judas, and Ananias, can he influence your mind—and in so doing affect your behavior? Why or why not?

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### **Stepping Up**

Satan is indeed alive on the planet earth, and he is driven. He's a fallen angel who once lived in heaven, "till unrighteousness was found in you," and the Lord threw him to earth along with a third of the angels (see Ezekiel 28:11-17, Isaiah 14:12-15, Revelation 12:9). Pride and jealousy are at the root of the spiritual conflict: The devil wants to sit on the throne of God and be praised, worshiped, and honored as God. Since he cannot have what he desires, he will do anything within his power, however limited by God, to rob God of the glory due Him. He's set his sights on anyone with an inkling of a desire to serve God—even God's Son Himself! See how the devil attempted to subvert God's redemptive plan from the start.

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written,*

*" 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "*

*Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, " 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.' "*

*Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.' " Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, " 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.' "*

*Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.*

— Matthew 4:1-11



Why did the enemy believe that Jesus was vulnerable to temptation?

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How did the devil attempt to outwit Jesus? How did Jesus respond?

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What if the devil tried to twist Scripture on you—would you be prepared? How can you be better prepared?

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### **Stepping Out**

Notice that the devil attacked Jesus at the core of His identity—the very Son of God. His tactics haven’t changed. He still attacks the faithful Christ-follower at the core of his or her identity. Remember *who* you are in Christ—“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Remember as well *whose* you are—*you are a child of God!* Take note of where the enemy challenges you at the core of who you are in Christ, and find Scripture to counter each attack.

When are you most vulnerable to temptation? What might you change to better protect yourself in this area?

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God has given you spiritual armor for the spiritual battle (see Ephesians 6:10-17). How would putting on this armor every day help you to be more victorious?

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That old excuse “the devil made me do it!” avoids personal responsibility. How can you be more aware of the enemy’s attempts to trip you up? What practical steps can you take?

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### **Way to Grow**

Prepare your heart to battle evil. Pray along with the Psalmist, “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” (Psalm 139:23-24). Make praise and worship a daily activity (see Psalm 69:30-31). Put on the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-17). Take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). Consider memorizing this lesson’s key verse, James 4:7, as a way of remembering to live in the light of spiritual reality every day.

### **Pause to Pray**

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### **Next Steps**

The following additional Bible verses will help you to go deeper on what it means to battle evil:

- ➔ 2 Corinthians 2:10-11
- ➔ Colossians 2:15
- ➔ Ephesians 4:27
- ➔ 1 John 3:8
- ➔ 1 John 5:18-21

# Saints Who Sometimes Sin

## Basking in God's Grace

*“Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”*

—1 Corinthians 10:12-13

See if this sounds familiar. Everything was great in the worship service—taking down sermon notes, saying “amen” to the pastor’s key points, singing God’s praises. Something goes terribly wrong in the fellowship hall, though. You stretch the truth to make yourself look good, even lie so you could have some “me” time in the afternoon, and walk away feeling no small amount of guilt about your insensitivity to others’ challenges.

It seems the more you strive to live a God-honoring life, the more difficult life gets! You’ve read what the apostle Peter said, “but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct” (1 Peter 1:15), but is that realistic? Truth is, God’s at work in each of His children, conforming us ever to the image of His Son (see Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18). But we’re not there yet. We are saints who sometimes sin.

The Christian life is a process—sometimes two steps forward, one step back. The more we stay in the Master’s power, the better we are. But who among us doesn’t slip back into his or her own power and understanding at times? And it is in those times that we are more likely to fail. This side of heaven, Christians are “under construction”—not perfect, just forgiven.

What are a few thoughts or actions you experienced recently that took you by surprise? What have you needed to get right about with God?

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What are some of your secrets for staying “on the straight and narrow”?

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Are some sins worse than others? Why or why not?

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### **Stepping Up**

Remember, it was Peter—one of Jesus’ closest, most steadfast disciples, the one Jesus Himself called “the Rock”—who said, “be holy.” This is the same Peter who told Jesus he would follow Him to the death and never deny Him. What happened next helps modern-day disciples see that God in His grace couldn’t love us any more or any less. Make no mistake: God wants us to be holy, He tells us how in His Word, and sin has its consequences. At the same time, all who confess and repent find peace once again with God. Beyond brokenness is deeper intimacy with God. Though Peter didn’t get it right here, later Jesus restored him (John 21), and Peter went on to become a key early church leader (see Acts) and author of 1 and 2 Peter!

*“What is your judgment?” They answered, “He deserves death.” Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, saying, “Prophesy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?”*

*Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, “You also were with Jesus the Galilean.” But he denied it before them all, saying, “I do not know what you mean.” And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” And again he denied it with an oath: “I do not know the man.” After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you.” Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, “I do not know the man.” And immediately the rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly. — Matthew 26:66-75*



How could someone with such “rock solid” faith stumble so badly?

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In what ways can you identify with Peter?

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If you were put on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

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### **Stepping Out**

Is there a particular struggle you’re facing? Find a fellow Christ-follower with whom you can practice James 5:16, “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” Could it be that we’re not experiencing healing deep within because we’re not humbling ourselves and sharing our struggles with trusted others who would uphold us in prayer?

Failure can serve a good purpose when it sends us back to the forgiving arms of the Father. How has this been your experience?

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If God has forgiven you, you ought to forgive yourself. How are past missteps holding you back? Take God at His word!

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Perhaps the Holy Spirit has convicted your heart through this lesson. Do you need to get right with God—to confess, repent, and be restored? Who can you talk to? When can you make that happen?

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### **Way to Grow**

While none of us has “arrived” and none of us will “arrive” this side of heaven, the one who seeks to walk with God isn’t comfortable with sin. Keep short accounts with God and yield to His Holy Spirit, who is working in you to conform you to the image of Jesus. As you tap into God’s grace, extend it to others, gently restoring them when they fail to live what they believe (see Galatians 6:1,2). Consider memorizing this lesson’s key verses, 1 Corinthians 10:12-13, as a way of remembering to walk in God’s grace every day.

### **Pause to Pray**

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### **Next Steps**

The following additional Bible verses will help you to go deeper on what it means to depend on God’s grace:

- ➔ Lamentations 3:22-24
- ➔ Proverbs 28:13
- ➔ Psalm 119:11
- ➔ 1 John 1:9
- ➔ 1 John 2:1

# The Greatest Story Ever Seen

## Advancing God's Kingdom

*“ . . . but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy,  
always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who  
asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you;  
yet do it with gentleness and respect. . . . ”*

—1 Peter 3:15

They say people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Let's say new neighbors move in next door. They have heavy boxes and large appliances, but you're too tired to help out. Days go by. They can't keep the yard up, but you have your own “stuff” to do. More days go by. Rumor has it their marriage is on the rocks, but you don't think they'd be open to your Christian counsel. Your pastor challenges you to “reach your neighbors for Christ,” but yours take His name in vain. What can you do?

We who seek to walk with God see things differently. We know God has called us to be “salt and light” in our community—people who have a striking influence on all we come into contact with and a clear communication of the Gospel to share at just the right time. But “salt” doesn't flavor and “light” doesn't illuminate when we're not involved in the lives of the lost around us.

The key is *being there*—“quality” time happens in the midst of “quantity” time. As someone has said, “Preach Christ to all men; use words, if necessary!” Yes, *words are necessary!* Yet God will give you just the right words at just the right time so you can share the eternal hope you have in Him.

How did you become a Christ follower?

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What was your impression of Christians before you trusted Jesus?

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Who's influencing whom—you or your neighbors? Is it a God-honoring influence?

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### Stepping Up

We know the eternal truth of the Scriptures: All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God our Creator, and the wages of sin is death—eternal separation from Him; yet in His extraordinary love and grace, God offers each person a bridge over the chasm of sin—eternal life in His Son, Jesus (see Romans 3:23; 6:23; John 3:16; 1 John 1:9). That's our great hope! Jesus emphasized, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Since this is true, there's no greater joy and responsibility we have as Christ-followers than to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). See how this hope spread so naturally in early church times.

*One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).*

*The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"*

— John 1:40-49



How long did it take Andrew to tell his brother Simon Peter about Jesus? What do you make of it?

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Nathanael wasn't an "instant believer." In fact, he was more than a bit skeptical. How did his friend Philip respond to his hesitation?

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What was the convincing proof Jesus revealed to you that made you declare along with Nathanael, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel"?

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### **Stepping Out**

Make a list of the people in your relational network who don't know Jesus: think about family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and acquaintances. Pray for them. Make the sacrifice to spend time with them. Be "Jesus" to everyone you come into contact with.

What barriers keep you from sharing the Gospel with those you know?

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How is sharing the Good News with friends and neighbors today similar to or different from your past attempts to tell others about Jesus?

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What would you tell the person who puts you on the spot and says, “Tell me why you’re a Christian”?

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### **Way to Grow**

Pray to be used of the Lord to share the Good News—the hope that you have, which is evident to others. Remember, God looks for faithfulness, not success. He wants us to share the Gospel, but it’s the Holy Spirit who transforms lives (Zechariah 4:6; Acts 1:8). Also, as we share the hope that we have, we’re to do so “with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15). Remember, people are precious, not *projects*! Consider memorizing this lesson’s key verse, 1 Peter 3:15, as a way of remembering to reflect the hope that you have to those around you every day.

### **Pause to Pray**

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### **Next Steps**

The following additional Bible verses will help you to go deeper on what it means to advance God’s kingdom:

- ➔ Matthew 5:16
- ➔ Acts 1:8
- ➔ Matthew 28:18-20
- ➔ Acts 4:20
- ➔ Matthew 9:37-38

# Better Together

## Growing in Community

*“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”*

—**Ecclesiastes 4:9-12**

Sometimes it's easier to DIY—*do it yourself*. Consider the church ministries you've been involved in. It can be a challenge to team with others, listen to and value their ideas and them as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, and move forward together. Sometimes that means your ideas aren't selected; sometimes it seems like you're not valued. While it may be easier to be Lone Ranger believers in ministry and in life, it's not necessarily better. Take a look at the dozens of “one another” verses in the Bible and see just how much God affirms that we're better together. What does this look like?

Great teams in sports, business, theater, and elsewhere reflect that when people work well together, they become like one unit—one *body*. They get to know one another, trust each other, even anticipate one another's moves. God calls the church to be like a body—one body with many individual parts. Jesus is the head, and every Christian is a member of the body of Christ. Jesus' followers take this to heart and seek awesome teams that achieve ambitious goals for eternity's sake.

Do you like working alone or as a team? Why's that?

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How do Christians value relationships? What about non-Christians?

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What's the best example of a team that reflects they're better together than apart?

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### **Stepping Up**

Being a member of the body of Christ means being a part of a spiritual family that will last forever. Jesus asked, "Who do you think my mother and brothers are?" Then He stretched out His hands toward His disciples and said, "Look closely. These are my mother and brothers. Obedience is thicker than blood. The person who obeys my heavenly Father's will is my brother and sister and mother" (see Matthew 12:48-50, MSG). We're one spiritual family, and we're called to do God's will—not alone, but together, as this passage emphasizes.

*For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.*

*For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.*

*The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unrepresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.*

*Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*

— 1 Corinthians 12:13-27



Can one member of the body do it all—even if he or she is an incredibly gifted person? Why or why not?

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What’s the truth about seemingly “weaker” and “greater” members in the family of God?

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To what extent should we come alongside and help others be successful at what God’s called them to do?

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### **Stepping Out**

Those who walk with God throw themselves into relationships, allowing God to lead them to become members of just the right team(s) that will carry out kingdom purposes. Be there for one another—as fellow members of the body of Christ—to help each other succeed in this area.

Are you comfortable with the extent to which you’re teaming with fellow believers? What needs to change?

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Is there someone you need to forgive—or ask to forgive you—as a result of a dispute while working on a task together? What’s your plan?

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What dream or vision is God calling you to pursue for the sake of the kingdom in the name of Jesus?

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### **Way to Grow**

Yield to God’s control and rely on God’s power in all things. Know that only God gives us the power to come together. Depend on God’s infinite strength to team with other Christ followers for the greater good of godly goals. Consider memorizing this lesson’s key verses, Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, as a way of remembering not to “go it alone” but nurture godly relationships every day.

### **Pause to Pray**

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### **Next Steps**

The following additional Bible verses will help you to go deeper on what it means to grow in community:

- ➔ Matthew 18:20
- ➔ Acts 2:42-47
- ➔ Hebrews 10:24-25
- ➔ 3 John 1:8
- ➔ Revelation 7:9

# Forgive & Live

## Forgiving Others

*“For if you forgive others their trespasses,  
your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not  
forgive others their trespasses, neither will your  
Father forgive your trespasses.”*

—**Matthew 6:14-15**

Jesus’ followers are on a monumental mission: advancing the kingdom of God. We’re out on the battlefield, fighting alongside one another. We’re bold, valiant, wild at heart! As warrior men and women, we wield our swords, bump into one another, step on each another’s toes, fall down and get back up again. We’re quick to do so—but it’s harder when in the midst of it all we’re wounded by someone who’s supposed to be fighting *with* us. In our day-to-day lives, we often find ourselves either wounded or having wounded someone—needing to extend or ask for forgiveness.

But extending or asking for forgiveness doesn’t come naturally or easily. And that’s where the evil one sees and seizes upon an opening. Our enemy the devil and his fallen-angel followers love it when we get hurt, offended, and frustrated with one another. They exist to disrupt or destroy relationships—anything to get us working against rather than alongside one another. Anything to prevent us from advancing God’s kingdom and give them an opportunity to advance the kingdom of darkness. That’s why Jesus’ followers must be ever so quick to forgive one another!

How easy is it for you to forgive others?

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When have you carried a grudge or sought to get even?

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What if the person who has wronged you doesn't acknowledge the offense or ask for forgiveness. Is it okay to withhold forgiveness? Why or why not?

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## Stepping Up

Every day we must deal with offenses, small and large. Even though we may overlook a transgression, some offenses touch the soul and harden the heart. We must deal with them—"keep short accounts." In the following story, Jesus makes it clear why we must forgive, forgive, and keep on forgiving.

*Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.*

*"Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."*

— Matthew 18:21-35



Is there a person who has offended you many times? Why have or haven't you forgiven this person?

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When have you felt like the first servant in Jesus' story, the man whom the master forgave?

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Is an unforgiving spirit putting a barrier between you and God? What can you do to get rid of the barrier?

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### **Stepping Out**

Forgiveness is often tied to action. We forgive another, then serve him or her as if nothing had occurred. We follow the example of Jesus, who even asked the Father to forgive those who yelled "crucify Him" and nailed Him to the cross (Luke 23:34). Is there a need to ask for or extend forgiveness? Will you take action, and then serve?

Is it possible to extend forgiveness at the moment you are upset? Why or why not?

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What's the issue you're most upset about right now? How would the situation be different if you were to ask for or freely extend forgiveness today? What's your plan?

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Is there someone you've held a grudge against for a long of time that you realize now you need to forgive? Why not take a moment to talk to God about it?

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### **Way to Grow**

Jesus' followers strive to extend true, heartfelt forgiveness. Of course, authentic forgiveness, especially in the most painful episodes, comes only from the Holy Spirit's intervention. In fact, that is where all Christ followers' strength is derived from. Consider memorizing this lesson's key verses, Matthew 6:14-15, as a way of remembering to be quick to extend forgiveness every day.

### **Pause to Pray**

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### **Next Steps**

The following additional Bible verses will help you to go deeper on what it means to pursue forgive others:

- ➔ Mark 11:25
- ➔ John 20:23
- ➔ Romans 12:18
- ➔ 1 Corinthians 13:4-7
- ➔ Ephesians 4:32

# Grace Awakening

## Extending Amazing Grace

*“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”*

—2 Peter 3:18

Grace is powerful. One acrostic for grace is “God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense.” Stop and think about all that God has done for you, how He has paid the eternal debt you could never pay and extended blessings undeserved. All heaven’s riches, the power of God, and the infinite love of Jesus our Savior are given to us not because they are somehow “due” us, but because God is so very gracious!

It’s in light of God’s amazing grace that He calls us to generously shower grace on people He brings across our path. That’s just not natural in this world, where many people prefer justice or getting even. God calls Jesus’ followers to something loftier—showering upon others the same unmerited favor that He extends to us! The truth and consequences of a wrong act are not ignored, yet grace is ever sought. Jesus’ followers don’t condone evil; we are used of God to redeem it!

Tell of a time when someone showed you grace rather than the justice your words or actions deserved.

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What’s more natural for you, seeking justice (giving people what they deserve) or extending grace (giving people unmerited favor)? Give an example.

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Is grace always a better way than justice?

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### Stepping Up

In the Garden of Eden, God permitted Adam and Eve to eat of every tree in the garden except for the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil; sadly, Adam and Eve opted to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Similarly, we today behave under Good-and-Evil Tree rather than Life Tree standards. The Tree of Life seeks a grace-giving force that brings the power of love and life to all situations. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, however, seeks its own good—a favorable outcome from people and situations, fairness and justice at all costs. Jesus illustrates what it looks like to extend grace in everyday life.

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.*

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* — Matthew 5:38-48



What does Jesus mean when He says we're not to resist an evil person?

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Jesus wants us to give our coat (tunic, cloak) and go the extra mile. What might this look like in your life today?

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Consider Jesus' words about loving your enemies and praying for those who persecute you. Who and what situations come to mind?

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### **Stepping Out**

The world is shocked when told stories of grace. Why? Because its mantra is, "Don't get mad, get even!" Yet Christ calls His followers to extend grace and let Him execute justice. Food for thought: *What commitment(s) might you make in light of this lesson—a grace commitment that shocks the watching world?*

Do a "grace audit" in your own life. How has God been gracious to you? How might you respond to Him?

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Who do you need to extend grace to today? What's your plan?

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What practical steps can you take to ensure that your home is an environment of grace?

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### **Way to Grow**

If you are not offering grace on a regular basis, what's your plan to change that? But remember, grace is absolutely impossible to work up in our own power. It's spiritual. And extending it is a spiritual act as well. Earnestly pray that God will fill your heart with a readiness to extend grace. Consider memorizing this lesson's key verse, 2 Peter 3:18, as a way of remembering to give others grace every day.

### **Pause to Pray**

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### **Next Steps**

The following additional Bible verses will help you to go deeper on what it means to extend amazing grace:

- ➔ John 1:14
- ➔ 2 Corinthians 12:9
- ➔ Ephesians 2:8-9
- ➔ Titus 3:7
- ➔ 2 Corinthians 9:8

# Humble Beginnings

## Killing the Pride

*“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit,  
but in humility count others more  
significant than yourselves.”*

—**Philippians 2:3**

We who seek to grow in our walk with God understand that everything we have—success, smarts, power, agility, *whatever*—comes from above. God loves us and desires to give good gifts to us. He gives us all we need to live spirited, abundant lives that honor Him as we passionately pursue His priorities—namely, living out and sharing the Good News in our spheres of influence, using all He has given us in so doing. Christ-followers know that it’s not about us; it’s about *Him*—God.

Yet the enemy whispers in the ear of the “old man” of our fallen nature in an attempt to trip us up. His soft, soothing voice says we’re something special, that God’s actually “lucky” to have us on His team, and that we can accomplish “big wins” apart from the help of God and His people. Pride is so subtle, so deadly. We must kill it, yield each day to the Holy Spirit as the Source of anything that we do that will have an eternal impact. Only in humility can we do anything for good and for God.

In what areas does pride show itself in your life?

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Describe struggles you’ve had or presently have with pride.

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Are there areas of your life where you may be prideful and don't realize it? Ask someone you know and trust what comes to mind.

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## Stepping Up

God's answer to pride is humility. His Word tells us how God towers the humble and topples the proud. The ultimate picture of humility is Jesus, who left heaven to live and breathe and make His home among us. As we follow in His footsteps, we find purpose and identity in humbling ourselves before God and man. Consider this teaching from James, the half-brother of Jesus and a key leader in the early church.

*But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*

*Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?*

*Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.* — James 4:6-16



What does the term "more grace" mean to you?

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How can you “resist the devil,” especially that whisper of his to be prideful?

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About what do you boast and brag? Paint a word picture of a more God-honoring and accurate response.

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### **Stepping Out**

Pride takes the attention away from God and puts it on us. It seeks things that benefit us. It can reveal itself in explicit ways or subtle ways. It is a condition of the heart. So how is God leading you? Is it to humble yourself at home or work? To ask another person for help with a particular project?

How does the above Bible passage suggest that pride is related to one’s relationships with others?

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Describe a recent situation where you put yourself first. How did that work for you?

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What would be the best thing to do when you find yourself in a situation where you’re tempted to be filled with unhealthy pride?

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### **Way to Grow**

Consider once again the example of Jesus, who humbled Himself to the point of taking the form of a man for the benefit of all mankind (see

Philippians 2:1-11). It doesn't get any more sacrificial than that! Such humility is possible today, if we would only yield before God Almighty! Consider memorizing this lesson's key verse, Philippians 2:3, as a way of remembering to walk humbly before God and those around you every day.

### **Pause to Pray**

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### **Next Steps**

The following additional Bible verses will help you to go deeper on what it means to kill the pride:

- ➔ Proverbs 11:2 (also see 13:10; 16:18; 29:23)
- ➔ Ecclesiastes 7:8
- ➔ Zephaniah 2:3
- ➔ Colossians 3:12
- ➔ James 3:13

# One Life to Give

## Living Generously

*“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart,  
not reluctantly or under compulsion,  
for God loves a cheerful giver.”*

—2 Corinthians 9:7

“How much is enough?” Someone put that question to a wealthy man who had more money and stuff than he could ever use. “Just a little bit more,” he replied. Sound familiar? Whether it’s a George Washington or Ben Franklin in your wallet or purse—or simply loose change—perhaps you believe, “Life will be better with just a little bit more.” Don’t be deceived.

Let’s identify with King David, “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22), who asked the Lord, “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you” (1 Chronicles 29:14).

Look at Jesus, our model for life and ministry. He was never possessed by possessions. Instead, He poured His very life into His mission: “to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). Consider your “time, talents, and treasure.” To what extent is this true of you?

Whether it’s a large or small amount, we’re all money managers. Where does it all go?

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They say time’s money. So how are you spending your time?

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Do you possess your possessions or do they possess you?

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### **Stepping Up**

The non-Christian life is all about “I,” “me,” “mine.” That’s before we realized that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God—the wages of sin being death. That’s before we learned that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus, who paid the debt we could never pay with a sacrifice we cannot comprehend this side of heaven. Now worldly possessions are rubbish compared to riches in Christ. Now Jesus’ mission is ours, and His kingdom mentality must dominate our desires and dictate how we use every resource at our disposal! This early church account gives us both a positive and negative example of what this looks like in everyday life.

*There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.*

*But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife’s knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.”*

—Acts 4:34-5:4



How did God use His people to meet others’ needs in early church days?

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Why did Ananias lie about his and his wife's gift to the needy among them?

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From time to time the writer of Acts says that the Lord added to the number of believers daily. How might incidents like these draw people to faith in Jesus?

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### **Stepping Out**

Take inventory of all God's possessions He has placed in your care. Ask Him how you might use what you have to advance the kingdom. If it's a car, who can you give a ride to church? If it's a home, who can stay in the spare room until they get on their feet? If it's money, above and beyond the tithe to your church, how can you help meet the needs of those around you?

To what extent is giving—yes, of money, but also of yourself and your time—a part of your walk of faith?

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Jesus said it's more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). Has this held true for you?

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What's keeping you from the kingdom mentality of giving your all for the advancement of the Gospel?

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## Way to Grow

Remember the story of the rich young man (Mark 10:17-31)? He was definitely a man possessed by his possessions. Some wonder if he wasn't Barnabas, who later sold a field and brought the money to the apostles for distribution to the needy. In any case, God can and does change hearts! Ask Him and He will transform you into a person who gives joyfully, openhandedly, and sacrificially. In your giving, keep in mind Jesus' words: "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more" (Luke 12:48b). Consider memorizing this lesson's key verse, 2 Corinthians 9:7, as a way of remembering to give generously as God leads every day.

## Pause to Pray

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## Next Steps

The following additional Bible verses will help you to go deeper on what it means to "give it all":

- ➔ Proverbs 11:25
- ➔ Luke 14:13-14
- ➔ Matthew 6:19-34
- ➔ 1 Timothy 6:17-18
- ➔ Malachi 3:10

# It's Your Serve

## Serving Like Jesus

*“ . . . rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.”*

—**Ephesians 6:7-8**

We live in a world where self-service is the norm. “You only go around once in life,” the world says, “so grab all that you can!” That, of course, is quite the opposite of Jesus’ teaching and example. Here’s another way He expressed His personal mission: “even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). This led Him to the cross to pay the penalty for our sins we could never pay apart from Him. As members of the body of Christ—as Jesus’ followers who want to make a meaningful difference in this world today—that’s a present-day mandate for us.

God enables us to serve one another either with our special gifts or simply with grace for the moment. When Jesus washed the disciples’ feet, He had the grace to serve at that moment. May we, too, passionately serve God by serving others; may no one or nothing hold us back in pursuing a life of service. Let’s find a need and fill it to the glory of God!

Share about a time recently when you saw another person’s need and had the ability and presence of mind to meet it.

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How has God uniquely shaped you to serve Him and others?

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How can we achieve balance as we seek to serve others—at home and work, in the neighborhood and at church?

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### **Stepping Up**

Once God shows you ways to serve and how He’s uniquely shaped you for service, then it’s time to act. Jesus tells us that, as we lose ourselves in service to Him and others, we paradoxically find ourselves. The faithful Christ-follower serves without expectation of praise or gratitude in return. And yet one day you will receive the only praise that matters, Jesus’ “Well done!”, as this portion of His story about the Sheep and the Goats reflects.

*“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’”*

— Matthew 25:31-40



How does Jesus seem to describe a life well lived?

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To what extent have you served people who were hungry, thirsty, strangers, in need of clothes, sick, and imprisoned?

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What “service opportunities waiting to happen” exist in your community, neighborhood, home?

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### **Stepping Out**

In our fast-paced, 21st century world—where so many of us are too busy for one more thing on our plates—the sacrifice of time, energy, and resources is a difficult proposition. “It’s inconvenient.” “It’s risky.” At the same time, God calls us to love and serve others, which can indeed call for a sacrifice. No one can do everything, but everyone can do something. Perhaps God is prompting you right now. Where in the world does He want you to serve?

How can you find out what needs exist around you?

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Is God calling you to serve within or through your church? How might He use someone like you to make a kingdom difference through your home church?

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Are you currently using your giftedness out of gratitude or some lesser motive? If you sense you are serving with a lesser motive, what needs to change?

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### **Way to Grow**

Joyful service can't be generated through our own power. Look to the Lord to lead you into just the right areas of service. Stay in touch with God through the process of serving, seeking the power of the Holy Spirit to sustain you. Consider memorizing this lesson's key verses, Ephesians 6:7-8, as a way of remembering to walk as a humble servant of God every day.

### **Pause to Pray**

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### **Next Steps**

The following additional Bible verses will help you to go deeper on what it means to serve like Jesus:

- ➔ Mark 10:45
- ➔ Luke 17:7-10
- ➔ Galatians 5:13
- ➔ Ephesians 4:11-13
- ➔ 1 Peter 4:10-11

# Peace Making

## Getting Along Well

*“For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”*

—James 3:16-18

“In the world you will have tribulation,” Jesus said (see John 16:33). As always, He’s right! There’s conflict everywhere you turn—in families, among neighbors, at work, and even at church. While conflict can be constructive, God wants us to pursue peace, to be at peace with everyone, “so far as it depends on you” (see Romans 12:18; Hebrews 12:14). Practically speaking, how is that possible?

When Jesus said to expect trouble, He added: “But take heart; I have overcome the world.” We who seek to grow in our walk with God are desperately dependent upon Him to help us do and say what’s right and appropriate in every situation. Whatever we do, we strive to do so to God’s glory (1 Corinthians 10:31). What does that look like?

We remove the “log” from our own eye before trying to help another person get the sawdust speck out of his or her eye (Matthew 7:5). We go directly to those who’ve hurt us, talking *to* rather than *about* them, in an effort to work things out (Matthew 18:15). We make managing conflict, being a peacemaker, and ultimately reconciliation a top priority (Matthew 5:24).

What are one or two areas of conflict in your life today?

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When it comes to conflict, are you more apt to stand and fight or take flight?

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When have you managed conflict effectively—or wished that you had?

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### Stepping Up

“Why can’t we all just get along?” is a question that echoes in our time. Truth is, we live in a fallen world, and even people who have given their lives to Jesus are still adversely influenced. We can anticipate conflict in the world (John 16:33) and in the church (1 Corinthians 5:1)—not only physical but spiritual conflict as well (Ephesians 6:12). We’re neither immune to it nor destined to be destroyed by it when its sparks are fanned into flames. This passage from Paul’s letter to the church at Philippi offers some practical wisdom on the subject.

*I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.*

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

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

— Philippians 4:2-9



How have you seen conflict within the church cause harm?

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The “true companion” that Paul refers to is a peacemaker. Describe someone in your church who is a modern-day “true companion.”

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What strategies do you find here for helping keep the peace, wherever conflict arises? How might you tap into them to keep conflict from spreading?

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### **Stepping Out**

While God wants His children to pursue peace, He also has a greater purpose in allowing conflict. It’s said that God loves us as we are, but He loves us too much to let us stay that way. He is known to use conflict to build our character and faith (see Romans 8:28-29). So it’s helpful to ask, “What’s God’s purpose for me in this conflict situation?”

What are predictable times or topics of conflict for you? How can you prepare yourself to better respond in a godly manner?

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The vast majority of the conflict you face will be the result of unmet expectations. How has this been true in your life? How can knowing this help you in the future?

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Is there conflict in your life today, be it at home, work, or church? If so, talk about it with a Christian friend and pray for wisdom to manage it (James 1:5).

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### **Way to Grow**

People expect conflict at work but are often taken by surprise when they run into it at church. Because the church is made up of people who claim faith, it is expected that their lives will be like Jesus'. Know that it's only in God's strength that you can exchange the acts of the sinful nature with the fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (see Galatians 5:19-23). The more you yield to God's Spirit, the more the fruit will flourish! Consider memorizing this lesson's key verses, James 3:16-18, as a way of remembering to be God's peacemaker every day.

### **Pause to Pray**

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### **Next Steps**

The following additional Bible verses will help you to go deeper on what it means to get along well with others:

- ➔ Matthew 5:9
- ➔ 2 Corinthians 5:18-19
- ➔ Philippians 2:3
- ➔ Colossians 4:6
- ➔ James 5:16

# In Times of Trouble

## Enduring Difficult Days

*“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”*

—James 1:2-4

Jesus’ followers are at war. In the midst of a spiritual battle that rages, we don’t expect life to be easy. In this sin-affected world, there are skirmishes on every side. God does not promise Christians freedom from adversity nor release from trials. Yet in the midst of our everyday problems and struggles, doubts and fears, God does promise peace that defies explanation. When we draw ever closer to God in troubled times, we find supernatural strength to endure life’s trials and exit victorious on the other side of them.

Someone has said that we live two lives: the one we learn from and the one we live afterward. This is consistent with God’s Word, the Bible. We have God’s promise that He both watchfully and lovingly makes “all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

We may not see it—read the Old Testament book of Job, for example—yet that doesn’t make it any less real. As stated earlier, God uses tough times to build our character and faith. Even in the valley of the shadow of death (see Psalm 23), let’s keep our eyes not on our circumstances but on our Savior.

What are some of the struggles you’re facing today?

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Who or what is to blame for the tough times you're going through right now? Others? Yourself? Circumstances beyond anyone's control? Where's God?

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When struggles arise, do you tend to run away from or toward God?

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### **Stepping Up**

Some people think that life should be trouble-free once a person commits his or her life to Christ. That's not what Jesus taught. He spoke of hard times ahead, this side of heaven. In one parable, Jesus said that those areas of life that do not produce fruit will be removed (which can feel hard at the time), and areas producing little fruit would be pruned (another temporary *ouch!*). Take heart: Pruning leads to untold fruitfulness.

*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."*

— John 15:1-8



What pruning can you identify as having taken place in your life? What “branches” has the Lord removed?

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How has it been your experience that areas pruned have produced more Christian fruit that will last into eternity?

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Consider what Jesus meant when He said “abide.” What might that look like in everyday life?

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### **Stepping Out**

Know that God loves you. Absolutely nothing will change that. (If you need a reminder, read Ephesians 1-2 and circle all of the ways God expresses His love to you—there are a number of them!) In view of eternity, the temporary pain of life is a fleeting moment in time. Eternity with the Savior is life’s reward, and, despite life’s difficulties, eternity starts right now.

How does this lesson change your perspective about going through tough times?

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What’s the difference between discipline and pruning? How will you respond the next time you experience each?

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How will you pray the next time trouble comes?

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### **Way to Grow**

As you walk through troubled times, God is your comfort. It's said that sometimes He calms the storm, and sometimes He calms the person in the midst of the storm. The Spirit is also referred to in Scripture as the Comforter, and He lives inside of you. Consider memorizing this lesson's key verses, James 1:2-4, as a way of remembering to walk with God through the tough times you face every day.

### **Pause to Pray**

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### **Next Steps**

The following additional Bible verses will help you to go deeper on what it means to endure difficult times:

- ➔ Psalm 71:20
- ➔ John 10:10
- ➔ Acts 5:40-41
- ➔ Romans 5:3-5
- ➔ 1 Peter 1:6-7

# Run for the Prize

## Fulfilling Life's Mission

*“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*

—Ephesians 2:10

Every follower of Jesus is on a mission from God. The One who places desires in our hearts *grants them* (Psalm 37:4). Yes, you have a desire to be used of God to fulfill the Great Commission in your world (Matthew 28:18-20). You long to do so in light of the Greatest Commandment and the Second Like It (Matthew 22:34-40). Yet you have unique and God-given gifts, talents, abilities, interests, and you may wonder where they fit in. Make no mistake: They are part of (and clues to) your God-given mission in life.

You see, it's no accident you love outdoor adventure, jogging, wood-working, board games, jigsaw puzzles, music, photography—whatever healthy activity it is that you love to do. That's how God has wired you.

God wants to use *all of you*, as He uniquely shaped you, to be involved in a mission that makes a difference with rippling effects into eternity. “And whatever you do, in word or deed,” the Bible tells us, “do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17). So what gospel-centered mission has God given you?

If you have a life mission, what is it? How did you develop it?

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If you don't have a life mission, consider what you love to do and care deeply about. How might these be used to glorify and honor God?

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What's keeping you from going all out in pursuit of your mission?

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## Stepping Up

Jesus told the following story as an encouragement not to “bury your talents,” to consider who you are in Christ, how He has uniquely wired you, and to go for it! It's a story specifically about money, but it points to all the “talents” God's given you. Are you using them for His glory? When you stand before God on the day of judgment, He will ask what you did with His Son, and what you did with what He gave you. This story illustrates that we're definitely not to “play it safe”!

*“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.*

*“For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.’ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an*

*abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ” — Matthew 25:13-30*



What “talent” or “talents” has God given you?

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Who do you identify with most in this story—and why?

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Would you say that you’re making a solid investment of your talent(s) for eternity’s sake? If so, wonderful! If not, what needs to change?

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### **Stepping Out**

Start running for the prize today (see 1 Corinthians 9:24-27)! If you’re not sure which direction to head, what your “life’s mission” is, ask God to help you. He wants you to know! It also might be helpful to process with a fellow believer. Once you find it, start and end each day with your God-given mission in mind!

Who do you know that’s really “killing it,” truly *running for the prize*? What do you see in his or her life that’s worthy of imitation?

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As you prayerfully consider the implications of Jesus' parable, what's your plan to make the most of your talent(s)—your gifts, talents, and abilities? How is God leading you?

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Here's the bottom line: If you're going to *go for it*, to live all out "on mission," what needs to change?

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### **Way to Grow**

Remember, God is on your side. If He hasn't already, He will reveal your mission to you, and He will empower you to accomplish it. He has wired you uniquely to serve Him faithfully during these days. Consider memorizing this lesson's key verse, Ephesians 2:10, as a way of remembering to use your gifts, talents, and abilities to glorify God and enjoy Him throughout every day.

### **Pause to Pray**

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### **Next Steps**

The following additional Bible verses will help you to go deeper on what it means to fulfill your mission in life:

- ➔ John 17:4
- ➔ Acts 20:24
- ➔ 1 Corinthians 9:24; 10:31
- ➔ Philippians 3:12-14
- ➔ 2 Timothy 4:7

# Heaven on My Mind

## Pursuing Eternal Values

*“If then you have been raised with Christ,  
seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right  
hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above,  
not on things that are on earth.”*

—**Colossians 3:1-2**

Watch out for this world (and the voice of the enemy behind it)! It'll try to convince you that life on earth is all there is. It says people who succeed value what it values, and it taps into all kinds of media—TV, advertising, social media and other online avenues—to get its message across.

Yes, the world agrees, life passes all too quickly, but it encourages you to do whatever feels good and live life on its terms, apart from God. Come to think of it, all this is designed to distract us from what's of primary importance.

All who seek to continue to grow in our walk with God reject the world's wisdom and commit afresh each morning to be “all in” for God.

Like Moses, we do not live for the passing pleasures of sin but only for what pleases God (see Hebrews 11:24-26).

Like Paul, we “count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:8a).

Like Jesus, we acknowledge that this world is not our home and boldly live life with eternal values in view—with heaven on our minds.

What does the world value? What does God value?

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Look at how people spend their time and money and you will learn a lot about what they value. What *do* the way you spend your time and money say about your priorities, your values?

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If you're being honest, would you say that you're listening more to the world or God? Why?

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### **Stepping Up**

Near the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus began to talk to His disciples about returning to His Father (see John 14:1-3). Naturally, they were distraught, not wanting Him to leave. "Let not your hearts be troubled," He said. "Believe in God; believe also in me." Then Jesus told His disciples—and followers through the ages—that in His Father's house there are many rooms and He's going on ahead to prepare a place for us: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." Meanwhile, Jesus has left us here with a battle charge: to do all we can to help people around us know that this life isn't all there is—beyond the grave is an eternity with God (in heaven) or apart from Him (in hell). This passage gives us a glimpse into that eternity and helps us see just how crucial it is to live in light of eternity and help others do the same.

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."*

*And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the*

*spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”*

—Revelation 21:1-8



What does this passage say about life after this life?

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What parts of this passage comfort you?

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How does this peek into eternity challenge you?

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### **Stepping Out**

As you conclude this Bible study, make sure that your eternity is secure—even if it means pausing right now to recommit your life to Christ (see Romans 3:23; 6:23; 1 John 1:9; John 1:12; and also the Introduction). Ask God to search your heart to ensure that there are absolutely no barriers between you and Him (see Psalm 139:23-24). Finally, make a note not to put this Bible study on the shelf before you read and prayerfully consider “Going Forward” (see page 91).

How do worldly values differ from God’s values? Which are your values? What needs to change?

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Think of a person who has lived with heaven on his or her mind? What might you do to walk the same path?

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Who do you know is on a self-destruct course toward an eternity in hell? How can you be a better presence and influence for Jesus?

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### **Way to Grow**

Jesus comforted His disciples when He said that He wouldn't leave them (us) alone, but that He would send His Holy Spirit (see John 16:5-16). The Spirit convicts the world and guides Jesus' followers into the truth. When you were saved, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13), a "down-payment" of what is to come in heaven. As a Christ follower, live a life yielded to and empowered by the Holy Spirit, who will lead you into abundant life (John 10:10) during the rest of your days on earth and into eternal life beyond the grave (John 3:16). Consider memorizing this lesson's key verses, Colossians 3:1-2, as a way of reinforcing your commitment to grow in your walk with God every day.

### **Pause to Pray**

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### **Next Steps**

The following additional Bible verses will help you to go deeper on what it means to live with eternal values in view:

- ➔ Psalm 27:4
- ➔ Philippians 1:21
- ➔ Titus 2:11-14
- ➔ 1 John 2:15-17
- ➔ Revelation 7:9-10

# Going Forward

Well done! You've launched your **Morning Watch** and taken these essential steps to grow ever closer to God, following in the footsteps of His Son, Jesus.

But really, this journey is just beginning! Here's how you can keep going forward at a healthy pace.

First, it is imperative that you spend time with God every day—to keep the **Morning Watch**, your daily appointment with God. How do you make that practical?

Start with the do-able commitment of 10 minutes a day with a practice called “**Take 10**” with God. If someone tells you to “take 10,” they're telling you to stop what you're doing and take a 10-minute break.

Sometimes that break can't come soon enough! We live in such a fast-paced world we can be in danger of wearing ourselves out if we don't press the pause button from time to time.

That goes for our walk with God as well. We know in our heart of hearts that we need to take a “time out” to be with God every day. We know the benefits of doing so . . . and we know what happens when we fail to do so—we're either *revitalized* or *drained* spiritually!

Here are just a few Bible verses that remind us why it's important to take time out with God:

- ➔ “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” —Psalm 46:10
- ➔ “Come near to God and he will come near to you.” —James 4:8a
- ➔ “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” —Mark 1:35

There's an old saying, “You deserve a break today!” If we are to live in light of these and many other Bible verses, we need a “spiritual break” each day! And a good start is by thinking of it this way: “**Take 10**” with God!

So how might you spend those ten precious minutes? Many people have found it beneficial to focus on getting into the Bible and talking with God about what they read and about everyday life. With this in mind, you might consider starting this way:

**3 minutes** – Read the Bible. How can anyone keep on the right and best path, on the path of purity? By living according to God's word (see Psalm 119:9).

**3 minutes** – Meditate on what you read. Consider three questions: *What does it say? What does it mean? And what does it mean to me?*

How can anyone stay on the best, most blessed path? “Blessed is the one . . . whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night” (Psalm 1:1-2).

**4 minutes** – Pray. A great way to pray is the “ACTS” Plan, giving a minute each to the following four topics: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication.

Jesus Himself said, “But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:6).

Here’s the thing. You start with 10 minutes a day, and before long it becomes a habit! Not only that, before long you find you’re able to stretch that 10 minutes into 15 . . . even a half hour or more! To be *revitalized* or *drained* spiritually—the choice is yours!

When’s the best time for you to “Take 10” with God—in the morning, midday, or evening? Again, we encourage you to keep a **Morning Watch**, as the psalmist David put it: “in the morning LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly” (Psalm 5:3, NIV). Yet if the morning doesn’t work best for you, *find a time that does!* You deserve a break today—and you’ll be glad you did!

Second, step out of your comfort zone and find a Bible believing church where you can *belong*, *grow*, and *serve*. The first one you try may or may not be the right one for you. Pray for God’s clear direction. Get time with the pastor, if you’re able to, and talk about your desire to continue the walk with God and live for Him.

Third, surround yourself with Christian friends who will help you grow in Christ and whom you can also help grow in Christ. As Solomon said, “Two are better than one” (Ecclesiastes 4:9); and as the writer of Hebrews added, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together” (Hebrews 10:24-25a). Never go it alone. Always have a close brother or sister in Christ as a “traveling companion” in your walk with God, and always “be there” for the men and women in your sphere of influence.

Finally, seek to be a positive influence in the lives of people who don’t know Jesus. They may be in your home or neighborhood, where you work or play. Strive to live in light of the wise saying, “Be in the world not of the world.” As the apostle Peter put it, “. . . in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect . . .” (1 Peter 3:15).

The Lord is with you! Keep taking steps of faith that will ever draw you closer to Him. And may He continue to bless and lead you along the best, most blessed path!

# About the Author

Dean Ridings is a founding member of Make a Mark Ministries—see [www.makeamark.net](http://www.makeamark.net)—and is actively involved in a variety of disciple-making initiatives. He has an MA, an M.Div. and a Th.D.

Dean serves as the executive pastor at Calvary Worship Center in Colorado Springs. He's also an affiliate faculty member at Colorado Christian University.

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***Make a Mark***  
MINISTRIES

A Make a Mark Ministries Bible Study  
[www.makeamark.net](http://www.makeamark.net)



# Appendix

## Key Verses to Remember

### STEP 1 – PATH LIGHT

*“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”*

—Hebrews 4:12



### STEP 2 – GOD’S GOT THIS

*“. . . do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

—Philippians 4:6-7



### STEP 3 – LET US PRAY

*“And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.”*

—1 John 5:14-15



### STEP 4 – FEARFULLY & WONDERFULLY MADE


*“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

—Romans 12:1-2




## STEP 5 – THE SPIRIT-EMPOWERED LIFE

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”  
—Galatians 5:22,23




## STEP 6 – THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.”  
—1 John 5:2-4




## STEP 7 – THE SECOND GREATEST COMMANDMENT

“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.”  
—1 John 4:11-12



## STEP 8 – THE DEVIL IS REAL

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”  
—James 4:7



## STEP 9 – SAINTS WHO SOMETIMES SIN

“Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

—1 Corinthians 10:12-13



## STEP 10 – THE GREATEST STORY EVER SEEN

“ . . . but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect. . . . ”

—1 Peter 3:15



## STEP 11 – BETTER TOGETHER

“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”

—Ecclesiastes 4:9-12



## STEP 12 – FORGIVE & LIVE

“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

—Matthew 6:14-15



## STEP 13 – GRACE AWAKENING

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”

—2 Peter 3:18



## STEP 14 – HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”

—Philippians 2:3



## STEP 15 – ONE LIFE TO GIVE

“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

—2 Corinthians 9:7



## STEP 16 – IT’S YOUR SERVE

“. . . rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.”

—Ephesians 6:7-8



## STEP 17 – PEACE MAKING

“For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”

—James 3:16-18



## STEP 18 – IN TIMES OF TROUBLE

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

—James 1:2-4



## STEP 19 – RUN FOR THE PRIZE

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

—Ephesians 2:10

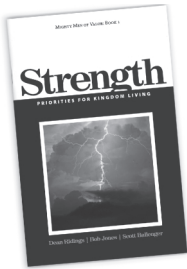


## STEP 20 – HEAVEN ON MY MIND

“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”

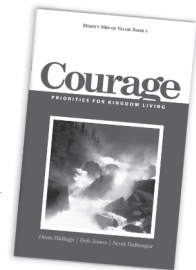
—Colossians 3:1-2

# Mighty Men of Valor have three distinct characteristics: Strength, Courage & Passion



**Men need Strength** that comes from God alone, the kind of strength He gave men like Gideon—who lived at a time when everyone did what was right in their own eyes—David and his band of mighty men, and Jesus’ early church followers!

**Men need Courage** to stand strong in increasingly challenging times, because we live in a world that’s not what God created—evil exists, and as someone has said, “All it takes for evil to flourish is good men to stand by and do nothing”!



**Men need Passion** to live in light of the fact that the God of the universe chose us to be His children, called us to be kingdom men, and enables us to passionately live like Jesus and advance His Gospel where we live, work, and play through the generations!



## Go through the entire **Mighty Men of Valor** series!

1. Use these studies as a daily devotional. We strongly encourage every man to take time out for a daily meeting—or appointment—with God.
2. Work through these studies with another man. Think of this as walking “Side-by-Side,” meeting weekly for mutual growth, support, and accountability.
3. Connect with other men in a triad or small-group setting. Think of Jesus, who invested in a small group of 12 men, guiding them on the spiritual journey.

***Make a Mark***  
MINISTRIES

To order titles in the **Mighty Men of Valor** series:  
**[www.makeamark.net](http://www.makeamark.net)**



# Are you living with Kingdom-minded purpose?

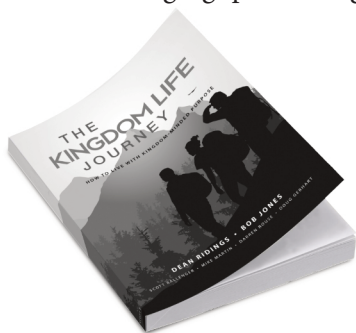
This is God's desire for you . . . The journey awaits!

*“And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”*

—Jesus (Matthew 24:14)

“If we have a limited time with someone, we would want him or her to fully grasp the **gospel of the Kingdom** and its implications.”

That’s the heart behind this workbook. We would want men and women to take what we call the **Kingdom Life journey**, passing the following signposts along the way:



- ✓ Seeing the Kingdom Vision
- ✓ Relating to the King
- ✓ Representing the King
- ✓ Living with Kingdom-Minded Purpose

Ideal for one-to-one and small-group processing, each of the 12 lessons will help you SEE, SEARCH, STAND, and SHOW life-changing Kingdom principles.

**Join the journey** and see the gospel of the Kingdom advance deeper in your own heart and make an eternal difference in the lives of those around you!

**Make a Mark**  
MINISTRIES

Find “The Kingdom Life Journey” on Amazon or  
**[www.makeamark.net](http://www.makeamark.net)**



# Tap into this free series to help “Ignite the Kingdom Life” within you!

**Asked if he was the long-anticipated Messiah**, John the Baptist pushed back immediately—that’s Jesus! Yet he did take the opportunity to speak of God’s mission for his life:

*“I’m baptizing you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. The real action comes next: The main character in this drama—compared to him I’m a mere stagehand—will **ignite the kingdom life** within you, a fire within you, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out” (Matthew 3:11 MSG).*

We have developed a series of one-page monographs to help **Ignite the Kingdom Life**—all freely available as PDF downloads and may be reproduced for ministry! They’ll help you:



- ✓ Get to Know God
- ✓ Get into God’s Word
- ✓ Talk to God . . . Pray
- ✓ Walk With Jesus Day by Day
- ✓ Live in Light of the Spiritual Battle

Print them out, process and pray through them, keep a few in your Bible to pass along to fellow Christians who long to make a Kingdom difference in everyday life!

**Download the entire set free of charge at:  
[www.makeamark.net](http://www.makeamark.net)**





# Morning Watch

20 STEPS TO GROW SPIRITUALLY

*“And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he [Jesus] departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.”*

—Mark 1:35

Jesus, our example for life and ministry, took time first thing in the morning to connect with the Father and receive directions for the day. And so must we!

Welcome to **Morning Watch**, that time just before dawn when darkness is heavy yet slowly gives way to the new day. It's an ideal time to connect with the Lord—whether you're alone, walking alongside someone, or in a small group Bible study.

These 20 foundational “steps” are written to help men and women grow spiritually and make walking in faith a daily habit. May this be true for you!

***Make a Mark Ministries encourages and equips God's people to know, live, and spread the Gospel.***



Dean Ridings

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MINISTRIES

FOR THE GOSPEL AND GENERATIONS

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