



ENCOUNTERING GOD

devotional guide

FEBRUARY 22 - APRIL 17, 2009

TAKING THE CHALLENGE(S)

Have you ever encountered God? Have you encountered God as Moses did, as he talked to a burning bush; or as Abraham did when his obedience was tested with his son's life? Have you ever encountered God and experienced His touch of peace and blessing in your life? This devotional booklet can be a tool to Encounter God and allow Him to transform you.

We have prepared this eight week devotional booklet as part of the "Encounter God" sermon series, which will take us from the beginning of Lent through a very important encounter at the empty tomb on Easter Sunday. **Each week contains 5 devotions**, intended to be read Monday through Friday, however; you may read them when it works for you.

An additional challenge is also before you with the *go deeper* Old Testament Bible Reading Challenge, which begins on March 1. Although there is a bit of overlap for eight weeks, we encourage you to bundle the two together. Forming a habit of doing both challenges daily will surely set a precedent of reading that will carry you to completing the 274 day Old Testament challenge. And as you'll discover through this devotional, having knowledge of the Word of God is a large tool (a sharp sword, in fact!) in your arsenal of weapons to fight temptation.

Feel free to write your thoughts on the blank space scattered throughout the booklet. Look back at through your comments at some point toward the end of the Old Testament Challenge as a measurement of your spiritual growth journey.

You may obtain copies of both challenges at Cicero Christian Church, or find them at www.CiceroChristianChurch.org.

WEEK ONE



ENCOUNTERING GOD

OUR HUMILITY

day 1 February 23

day 2 February 24

day 3 February 25

day 4 February 26

day 5 February 27

begin the Old Testament Bible Reading Challenge on March 1



READY! SET! GO??!

As we begin the ‘Encounter’ sermon series, as we walk alongside one another in a common activity of reading this devotional guide, a question comes to my mind:

Are we willing to meet with Him?

Taking time to answer that question is important as we begin this first day of reading. You see, that is a question that we must humbly ask ourselves each and every day. In fact, it’s a question that doesn’t really need to be answered—our activities and busyness of the day will quickly tell us pretty clearly what priority an encounter with God has in our lives.

Let’s begin with a spirit of humility as we allow our time with Him to be the priority of our every day. This journey through the next eight weeks or so is meant to be much more than just an exercise in thumbing through a neatly organized document. It is meant to help focus our hearts on meeting God in a deeper way, developing a stronger connection with him, allowing our lives to be *moved* as we seek out Christ and His own encounter with God—one that took Him to the cross and ultimately the empty tomb.

DAY ONE ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: God desires to meet with you!

Verse of the Day: As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, O God.

Psalms 42:1

Question to Consider: How willing are you to meet with God today?

INTRODUCTION



Have you met God? Wow! If you haven't, find a Bible and open to Genesis 1. If you have met him, do the same. The opening line of God's Word says it all. Look at those first three words:

In...

...the...

...beginning

The God we are striving to know better on this forty-day journey is the same God who started it all...in the beginning. The God we desire to read about and pray towards is the same God who created the very universe you and I are apart of. And, technically, he created you, too!

Wouldn't you think that the God who put this world into orbit, who created the sun, moon, and stars, who placed all the animals and built all the mountains, the God who put life into you and me and knows how many hairs are atop our heads...THAT God desires to know you personally. He's a very big God—but oh yes, he has a lot of time for you.

Seek him.

DAY TWO ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: Re-introduce yourself to God today.

Verse of the Day: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. *Genesis 1:1*

Question to Consider: Have we taken the time to recognize our God as our Creator?



GIVE IT UP

Today, February 25, is the first day of the season of Lent. It's a date on our religious calendar that is often overlooked and many times misrepresented. It is much more than a forty-day period in which we "give something up" —like chocolate, or soda, or ...animal crackers— waiting to devour those sacrificed items as soon as we get home from Easter services.

This week, as we encounter God at the core, as we begin this season of Lent, we come face to face with his Son Jesus Christ—the One whom He sent to ultimately pay the heavy price for our sins in order that we may have this encounter with Him.

The only thing we have to "give up" during this season of the year is ourselves. Be humble. Admit that it is not all about you. Or me. Just Him and our Savior, Christ Jesus our Lord.

DAY THREE ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: Spend a few moments in humble silence and solitude as you thank God for paying the price of our shortcomings through the blood of his Son.

Verse of the Day: We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah 53:6

Question to Consider: Are you beginning this encounter with God with Christ in your heart?

REVEALED IN CREATION



The seasons of the year simply amaze me. Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall all shout out the creativity of God in such uniquely splendid ways. We are entering my second favorite season of the year: Spring. (Revealing my first favorite will have to wait until another devotional guide....) Nature is just waiting to reveal itself in a new way with all the warmth and color that springtime in the Midwest can present.

Encountering God at the core, at the center of our hearts, continues with the desire to acknowledge him as Creator. A song we sing titled “Indescribable” contains these lyrics:

Indescribable!

Uncontainable!

You placed the stars in the sky and you know them by name;

You are amazing, God!

DAY FOUR ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: Remember, our Creator knows each of us by name.

Verse of the Day: O Lord, you have searched me and you know me.

Psalms 139:1

Question to Consider: God knows you. How well do you know Him?



LIKE PEANUT BUTTER AND JELLY

Author Ben Patterson writes, “All the work of the kingdom of God begins with simply being with Jesus. If it doesn’t start there, it doesn’t start at all.” If we are sincere in our efforts to have an encounter with God, if we really desire to do great things through Him, how are we doing at encountering Christ as well.

Growing up in the church taught me a lot about God. Sunday School teachers and various preachers all made great strides in informing us about the God of Creation. We’d learn about His majesty and power, His wisdom and knowledge. We also learned, however, of this man named Jesus, the One who came to redeem us so that we may have an eternal encounter with Him and His Father.

They go hand in hand, don’t they? You can’t have one without the other. In order to encounter God at the core of our being, we must be willing to open up the door to a relationship with God’s son, our Savior.

I have great memories of my childhood years in church and am thankful for the faithful instruction of God’s Word...completely.

DAY FIVE ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: Knowing God is not enough. Embracing His Son, Jesus Christ, is at the core of our faith.

Verse of the Day: So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. *Galatians 3:26-27*

Question to Consider: Is Jesus a large part of your spiritual journey?

WEEK TWO



ENCOUNTERING GOD

in our
WAY OF LIFE

day 6 March 2

day 7 March 3

day 8 March 4

day 9 March 5

day 10 March 6



ENCOUNTERING GOD WHEN IT MATTERS MOST

Several years ago I went through a difficult time in which I felt like my entire world was coming down all around me. I could not find comfort in the words of any friend or any family member. I was just living; and as I lived each day it seemed as if my pain and sorrow would never go away. One evening while sitting in the darkness of my room I cried out these words: Oh, Lord that you would hear my prayer. Oh, that you would hear the cry of my heart even when my lips are silent. Come to me in my hour of need and do not leave me with this feeling of loneliness and despair. *Oh, Lord help me!*

At that moment God spoke to me as clearly as the dawning of the morning sun and he spoke these words from **Psalm 119:105**, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, And light unto my path.” All that I had read in God’s Word came rushing into my heart and mind at that exact moment and the light of His Word consumed me. I was overwhelmed with His peace, His comfort, and His strength. At that moment I realized that my Jesus had never left me, I just was blind to see that He was carrying me in my hour of need. I encountered God when I needed Him most because I humbled myself before His very presence!

DAY SIX ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: God is always there even when we cannot see him.

Verse of the Day: Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
And light unto my path.

Psalm 119:105

Question to Consider: Where do you need to encounter God in your life today?

ENCOUNTERING GOD WITH MY WIFE



I cannot remember what my wife wore on our first date, the first song that we ever danced to, or when we first kissed. There are many things that have left my memory through the course of our marriage. Yet, for all the things I have forgotten, there are many things I will never forget. I will never forget the way my wife lights a room when she enters, her gentle smile and her tender voice. I will never forget the first time I saw her in absolute radiance as she walked down the aisle in her wedding dress. I will never forget the way that she loves our children and me. I will never forget the first time I said “I Love You!” There are many things that I have forgotten, but what I remember I will cherish with all my heart because I cherish my wife as a true gift from my Heavenly Father.

There is no doubt in my mind that there will be many more things that I will forget and also more things that I will always remember. Through it all, one thing will remain: “I will Love my wife as Christ has loved His church!” I do this not because I have to, but because I want to. Christ has shown me the example of what it means to love someone so much that you would give your life for them. I want my wife to feel that same kind of love when she looks into my eyes each night, knowing that I would give my life to protect her, provide for her, and encourage her.

DAY SEVEN ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: Christ showed us what love is so we could love one another.

Verse of the Day: Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. *Ephesians 5:25*

Question to Consider: What are ways that you could show the love of Christ toward your wife this week?



ENCOUNTERING GOD WITH MY HUSBAND

I love my husband. I really do. Of course, I will admit, I am a lucky—rather, blessed—woman. He washes dishes, helps out with the kids, and is an all-around handyman when it comes to household repairs. It is in these small displays of affection that my appreciation deepens and my love for him grows.

But, life isn't perfect. Marriages are not perfect. Husbands are not perfect. (Neither are wives.) Yet it is in the difficult times, frustrating moments, and petty arguments that it is even more important for wives to adhere ever so closely to the command—yes it is a command—found in Ephesians 5:33b: “Wives respect your husbands.” Why does God require wives to respect their husbands? Isn't love enough?

God knows our husbands needs even better than we do. While love is important in any marriage, respect is crucial for its long-term health. As our husbands strive to love us as “Christ loves the church,” we ought to give them the love and respect they both need and deserve. A wife's respect can encourage a husband and even help to transform a marriage. If you desire to encounter God with your spouse, begin by showing him the respect God requires and the love that results.

DAY EIGHT ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: Respecting my husband is a vital part of a healthy marriage.

Verse of the Day: However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. *Ephesians 5:33*

Question to Consider: In what specific ways can I show respect to my husband?

ENCOUNTERING GOD WITH MY CHILDREN



Feeling grass under their feet for the first time. Noticing the ladybug crawling along the ground. Making a wish on a dandelion puff.

Every day our children encounter God—whether it is while exploring the mysteries of the backyard or while facing the insecurities of junior high. God gives us these opportunities to explore His amazing and special plan with our children. But, how often do we miss these God-given moments to experience God with our children?

Jeremiah 29:11 says, “For I know the plans I have for you...Plans to give you a hope and a future.”

God often shares glimpses of his great plan in the little things. These brief moments may quickly flee our minds, but often fascinate the minds of our children. Take the time to encounter God with your children. Sit a while longer with your child and watch the ladybug. And while you watch, absorb all the wonder of God’s plan.

DAY NINE ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: God’s plan is all around us.

Verse of the Day: For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. *Jeremiah 29:11*

Question to Consider: What can I do today to explore God’s plan with my child?



ENCOUNTERING GOD AT THE SUPPER TABLE

The supper table. Fifty years ago this was the iconic symbol of the American family, while today it seems that the supper table is no more than a mere piece of wood that rarely gets used. In our culture very few families eat a meal together more than twice a week. Why? Sporting events, meetings, clubs, overtime, busy schedules; the list is as wide as the day is long. When I was a child our family seldom missed a meal together. With five children in different sporting events and activities, some may have considered it a miracle how often we ate together.

I remember the supper table: it was symbol of joy and anticipation, unity, encouragement and love. I remember the hours we would spend around just talking, laughing, crying, and sharing life together.

I remember when we stopped gathering around the table: the shattering of family unity, the cold and lonely meals eaten in silence. I remember the empty chair where my dad used to sit and tell us stories of his day and his adventures. I remember the tears shed upon reflecting on that empty chair, longing just to have supper table back the way it used to be.

The supper table is more than a piece of wood. It is where families come together and it is where God speaks to His children; where He unites parents and children, brothers and sisters; it is where life lessons are taught and never forgotten in the heart of the children. Reclaim the supper table today and you will reclaim your family!

DAY TEN ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: Teach the Word on every occasion and encounter God at home.

Verse of the Day: Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. *Deuteronomy 6:7*

Question to Consider: Is supper table time important in your family?

WEEK THREE



ENCOUNTERING GOD

in our
WALK

day 11 March 9

day 12 March 10

day 13 March 11

day 14 March 12

day 15 March 13

*Have you registered for the March 22
Walk Thru the Old Testament Seminar?*



WALKING IN HUMBLINESS

Ephesians 4:2 says that we are to be completely humble in how we live out our calling in our lives. There is a story of a group of people that went on a tour of the home of great pianist and composer Beethoven. As the tour was winding down, the tour guide asked if anyone wanted to play a few notes on Beethoven's piano. Many rushed at the opportunity except for one man. That man was asked if he wanted to play something and he responded, "No, I don't feel worthy." That man was Ignacy Jan Paderewski who was an accomplished pianist and composer in his own right. He was the probably the only person in the room that was actually worthy enough to play that piano.

We don't want to rush in and do things that we are not called to do. We need to be humble in how we seek and live out our calling. Take Mary, for example. Her calling was to give birth to God's Son, as monumental calling as you can have. Yet she was completely humble the way she completed her task. Walking with God in humbleness means checking our pride at the door and taking joy in the calling that God has given us.

DAY ELEVEN ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: God has a calling for me and cares how I live it out.

Verse of the Day: For he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed. *Luke 1:48*

Question to Consider: How humbly am I living out my calling?

WALKING GENTLY



For most of my life someone in my family has called me “Gentle Ben.” No doubt after a book and TV series about the adventures of a 650-pound American Black Bear and a young boy. I never really liked the nickname but never had the heart to tell them to stop. One of the reasons I didn’t like it was the word “gentle.” To me it seemed girly, soft, and weak. I wanted them to see me as strong, fierce, and manly. Years later it occurred to me that they meant it as a compliment. They viewed me as a person with strength of character, kindness and gentleness, not unlike the “Gentle Ben” of the stories.

There are only two people in all of scripture that are noted for being gentle or meek. Moses is the first one and is referred to as “a very meek man, more meek than anyone else on the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3). Meekness is power under control, and Jesus is certainly the prime example of that. We read about Jesus’ power. Jesus calmed the sea, healed the sick, and raised the dead. When Jesus was on the cross, He had the power to come down. With all that power, Jesus chose obedience. He chose to control His power. Walking gently means that we are ready to do the will of God no matter the cost, and determined to bow down to God’s will. How gentle is your walk?

DAY TWELVE ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: Gentleness is a strength.

Verse of the Day: Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Matthew 5:5

Question to Consider: What is God’s view versus my view gentleness?



WALKING PATIENTLY

Research the word “patient” and another word will come up: “longsuffering.” Contrary to what you might think, being patient does not mean that you suffer for a long period of time. Even though you might feel that you are when you are walking patiently. In fact, the word longsuffering simply means that we have a long temper as opposed to a short fuse.

Imagine that your temper is that of a bomb. My little girl, despite her pleasantries most of the time, has shown me what a temper on a short fuse can look like. For example, when she plays with something that I don’t want her to play with, I gently remove her from it, or it from her, and then it starts. Her face gets red, her lip juts out. She cries and kicks her legs in frustration. It’s a good thing that we adults never do such a thing. Do we?

Practice patience. It’s a phrase that we don’t like to hear—maybe because we misunderstand it. Maybe we should think of it as “adding patience.” When we practice patience, we add length to the fuse; we place more distance between our temper and the lit fuse on the other end. That gives us more time for the fuse to go out, or for us to smother it before it blows up. Think of the patience that God has for us. If anyone has the right to be angry, it is Him. Our repeated disobedience should be met with God’s fury. Instead, our God gives us another chance time and time again. So as you add to your fuse, reflect on the patience that God has for you.

DAY THIRTEEN ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: Patience is a fruit of God’s Spirit.

Verse of the Day: My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. *James 1:19-20*

Question to Consider: How long is my fuse?

WALKING IN LOVE



In my childhood I was a strong swimmer. I spent hours at my grandparent's house in the summer diving and swimming. I taught my cousins how to dive, and I would race anyone that might be there at the drop of a hat. So one day when my gym class was to start a swimming unit, I was excited and eager to show my stuff.

I remember one lesson when I spotted a student in my class having some trouble in the deep end of the pool. I wanted to help him, so I dove in after him in the crowded water. I told him to hold onto my back and I'd take him to the side of the pool. I wasn't ready for what happened next. Not only did he grab my back, but then he pushed me under the water as he made his way to the side. Unfortunately for me, we had not yet learned the proper way to save someone—that was yet to come.

The words in Ephesians 4:2 mention that we should be “forbearing one another in love.” What Paul says is that we must not push others down to exalt ourselves. We must hold each other up in love. In doing so, we need to show grace to others because we are ruled by love. We should live a life that is willing to teach and correct others. As we do it, we need to demonstrate grace and show the love of Christ. In other words, we must sometimes allow ourselves to practice grace in order to demonstrate Christ's love in a better way.

DAY FOURTEEN ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: The attitude of love does not push others down.

Verse of the Day: Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Colossians 3:13

Question to Consider: Who can I show grace in order to show God's love?



WALKING IN PEACE

Imagine yourself walking in a beautiful garden. You are surrounded by brilliant colors, sweet smells, and the sound of the wind swirling throughout the garden. This immaculate garden, a place so peaceful, is given to you. You are in charge of keeping it, maintaining it, and preserving its peace. There is no way that you can make this sanctuary any more beautiful, but you work to keep it as perfect as possible.

In the same way God has given us unity among believers in the form of His Spirit. It is our task to maintain it and preserve it. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says that, “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” God desired unity because He has unity within Himself (John 17:21). Our heavenly Father has even given us His Spirit so that we can have this unity not only with Him, but with other Christians.

When we are in Christ, we are connected with others who are in Christ. However; as man, we can create divisions that hinder that connection. We cannot create this unity ourselves because God has already given it to us in the form of His Spirit. We are simply called to maintain it and remove the barriers that prevent all true believers of Christ to be one body.

DAY FIFTEEN - MY DAILY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: God longs for us all to be one in Him.

Verse of the Day: For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. *1 Corinthians 12:13*

Question to Consider: Am I maintaining unity or am I creating barriers in the body of believers?

WEEK FOUR



ENCOUNTERING GOD

through

PRAYER

day 16 March 16

day 17 March 17

day 18 March 18

day 19 March 19

day 20 March 20

Walk Thru the Old Testament Seminar is March 22



A LIFE OF PRAYER

The Bible is full of great stories. One story that stands out is the story of Daniel. When we think of Daniel we immediately think about Daniel in the lions' den. We love to tell how God shut the lions' mouths and Daniel was unharmed. As a kid we used to sing a song called "Lions." The chorus said went like this:

"Oh them lions they can eat my body,
but they can't swallow my soul (no, no, no)

They keep on trying to crash my party,
but they can't get control (no, no)"

As a kid, this song and its crazy lion-like hand-motions was simply amazing. However, do we remember what got Daniel thrown in with the lions? One word: prayer. Daniel refused to stop praying, even when he knew it could cost him everything. In Daniel's mind, everything, without God, is truly nothing.

DAY SIXTEEN ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: A prayer-less life is a life-less life.

Verse of the Day: Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me.

Psalm 54:4

Question to Consider: Where have you quit praying?

FAITHFUL PRAYER



Prayer must always begin with faith. Anytime someone undertakes the task to talk to the unseen, that person must begin with faith. James tells us that when we ask God we “must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord” (James 1:6-7).

To offer a faith-less prayer is the epitome of insanity. Yet, so many of us do this day after day. So many times we pray for God to use us in order to reach the lost, and yet we continually shut ourselves off from those who are lost. How often do we pray for God to make us a blessing to others, and yet the next moment we refuse to give our time to others whom we could bless? How often do we pray for God to move in our lives, and yet we go on living as if He will not move? Do we truly believe that God alone can move mountains and that our prayers move God?

As you seek to encounter God through prayer, never forget that being faithful in prayer is not just the number of times we pray, but that we pray in faith.

DAY SEVENTEEN ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: Faith without prayer is dead, just as prayer without faith is dead.

Verse of the Day: Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Romans 12:12

Question to Consider: How can your faith grow in your prayer life?



GOD IS SO GOOD

Life is full of ups and downs. There are times when all seems to be going well and we are on the mountain top with God Himself. Then, there are times when everything seems just the opposite and we find ourselves in the valley. Or even worse, the valley seems high because we feel like we are at the lowest of low and down in the dark depths of the pit.

C.S. Lewis says, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” God’s blessing is not seen in our personal comfort level, but rather in our daily interactions with Him. The sobering truth is those that suffer the most are often times the ones most blessed by God.

Hebrews tells us of those “who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle”... “Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword” (Hebrews 11:33-34, 35b-36a).

On the surface it seems they are not the ones that were blessed, but then we read, “These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect” (Hebrews 11:39-40). God always does better than what we expect. So even when we are in the pit and do not understand why God is allowing things to happen the way that they are; remember that He is good.

DAY EIGHTEEN ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: God always does better than what we expect.

Verse of the Day: for though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity. *Proverbs 24:16*

Question to Consider: How does God lead while in the pit?

A FAITHFUL GOD



Life makes it pretty easy to get into difficult situations. Someone once said, “The trouble with trouble is that it usually starts out as fun.” The Bible is full of men and women that got themselves into all kinds of trouble. Either they ran into the wrong people, the wrong situation, or simply just ran their mouth. Today we are going to look at a guy that ran the wrong way.

God told Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach. Jonah however, disobeyed and “ran away from the Lord” heading in the wrong direction (Jonah 1:3). As we all know, soon Jonah found himself in one difficult situation. Jonah 2:1 says, “From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God.” Can you imagine what it must have been like to be Jonah praying from within the fish?

The pits of life can seem to bring us back to God quicker than anything else. Perhaps this is how Paul can confidently say, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him...” (Romans 8:28). Even in the worst of circumstances we know that we can turn to God, for He is always faithful.

DAY NINETEEN ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: God will always do what He has promised to do.

Verse of the Day: If we are faithless, he will remain faithful,
for he cannot disown himself. *2 Timothy 2:13*

Question to Consider: What circumstances in your life has God used to work for the good?



PRAYING FOR THOSE IN THE PIT

There is nothing worse than living a life outside of Christ. Every Christian should have a story. There should always be a story of my life before I met Christ, and the story of my life after I met Christ. If you see little change between the two, then there is something seriously wrong.

We cannot forget that while we have found the life that only Jesus can give; there are others that are still desperately searching. Matthew 9:36-38 says, “But when He (Jesus) saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers *are* few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.’ ”

As we encounter God through prayer, we cannot forget to pray for what He has asked us to pray for. May our eyes be opened to the opportunities around us to reach the lost and lead them to the Shepherd. May we pray for God to raise up workers for His harvest. May the church arise and be an unstoppable force making Him known among the nations.

DAY TWENTY ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: The deepest and darkest pit of all is a life entrenched in sin.

Verse of the Day: So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

John 8:36

Question to Consider: Have you made the decision to enter into the covenant of immersion? Why or why not?

WEEK FIVE



ENCOUNTERING GOD

through

HIS WORD

day 21 March 23

day 22 March 24

day 23 March 25

day 24 March 26

day 25 March 27



ENCOUNTERING GOD IN THE UNTOLD STORIES

I have a heart for the untold stories of God's glory. There are as many as the sands on the seashore. There are stories of God's infinite wisdom, of His grace, His unconditional love, and His redemption. There are many untold stories that you and I will never know until we enter into God's glory.

Every Christian has a testimony to share, yet few get to hear these amazing stories of God's great provision and His unchanging love. I have a heart for the untold stories of God's glory because I believe that there is nothing ordinary or insignificant about each person's testimony with regard to a life changed by the grace of God. The untold stories are where we find out the truth about the transformational and healing power of God's Word. If you have a life changed by God, then, make no mistake, you have an extraordinary testimony that just might change the heart of someone sitting beside you today. Never forget that the "Word of God is alive and active," so let it be active in your life today!

DAY TWENTY-ONE ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: Change a life, share your testimony today.

Verse of the Day: For the word of God is living and active. *Hebrews 4:12a*

Question to Consider: What is your untold story of God's glory, His grace, or His mercy?

THE PAST SHAPES OUR FUTURE



When families get together it doesn't take long for the conversation to drift backward to the memorable family events that seem to stick in the minds of everyone. Some are humorous, and you may get a good ribbing for something you did. Someone says something that brings a memory back that you had completely forgotten. You may hear a new story because you weren't originally there, or had never heard tell of it.

How wonderful it would be to have an accurate account of things that have happened in the family. Those births, marriages, family gatherings, family reunions, special events, and even the storms the family has weathered. Maybe you have some dedicated soul in the family that taken it upon them selves to be the unofficial "family historian," who has recorded family events as they happened. If not, all you have is the family collective memory to rely on, and that can be murky at times.

We can all see the importance of having an accurate account of past events. It can be a reference point to help for better decision making in the future. It can give a sense of purpose to guide us on life's path, or an anchor when storms arise. So it is with the Word of God. Paul, in his second letter to Timothy (2:2) says, "and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well." It is a source of our strength to know that God has used the Holy Spirit to quicken an accurate infallible account leading mankind to Christ and the love of a gracious God.

DAY TWENTY-TWO ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: The Love of Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Verse of the Day: And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. *2 Timothy 2:2*

Question to Consider: What are the hallmark moments of faith in your life or the life of your family that you could write down and share with future generations?



THE WORD OF LIFE

A study by the Barna Group in 2001 showed that barely half (54%) of Christian adults read their Bible during a typical week. However, 82% of all Americans (not just Christians) pray at least once a week. It is pretty clear that more people pray regularly than read their Bible. The sad truth is that most problems in our lives come from us talking too much and not listening to God enough.

Psalms 119:9 says, “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.” When we encounter God through His Word, we find ourselves being transformed. Rob Bell says, “The Bible is a revolutionary manifesto....It is living, it is breathing, and it demands that we surrender to it unconditionally so that it can transform us.” Reading His Word is risky business for those that seek to remain in control. However; to those that desire to surrender everything to the King, they will find that the Word leads to life.

In your reading, stop trying to master the Word and allow the Word to master you.

DAY TWENTY-THREE ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: God’s Word is alive and eternal seeking to transform your life.

Verse of the Day: You are my portion, O LORD;

I have promised to obey your words.

Psalm 119:57

Question to Consider: What are some obstacles that keep you from reading His Word?

WALKING IN THE WORD



Walking seems like a simple concept: put one foot in front of the other and maintain your balance. As I have watched my daughter grow this past year, I have seen her learn to crawl. At first, she would get up on her hands and knees and start to rock back and forth, but she wouldn't go anywhere. Then as she started to crawl, her world changed. She could go places she couldn't before and see what she wanted to see. Soon she started to pull herself up onto the couch, the refrigerator and anything she could. Lately she has started to show some signs of walking, but isn't quite there yet. She's not quite ready to take that first step.

As I've witnessed her mobility develop, I'm reminded of my own walk with the Lord. Many times we see someone who's walking with God, but we never stop to think about the steps they've taken to get there. It's not always easy to take the first step, to go from crawling to walking. In reality we have to learn how to walk ourselves. It starts off slow. We might not even feel as if we get anywhere; however, over time our efforts are rewarded. As we crawl we can see our world begin to change, and as we start to walk our lives start transforming.

As we walk with God let us never forget that the effort we give will always be fruitful. Isaiah 55:10 says, "so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." So know that as you put one foot, or knee, in front of the other that God's Word will transform our lives as we move forward.

DAY TWENTY-FOUR ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: Walking with God is a process.

Verse of the Day: So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. *Isaiah 55:11*

Question to Consider: How am I moving forward in my walk?



LOOKING FOR OUR LOVER

It is difficult to encounter God through His Word when we have a distorted image of Him. Did you know that a thief cannot “find” a policeman, no matter how hard he looks? The problem for the thief is not so much a matter of the looking as in the desire to find. No one wants to find someone who will restrict his quest for freedom and fulfillment.

Many see the Bible as set of rules which restrict their freedom and fulfillment. Since they already have more rule than they want, they are hardly anxious to discover more rules to add their already over-burdened life. So they are not highly motivated to read the scripture or learn more about the God whom they infer wants to further restrict their lives.

But God is not a policeman. God is our Lover, and His words are His love letters sent to us to bless our lives. Certainly there are restrictions in the Bible, but these are warnings to save us from harm. A lover who truly cares will always provide the warnings we need.

The purpose of the Bible is to show us our Lover so we will desire to draw closer to Him. We should read the Bible with the desire to “see beyond the sacred page,” to look into the eyes of our Lover. We should do more than learn the beautiful data about God. We should use Bible data as a lens through which we see Jesus more clearly.

The more clearly we see Jesus, the more we will desire to draw closer to Him. The closer we draw to Him, the more He is able to fill our lives with joy, satisfaction and fulfillment. In Jesus’ presence is fullness of joy, and at His right hand are pleasures forever more.

DAY TWENTY-FIVE ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: Let us look beyond the scared page to see our Lover and all His qualities and perfections.

Verse of the Day: You will make known to me the path of life;
In Your presence is fullness of joy and at Your right hand there
are pleasures forever.

Psalm 16:11

Question to Consider: For what are you looking when you read the Bible?

WEEK SIX



ENCOUNTERING GOD

through

THE FIRE

day 26 March 30

day 27 March 31

day 28 April 1

day 29 April 2

day 30 April 3



PRESSING ON

*When the valley is deep,
When the mountain is steep
When the body is weary,
When we stumble and fall...*

Life is not always easy. Raise your hand high and proud if you can agree with that statement! God never promised that an intimate, dedicated commitment to him would translate into a journey with no setbacks, detours, or rough roads.

As we begin this sixth week of readings, can we pause for just a moment and honestly reflect upon the times that we have been in the valley; when we've stumbled and fallen? For some, this may be a difficult exercise—you've had it "pretty good." For others, answering this question may be way too easy—you've had more than your share of steep mountains and weary bodies. Whatever the case for you, take time to silently document those times of trials.

I want you to carry those with you these next five days—not as a burden or weight upon your soul—but as a reminder of God's faithfulness. As we will see in the next few readings, taking stock of our difficult times will help us encounter God on an even more intimate level.

DAY TWENTY-SIX ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: "Hope is as important to us as water is to a fish...as vital as electricity is to a light bulb...as essential as air is to a bird."
(Charles Swindoll)

Verse of the Day: Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. *James 1:2*

Questions to Consider: Even in difficult times, where are you placing your hope?

PRESSING ON PART 2



*When the choices are hard,
When we're battered and scarred,
When we've spent our resources,
When we've given our all.*

Yesterday I challenged all of us to reflect upon the struggles we have had in each of our lives. As we carry those times into our devotional today, have there been choices that you have had to make that have been difficult? What are some of the ways you have literally “given your all” for a specific dream, goal, or prompting from God? Did the results pan out differently than what you expected?

In our journey to encounter God and serve Christ, the apostle Peter reminds us to remain faithful to Him. It is easy to be overwhelmed in life and thereby have very little confidence in your “faithful” God pulling you through. When we give our all, we usually expect immediate results, don't we? We study hard for an exam and we usually quickly know what our grade will be. We sweat over a hot stove in a cramped kitchen all day, preparing a feast for the family, and usually know how good the meal was after the first bite by the guests.

Be patient, Be comforted. Be in Christ.

DAY TWENTY-SEVEN ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: No matter the choices, easy or hard, God is there to help us through them.

Verse of the Day: Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you....
1 Peter 4:12

Question to Consider: Are we really giving God our all, even in the times of testing?



I'M CRYING AGAIN

*In Jesus' name, we press on,
In Jesus' name, we press on.
Dear Lord, with the prize clear before our eyes.
We find the strength to press on.*

The words that have prefaced the last three devotionals are lyrics taken from a song that were sung last Sunday. It's a song I remember singing during a very difficult period in the life of the church where I grew up. I always loved singing in the choir and I was one of the rare individuals (in high school) who chose to sing in the church choir. Our beloved Music Minister, Mr. Bright, had made a decision to move on to another church after twenty-three years of ministry at my church. In following God's call elsewhere, he went on to do amazing work for God's kingdom...but the pain it put upon our little church was almost too much to bear.

Mr. Bright chose an anthem titled "Press On" as the last anthem he would direct with the choir—on his last Sunday. I distinctly remember sitting in the choir loft on the far left side, belting out my bass part with tears streaming down my face. Out in the congregation, people had their own flow of tears going as well. It was a very difficult time—but a great lesson and song selection.

No matter the pain, no matter the size of the mountain, God encourages all of us to *press on*. We find our strength in Him!

DAY TWENTY-EIGHT ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: Nothing is impossible for God!

Verse of the Day: I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. *Philippians 4:13*

Question to Consider: Have you shed a tear or two over the difficulties in your life? That's okay! Take comfort in God in even the most difficult of times.

CARNIVAL PRIZES



*In Jesus' name, we press on,
In Jesus' name, we press on.
Dear Lord, with the prize clear before our eyes.
We find the strength to press on.*

It's been a LONG time since I've been to a carnival. I remember a small circus coming to town back when I was in high school. The elephants and tigers and trapeze artists and clowns all arrived one bright, sunny day and set up camp on an old soccer field across from the high school. By no means was this the Barnum & Bailey Circus. Maybe the Tom & Jerry version—I don't know.

I do remember, however, walking down the “midway” and seeing all of the *games* we could play. Even more amazing...all the PRIZES!!! Clearly, the goal was to receive a prize—a stuffed animal or gigantic lollipop. But in order to get the prize, hoops had to be thrown on pop bottles or targets had to be shot off the counter with air guns. Oh, the fun.

Being the nerd that I was (or, um, am) I never really won many prizes. (I think they were rigged). But, I kept putting my money down, clearly determined to win won of those prizes to give to my gorgeous girlfriend.

Wait. I didn't have a girlfriend.

The point? Life is **nothing** like a carnival, I know, but we all have goals and desires. Shouldn't our main goal be to live for Christ? Anything less would be a loss? That's as challenging for me as I'm sure it is for you at times.

DAY TWENTY-NINE ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: Keep your eyes on the prize...Christ Jesus.

Verse of the Day: Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. *Philippians 3:12*

Question to Consider: Are we looking to “gain” only for ourselves? Do we have the Kingdom of God in our viewfinder?



PSSSSSFFFFFFFFTTTT

Beginning in high school and continuing through college summers, I worked for my dad at his retail tire business. Each day we would jack cars up, use an air wrench to loosen lug nuts, and replace tires. The process was pretty simple, but you certainly couldn't miss a step anywhere. Disaster would strike the car owner down the road if you did!

Removing the tire from the wheel was easy. Putting a new one back on was not as easy. These were the steps, in order: remove valve stem, insert new valve stem, clean rim with wire brush to provide smooth service, lather soapy material on tire bead to provide adhesion of tire and rim, place new tire on wheel, use machine with rotating arm to place tire on rims—twice, place air hose on valve stem, use legs to hold tire in place, press pedal for incredible blast of air pressure inside tire, seat tire bead on rim, air up tire to proper pressure, do a little dance. (Dancing optional).

Even though every step was important, the pressure put between the rim and the tire was crucial. Messing that up would cause the tire to lose air pressure—not a good thing. It didn't always work the first time. Sometimes, two or three blasts of air would be required. We have steps in pursuing Christ, don't we? It may not be a checklist, per se, but in order to pursue Christ, we must continue to *press on* toward that goal. Accept Christ, pray, read the Word, share the gospel, help your neighbor, love God and one another....keep at it, keep trying. One more blast of air.

DAY THIRTY ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: Continue to apply pressure, good pressure, in your pursuit of Christ, even in the most difficult of times.

Verse of the Day: Brothers, and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which Christ has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. *Philippians 3:13-14*

Question to Consider: In times of fire and turmoil, are we more inclined to back off or pursue with more determination?

WEEK SEVEN



ENCOUNTERING GOD

through

TEMPTATION

day 31 April 6

day 32 April 7

day 33 April 8

day 34 April 9

day 35 April 10

Easter is April 12



EXPECT TO BE TEMPTED

How will you address temptation today? Sometimes people don't want to think about temptation because when they do, they get discouraged. They see temptation as weakness and sin. Temptation is neither. After all, Jesus Himself was tempted and He was neither weak nor sinful. In fact, Jesus experienced all our human temptations. He was "tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). So no temptation in itself is sin. Sin comes in the wrong response to the temptation.

This week you need to prepare for temptation. Prepare first by expecting to be tempted. The Christian life is not an escape from trials, tests and temptations. Rather, God uses these three phenomena as part of our growth curriculum. "Trials" are part of the natural consequences of the living in a fallen world. "Tests" are sent by God to help us know our heart, our maturity level and our need for dependency on Christ. "Temptations" are sent by Satan to pull us away from God, discourage us and eventually, with our cooperation, destroy us.

Our Example, Jesus, experienced all three: trials, tests and temptations, throughout His life, but especially in the Judean wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). Hunger, heat and deprivation led to a physical state that provided a trial to the body and the brain. God also tested Jesus. God led Jesus into the wilderness for the purpose of encountering the temptations of Satan. Satan did his part. He tempted Jesus at least three times. Matthew 4 records how Satan sought to destroy Jesus at the onset of His ministry, but Jesus overcame temptation. Jesus showed us we can expect to overcome even the severest temptations through His strength.

DAY THIRTY-ONE ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: Temptation is part of the curriculum for the Christian.

Verse of the Day: No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it. *I Corinthians 10:13*

Question to Consider: Thank You for the victories over temptation You will bring through Your strength this week.

EXPECT THE HOLY SPIRIT TO WORK



When tempted, do you at the time think about the fact that God is actively at work during the temptation? In temptation, God is at work before the fact, during the fact, and after the fact. As you prepare for temptation today, expect God to be working in you to deliver and mature you.

In Jesus' Judean wilderness retreat, God was working *ahead* of the temptation experience. "Jesus was led by the Spirit *into* the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Matthew 4:1). God was also working *during* the wilderness experience. Jesus "was led about by the Spirit *in* the wilderness" (Luke 4:1). Finally, God was working *after* the temptations. Jesus "returned to Galilee [from the wilderness temptations] *in the power* of the Spirit" (Luke 4:14). Jesus relied on God because Jesus knew God was working ahead, during, and after the wilderness temptations.

In the wilderness God was at work within Jesus. "Jesus learned obedience by the things He suffered" (Hebrews 5:8). God was at work strengthening and helping Jesus to obey the truth. God is also at work within us. "For it is God who is at work within you, both to will and to do His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). God is always at work within us to deliver us from temptation and to use the circumstances of our life to bring us into greater maturity and joy.

DAY THIRTY-TWO ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: God is at work during our temptations.

Verse of the Day: For it is God who is at work within you both to will and to work for His good pleasure. *Philippians 2:13*

Question to Consider: Thank You Father that You will be working before, during and after my temptations today to help me overcome and to make me more like Christ.



PREPARE FOR TEMPTATION

God is always at work within you to prepare you for victory in spiritual warfare. He asks us to join in that preparation. While cannot know which temptations will come on any given day, we can, nevertheless, know how to prepare for them. The best preparation is to remove Satan's weapons from him before he can use them against us.

The best way to remove Satan's weapons is through the prayer of renunciation in Habakkuk 3:17-19. The prayer of renunciation, if prayed from the heart and with understanding, removes almost all of the weapons Satan uses against humans. If we believe what we are praying and continue to believe it throughout the day, the prayer of renunciation will keep up from falling. Because of the renunciations as well as the positive announcements in the prayer, Satan has no weapons to use against us, since we have renounced our trust in everything that people are tempted to trust in besides God alone.

The prayer of renunciation is a "no-lose" prayer. If we have renounced our dependency on things and circumstances to make us happy, we have nothing temporal to lose. We have placed our affections on God alone and He will never leave us (Hebrews 13:5). When we depend for our happiness and welfare on God alone, every day is only gain. No matter what happens during the day, there can be no losses, only gains.

DAY THIRTY-THREE ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: Pray the pray of renunciation only on the days you think there is a possibility you could be tempted by Satan.

Verse of the Day: Though the fig tree should not blossom and there be no fruit on the vines; though the yield of the olive should fail, and the fields produce no food; though the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there be no cattle in the stalls; yet I will exult in Yahweh. I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord Yahweh is my strength and He has made my feet like hind's [deer's] feet and makes me walk on my high places.

Habakkuk 3:17-19

Question to Consider: Can you memorize the prayer of renunciation?

PREPARE WITH TRUTH



Temptation involves a spiritual battle. In spiritual warfare the main weapon the Holy Spirit supplies us is truth. Sometimes we are poorly prepared for battle because we cannot effectively wield the truth sword—the Bible. We know the Bible, but not well. We know only enough truth to be easily deceived by Satan. So we are vulnerable to Satan.

A good deceiver deceives by appealing to truths. The most dangerous deception is 90% truth and only 10% lie. Counterfeits deceive because they closely resemble the genuine.

In the wilderness temptations of Matthew 4:1-11, Satan used the approach he uses to today to deceive us, but Satan could not deceive Jesus because Jesus knew the whole truth. Jesus knew the truth so well that He could immediately recognize the lie in Satan's deception. In His battle with Satan, Jesus repeatedly used the truths found in the scriptures, the sword of the Spirit.

A major reason the Holy Spirit gave us the scriptures is to provide us with the truth we need in order to battle temptation. But we need more than knowledge of scripture. We also need spiritual wisdom. In addition to knowing the scriptures, Jesus also knew how the scriptures apply to life decisions. The reason the church encourages everyone to read through the Bible is so that we will learn the scripture so well that we will know "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). The reason the church calls everyone to participate in a group Bible study is so that we will learn spiritual wisdom and know how to apply God's counsel to practical living, such as during times of temptation.

DAY THIRTY-FOUR ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: What is my next step in learning God's truth so well that I can quickly recognize Satan's deceptions in my life?

Verse of the Day: Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. *Ephesians 6:17*

Question to Consider: Will you seek a Bible study plan that you can do in order to learn the whole counsel of God?



PREPARE THROUGH MEMORIZATION

Have you noticed that when you are tempted, you are seldom ready at that moment—the moment when you actually need the most help—to do a Bible study? Yet there is a way to draw upon the Bible immediately and effectively during temptation to get the exact help you need. This is what Jesus did during His temptation experience in the Judea wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11).

During His temptations from Satan, Jesus drew up the exact scriptures He needed every time. He did not unfold arms full of scrolls. He probably did not have any written manuscripts with Him. Yet He had the Bible readily at hand, the same way we do today.

The Bible was readily at hand for Jesus because He had previously memorized scripture. Jesus had memorized Deuteronomy 8:3; 6:16 and 10:20. Scripture is never more at hand than when it is memorized. The most helpful Bible manuscript is the one in our head. By quoting the Deuteronomy passages Jesus overcame temptation, showing us how we too can overcome temptation.

Start today to prepare to overcome future temptation. Write the memory verse for the current sermon series on a card and carry it in your pocket this week. Take it out at each meal and repeat it aloud. This means three times a day for a week. Learn the verse word perfect. “Over learn” it, since you will forget most of what you have not “over learned.” During the following weeks, repeat the verse aloud periodically and the passage will sink deeper into your long-term memory, becoming available to you whenever you need.

DAY THIRTY-FIVE ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: Prepare for temptation the way Jesus prepared: memorize scripture.

Verse of the Day: How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word. You word I have hide in my heart that I might not sin against You.

Psalms 119:9, 11

Question to Consider: Can you recite the sermon memory verse?

WEEK EIGHT



ENCOUNTERING GOD

in the

TOMB

day 36 April 13

day 37 April 14

day 38 April 15

day 39 April 16

day 40 April 17



ENCOUNTERING GOD AT JUST THE RIGHT TIME

It was only five feet, maybe six feet at the most. The gap between the buildings really did not look that wide. As I made my way to the edge of the roof of the apartment complex in downtown Chicago, I looked back to my friend and I said: “I don’t care how short of a distance it is, we are ten stories up and I do not want to die.” My friend continued to agitate and taunt me hoping that I would give into the pressure. I finally went to the other end of the roof, took off running. I closed the gap between myself and the edge of the building and with a few feet to go I veered off to the right hand side and down the ladder we had just climbed up. You thought I was going to jump didn’t you? Come on, I am not that stupid! I want to live until God is ready to take me home.

This is only one of many times in my life that God has delivered me from disastrous mistakes. I have made many stupid mistakes in my life, yet God abounds in grace and still forgives me as I go to Him in humility and repentance. Jesus Christ came to this earth at just the right time when mankind was wallowing in our sin and He died for our sin. He died so that we could live. Make no mistake: God always shows up at just the right time. He is never too early, and never too late; but ultimately it is your choice to respond to Him and follow Him!

DAY THIRTY-SIX ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: God is never late, he is always on time.

Verse of the Day: You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. *Romans 5:6*

Question to Consider: Where do you need God to show up in your life?

ENCOUNTERING GOD AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS



When I was young I had thoughts that I was invincible. I was strong, smart, athletic, and I had everything going my way. I was on top of the world and I felt like there was nothing that I could not do. I pushed the edge with everything that I threw myself into because I was invincible. Then it happened, my world was shaken and the false reality that I had painted in my picture perfect world was completely wiped away.

I will never forget the day that my dear friend was killed in a farming accident. He was only a few months older than me and we had so much in common. He was like Superman in my eyes, a man that could do anything, a man that was invincible. At the time of his death my whole life was turned upside down, and at his funeral I found out the truth about what it meant to be invincible. My friend was a Christian and his death led me to Jesus Christ. I finally understood for once in my life that we will all fade from this life and will enter into eternity, but some will not live forever. Some will not be invincible—some will perish forever. There are many that are facing a false reality today and they say things like “I have lived a good life and I am a good man and that is good enough.” “I will live forever because of my good nature and my kindness.” But the truth is that without Jesus Christ no one will live forever. It is through Christ alone that you will live for eternity. Do you know Him as your Lord and Savior? If not then come to the foot of the cross today, for as long as you have breath it will never be too late!

DAY THIRTY-SEVEN ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: It is through Jesus Christ alone that you will live forever.

Verse of the Day: But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. *Romans 5:8*

Question to Consider: Do you know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?



ENCOUNTERING GOD IN OUR HOUR OF NEED

I have had times where grief has consumed me in my life. I have had times where temptation has clouded my vision. I have had times when sorrow has cast darkness over my heart. I have times where I felt like God was no where in sight and times when I felt like He did not hear a single prayer that I lifted up to Him.

During these times when I needed God the most, I felt like He was farthest away; but the reality was the exact opposite. God is closest to us in our times of weakness and trial. He is the one who gives us strength when we are weak. He is the one who gives us vision when we cannot see. He is the one that gives us courage, boldness, and the will to carry on even when it seems as if the odds are against us. Yes, God is always there in our time of need, but sometimes we do not see Him because we are so consumed by the weight of our need!

Next time you find yourself in an hour of need and there seems no where to turn, turn to the Lord with a humble heart and ask Him to remove the scales from your eyes that you might see His truth in a whole new light. Trust me, God delivers! I am living proof of it.

DAY THIRTY-EIGHT ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: God is ready to deliver, get ready to respond.

Verse of the Day: Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. *Matthew 11:28*

Question to Consider: Where do you need God to show Himself to you today?

ENCOUNTERING GOD AT THE CROSSROADS



We have all found ourselves at *crossroad moments* during different points of our lives. These moments set the course or direction of our lives for years to come. One of my first crossroad moments came when I entered into college. I had my heart set upon entering into a medical field, yet I had another option set before me and the choice was up to me. I did not become a doctor! Over the next four years my college journey would shape and mold me with the discipline that would be needed in the years ahead. God had His hand at work even when I did not see it.

Another crossroad moment came as I was entertaining the idea of entering into ministry. It was a difficult decision from a human perspective, yet an easy decision from a spiritual perspective. Guess what? I became a minister, and I have never regretted a day of it since. We will all find ourselves at different crossroad moments during the course of our lives. The question is: Are we listening for God's voice? Are we asking for His direction? Are we willing to take the long walk if He asks of us? Tough choices are not easy to make but they bring the most reward! Do not be afraid, for God will not set you up for failure, only for victory.

DAY THIRTY-NINE ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: God is always at work around us, trying to get our attention to follow Him.

Verse of the Day: This is what the Lord says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, 'We will not walk in it.'" *Jeremiah 6:16*

Question to Consider: As you stand at the crossroads, are you listening for the voice of God?



ENCOUNTERING GOD FOR ETERNITY

The most important investment that you will ever make is the one that you are making for beyond this life. Many people live their lives looking to find peace, happiness, and fulfillment in the things of this world: houses, cars, or careers. In the end, their search for peace and fulfillment is elusive and they cannot figure out why.

The answer: fulfillment is not found in the things made by mankind. Sure, these things will give you pleasure for a moment, but ultimately they will crumble, rust, or fade away. The investment I want to make with my life is one that is bigger than my life, bigger than the entire world, bigger than any investment I could ever make with my pocket book or even all the money in the world. The investment I want to make with my life is the investment into Jesus Christ and His Kingdom.

Read Revelation 21:6-7 and you will see the reason why I am so passionate about this investment. My desire is not invest into things that will perish but rather into those things that will never perish or fade away. Why? Because I do not ever want to perish. I want to encounter God for eternity and leave this challenge behind for my children, grandchildren, and all to come in the years ahead.

My hope for you is that you have grown deeper in your relationship with God throughout the course of this devotional journey and that God shaped and molded your heart into an instrument for His glory. If you do not know Jesus Christ as you Lord and Savior then what are waiting for? Now is the time to begin *Encountering God for Eternity!*

DAY FORTY ~ MY TIME WITH GOD

Point to Ponder: We will all stand before God some day.

Verse of the Day: He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son." *Revelation 21:6-7*

Question to Consider: Are you ready to give an account of your life to your Heavenly Father? What would that account look like?

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