

*30 Day
Devotional
for
New
Christians!*

NEW KING JAMES VERSION

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How to Use this Book:

God's Word is Awesome! The Lord promises that if we will diligently study the Bible He will use it to increase our faith. Romans 10:17 says: "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."

The first thing you need to do to make this study be everything it can be for you is to **commit yourself to becoming a student of God's Word**. You're going to need to find at least 30 minutes each day to study and to pray! Don't say you can't do that! How much time do you spend on your phone each day? How much time watching TV? How much time on the InterNet? How much time checking social media? You *can* find 30 minutes for God!

Next you need to begin each session in prayer, asking God's Holy Spirit to lead you into all truth! Then follow the study guide for that day, which will guide you through this wonderful book. Look up the verses in the New King James Version of the Bible.

After each day of study, end each time in prayer, using the things you've learned that day as a launching pad into praying for all the things going on in your life.

God bless you as you study God's Word!!!

Additional Hint:

When you are looking up Bible verses, look first in your table of contents near the beginning of your Bible for the page of that Bible "book" (there are 66 "books" within the Bible!)

If you are asked to look up John 3:16, you turn to the book of John, go to the 3rd chapter (usually marked with bigger numbers), and go down to the 16th verse (usually marked with smaller numbers). Some books have a I, II, or III before them – those are Roman numerals for First, Second, or Third, as in First John, Second John, and Third John – three different books of the Bible written by John the apostle.

Day 1

Christianity is Christ! It is having a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ! **It is not merely a religion- it is a *relationship!*** Man-made religions show man trying to reach up to God and trying to earn His acceptance by doing good deeds. Christianity is God reaching down to man and making acceptance (salvation) possible, not because of our good deeds but because of the good deeds of Jesus! **Jesus lived** the perfect life we could never live, **died** in our place of judgment on the cross, **and rose from the dead** so that all who trust Him would also rise up after death and be in Heaven with Him as saints instead of in Hell with Satan as sinners.

In many places in the gospel of John we are told who Jesus is, including lots of times He said “I Am” and then followed it with an awesome statement. Look up the verses in John, and then draw a line matching the reference in the left column with the “I Am” statement in the right:

John 11:25	the Bread of Life (who satisfies hunger)
John 8:12	the way, the truth, and the life (no one comes to the Father in Heaven except by Jesus!)
John 15:5	the light of the world (if a person follows Jesus they won't walk in darkness)
John 6:35	<i>He</i> (unless you believe that Jesus is God, you will die in your sins)
John 14:6	the Good Shepherd (who lays down his life for the sheep)
John 8:58	alive before Abraham (who lived on earth 2000 plus years before Jesus was born)
John 8:24	the resurrection and the life (if you believe in Jesus, even though you die, you'll live)
John 10:11	the vine (if a person abides in Jesus, they'll bear much fruit)

Jesus is the only hero in the Christian faith! He is the great “I Am” in your life! He didn't save you because you were good enough, but because He is! Or as He said, I Am! Let Him be the great “I Am” in your life!

As you pray today, Thank the Lord Jesus that He is the great “I Am.”

Day 2

Yesterday we saw how Jesus said who He was, er, who He am, uh, you get the idea! If you have become a Christian, the Bible also takes a lot of time to tell you who YOU ARE now because you have become a born again Christian.

One of the places in the Bible this happens is the first 3 chapters of the book of Ephesians. Open your Bible to Ephesians, and fill in the blanks to reveal all that you are “in Christ”:

Ephesians 1:1 S _____
Eph. 1:3 Blessed (us) with E _____ S _____ B _____
Eph. 1:4 C _____
Eph. 1:4 H _____ and without B _____
Eph. 1:5 P _____ us to A _____
Eph. 1:6 A _____
Eph. 1:7 We have R _____ through His blood, the F _____ of sins
Eph. 1:13 S _____ with the H _____ S _____
Eph. 1:14 Guaranteed An I _____
Eph. 2:4 L _____
Eph 2:5 M _____ us A _____ together with Christ
Eph. 2:5 S _____
Eph. 2:6 R _____ us U _____
Eph. 2:10 His W _____, created in Christ Jesus for good works
Eph. 2:13 B _____ N _____ B _____ T _____ B _____
Eph. 2:18 A _____ By One Spirit To The F _____
Eph. 2:19 F _____ C _____ With The Saints
Eph. 2:19 M _____ of the H _____ of God
Eph. 3:6 P _____ of His P _____

Saints, Blessed (us) with Every Spiritual Blessing, Chose(n), Holy and without Blame, Predestined us to adoption (adopted), Accepted, Redemption (Redeemed), Forgiveness (Forgiven), Sealed With The Holy Spirit, Guaranteed An Inheritance, Loved, Made (us) Alive, Saved, Raised Up, Workmanship, Brought Near By The Blood, Access By One Spirit To The Father, Fellow Citizens With The Saints, Members of the Household, Partners Of His Promise

That’s some of who YOU ARE in Christ if you have become a Christian! And that’s just some of the first three chapters of the Book of Ephesians! The rest of your life will be discovering who you are in Jesus and living as His chosen one!

Praise him now as you pray!

Day 3

Now that we have seen a little of who Jesus is and a little of who the new Christian is in Jesus, I need to make a direct statement to you: You will not become all you can become as a Christian if you do not unite with other Christians in a local church. In the New Testament there is constant emphasis placed on how important it is for Christians to unite their hearts together to know and to do the will of God.

Look up Hebrews 10: 23-25 and fill in the missing words (using the NKJV):

Let us hold fast the _____ of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is _____. And let us consider _____ in order to stir up love and good works, not _____ the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but _____ **one another**, and so much more as you see the Day approaching. -Hebrews 10:23-25

This passage makes clear that Christians need each other. Don't try to be a lone ranger Christian. Unite with other believers who believe the Bible and practice their Christian faith in a spirit of love. You have as much to offer them as they have to offer you!

Take a moment and match some of these other "one anothers" with their Bible reference. Draw a line from the verse to the reference. The verses will start in the Book of Romans and all you will have to do is flip pages toward the end of the Bible- you won't have to hop back and forth! You're welcome.

Romans 12:5	Receive one another
Romans 13:8	Abound in love to one another
Romans 14:13	Serve one another
Romans 15:7	Be kind to one another; forgiving one another
I Corinthians 12:25	Be hospitable to one another
Galatians 5:13	Speaking (sing) to one another
Galatians 6:2	Care for one another
Ephesians 4:32	Minister your (spiritual) gift to one another
Ephesians 5:19	Have fervent love for one another
Ephesians 5:21	Members of one another
Colossians 3:16	Teaching and admonishing one another
I Thessalonians 3:12	Owe no one anything except to Love one another
I Thessalonians 4:18	Bear one another's burdens
Hebrews 3:13	Comfort one another
James 5:16	Submitting to one another
I Peter 4:8	Confess to one another and pray for one another
I Peter 4:9	Let us not judge one another anymore
I Peter 4:10	Exhort one another daily

Brother or sister in Christ, pray today that God will lead you into meaningful relationships with other Christians!

Day 4

When you are walking in the dark, it is hard to find your way around. You stumble. You run into things. You fall down. You cry (well, crying is optional). The point is, it's hard to get around when you really can't see where you are going.

Psalm 119, verse 105 says what the Bible is for the person who knows God: **“your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.”**

Do you want your faith in Jesus to grow? Write Romans 10, verse 17, here:

Your faith will grow as you learn to study the Bible and apply what it says to your life!

2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us the different ways that the Bible helps us. Read those two verses and try to match the words below with what they mean.

- | | |
|---------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Teaching | A. How you should behave |
| 2. Rebuking | B. What you should believe |
| 3. Correcting | C. How you should not behave |
| 4. Training | D. What you should not believe |

1=B 2=D 3=C 4=A

The Greek word for “inspiration of God” literally means God-breathed! Scripture is God speaking to you! We will learn that prayer is you speaking to God. Don't you want God to speak to you? He has! The Bible will be of spiritual profit to you as you read it and study it!

Of course, the Bible is not to be studied for trivia knowledge or to make yourself out a rigid checklist of what you have to obey (although there are things you have to obey!). The Bible is to help you grow in your personal relationship with Jesus Christ and serve him out of gratitude, faith, and love.

Write John 5:39-40 here:

After you finish this 30-Day devotional, you can go about regular Bible study in a number of ways. You can pick up other devotionals that will guide you at the Lifeway Christian Book Store. I would also recommend reading one chapter a day (or a section a day if your Bible gives section headings) in “books” of the Bible like the gospel of John. Start at the gospel of John and read through the rest of the New Testament. Then begin in Genesis and read the whole Bible a little at a time.

Take it as slow as you need to! Ask Christians you trust questions that arise (Pastors love to help with Bible questions!). Be sure you keep studying the Bible to make sure your advisors are really telling you what the Bible teaches (see Acts 17:11).

When you come across a verse you really like, write it on a 3 x 5 card, and put it on your mirror at home, or your car dash when you drive! Meditate on the truth God is trying to teach you!

Question: Should I *really* read some of the Bible almost every day?

Let me ask you a question: Do you eat almost every day? Well, your spirit needs soul food just like your physical body needs food. You should read the Bible and afterwards spend some time in prayer every day! Of course there will be days you miss- just don't let days turn into weeks turn into months. That is a guarantee you'll be spiritually malnourished!

Question: Is the Bible *really* unique among religious books?

ABSOLUTELY! The religious books of the world are all attempts to show how a person can "work" their way to being accepted by a god. That's bad news, because as sinners we could never do enough good things to earn a perfect God's acceptance and approval. If God didn't deal with sin, He would be merciful but not just, just like a judge who let a murderer off would be merciful but not just in the eyes of the public.

The Bible shows a vastly different God than man-made religions. The God of the Bible Himself does the work needed for salvation through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Sinners can be saved by trusting the God who loved them enough to do for them what they could not do for themselves! The need for justice is satisfied through the Atoning Death of Jesus (His death as our substitute, taking the punishment due us on Himself). God's loving desire for relationship with us is satisfied when we accept Jesus as our Savior and Lord. That's the gospel, or *good news*, and it is uniquely found in the Bible!

It should also be noted that most religious books were written by one or a very few people who represent life at that period of time and are very limited in their scope. The religious books of the world do a very poor job standing up to demands for verifiable archaeological evidence, whereas archaeologists time and time again have dug up facts that support the Bible's accounts!

The Bible also contains something manmade religious books simply don't have: predictive prophecy. *Say What?* Predictive prophecy is when a person says something is going to happen and then hundreds of years later that something happens. The Bible predicts destruction of cities that have subsequently never been rebuilt as well as the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ in the exactly right small city named Bethlehem, hundreds of years before these events happened! Truly God is its author!

Here is an overview of the Bible's uniqueness:

*Written over 1500 years!

*Written by more than 40 human authors from all walks of life in 3 different languages!

*Written on 3 continents by people in dungeons and palaces, during times of war and times of peace, by people filled with joy and also by those filled with sorrow.

*Written in a wide variety of styles: poetry, narrative, song, romance, teaching discourses, personal correspondence, memoirs, satire, biography, autobiography, law, prophecy, parable, and allegory!

*Written addressing hundreds of controversial subjects and yet speaking in unity on these issues from beginning to end!

This last bit of information taken from Josh McDowell's *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*

All of this is to say that you can open your Bible with confidence and certainty that you have God's love letter to you in your hand! Pour over it and God will pour into you blessings from Heaven!

But don't forget James 1:22: "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only!" When God calls you to action through his word, ACT! As you pray today, thank God for the Bible, the light for our path!

Day 5

After giving some reasons for Bible study yesterday, today I'd like to give you a little insight as a Pastor on what I consider to be **some of scriptures highest "peaks."** You know that when you stand on top of a mountain you can see a lot farther than when you are on a hill or in a valley. I believe the more important a teaching in scripture is, the clearer it is when you read through the Bible. So I've taken a little time to list what I view as some of scripture's highest peaks that will help give you perspective on other things the Bible teaches!

1. **God created everything:** the universe and everything in it, including people! Because He created us **we are all accountable to Him** for our actions. All of His "demands" are rooted in his perfect character which includes his being Holy, Loving, Righteous, Faithful and Just. We are to stand in awe of our Creator!

2. Humans have a **very real enemy in Satan**, the chief of fallen angels (demons). Satan tries to deceive us, destroy us, and keep us from knowing that God loves us and has a wonderful plan for our lives. He has limited power and **God has insured his future demise in Hell**, which God created for rebels like Satan and the demons.

3. God is not mocked- **the Holy God will judge sin.** We all inherit a sin nature from our parents and willfully make sinful choices when given opportunity. Our sin leads to death and condemnation and if we don't repent and turn to Jesus, we will wind up in Hell like Satan and the demons.

Additionally, each thing the Bible calls sin tends to have built in consequences that happen when that sin is done. It would not be the fault of the designer of a badminton racket if you hit a baseball with it and messed it up. In a similar way, God is not responsible when we reject His way of doing things and choose sin instead. When we are determined to sin God's judgment is allowing us to experience the built in consequences each sin deserves. But thankfully He has provided a better way!

4. Due to his great love and grace **God initiates our redemption through the work of Jesus Christ.** The bloody Old Testament sacrifices all pointed to the coming work of Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

5. When the good news of God's grace in preparing a way to accept sinners is made known to people, they are faced with a **decision** of whether to go on living in defiance of God, or whether to **choose life** by receiving Jesus as their Savior and Lord. From cover to cover the Bible calls sinners to **turn from self-rule to Christ rule** in their life! **Those who do will go to Heaven and be with Christ when they die.**

6. **Being a "hearer" and "doer" of the word will make you wise beyond your years!**

7. **God the Holy Spirit** comes alongside of believers and inside of believers to guide us into Biblical truth and to help us do what God asks us to do, especially “witness” of His saving grace.

8. **Our lives are to be lived for God’s glory as an act of worship.** He has given us natural talents (singing, for example) that are to be used to glorify Him. And He gives Christians a spiritual gift (teaching, for example) that is to be used to help other Christians grow and advance the work of Christ on earth!

9. The people of God are to **respect authority** in their lives: parents, laws, leaders, marriage vows, etc (unless these ask them to do something that would dishonor God).

10. The people of God are marked by their **compassionate response to human need.**

11. **God is in complete control** and yet somehow delights when we **earnestly pray** to Him and seek His face with thanksgiving.

12. **God keeps all of His unconditional promises,** whether to Israel, the church, or to individuals, and “He himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”

Optional:

These are some verses that speak of those truths. Write the number of the “peak” by the verses that speak of that truth.

Colossians 3:17 _____

Psalm 1; James 1:22 _____

Genesis 1 _____

Hebrews 13:5; Malachi 3:6 _____

John 1:29; Hebrews 7:25-27 _____

John 10:10a; Luke 22:31; Revelation 20:10 _____

Joshua 24:15; John 3:16; Rev. 3:20; Luke 23:42-43 _____

Ephesians 6:1-2; Romans 13:1-4 _____

2 Chronicles 7:14; I Thessalonians 5:16-18; James 5:16-18 _____

I John 3:16-17; Titus 3:14; Matthew 25:31-46 _____

Galatians 6:7; Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23; Hebrews 8:27 _____

Ephesians 1:13-14; John 16:7-13; Acts 1:8 _____

Friend, a beautiful amount of discovery awaits you as you study your Bible and discover God’s wonderful plan! As you “hike” from peak to peak in the Bible, stop often to stand in awe of this God who loves you so! Take a moment now to pray and tell him how wonderful you think He is!

Day 6

Today I am going to give you some tips on prayer. What you need to know first is that prayer is simply listening and talking with God. You talk on a phone with a friend even though you can't see your friend on the other line. Prayer is your hotline to Heaven. You say, "Well, I can't hear Him speaking on the other end." Well, God speaks to you through His written word, the Bible. It is always a good idea to let scripture speak to you, and then you spend time quietly letting God's Spirit impress the words you've read on you, and then you pray about other matters that are heavy on your heart with Him. Over time, I can testify to you that if you obey Him you will almost hear Him speaking audibly to you, that's how much you will be impressed that He is speaking to you from Heaven!

Read John 15:5-8, and write verse 5 here:

Here Jesus says that praying, or abiding in Him, is like being a branch connected to a lifegiving tree. Apart from Him your life becomes brittle to the point of breaking. Life with Him in prayer and time spent together makes you nourished with the life-giving sap that comes from Him!

Don't miss out on the real thing! Don't just listen to a preacher speak about God on a Sunday morning; "abide" with Him in prayer all week long!

You say, "But I don't even know how to start! What do I concentrate on!"

I'm glad you asked! Jesus himself gave his disciples a model prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. Fill in the blanks of that prayer here:

1. Our _____ in Heaven,
2. Hallowed (holy) be Your _____.
3. Your _____ come,
4. Your _____ be done
5. On _____ as it is in Heaven
6. Give us this day our _____ bread.
7. And _____ us our debts

8. As we forgive our _____
9. And do not lead us into _____
10. But deliver us from the _____
11. For Yours is the Kingdom, and the _____ and the _____ forever. Amen.

Jesus is not giving us a prayer to mindlessly recite over and over again, He is telling us the kind of things that we need to keep in mind when we pray! I will use the numbers above to comment on Jesus' prayer:

1. When we pray we need to picture God as a loving Father who wants what is best for us as His children, because "Father knows best."
2. When we think of His name as "hallowed" we are saying that He is HOLY, or set apart, that there is no one like Him! We are acknowledging that He is the perfect God and that we are not, and that we have come to the only one that is worthy to be sought out like He's God, because, HE'S GOD! (See Isaiah 6:1-8)
3. Next we acknowledge that it's His Kingdom we want to come more than we want our way in prayer. We are saying that nothing is more important than the Kingdom of God growing, even if it means our kingdom shrinks (see John 3:30)
4. Then we are saying, "Your will be done." That just underlines again that we want what God wants (will=wants) more than we want what we want. We agree that ultimately it will be better for us if God has His way in our lives than if we have our way!
5. In our prayers we want Heaven on earth, not Hell on earth!
6. Not only should we be concerned about the future, but we should trust God for the issues we will face today, and be thankful for His concern and provision for even our next meal! (See Proverbs 3:5-6)
7. Because we agree that God's ways are the right ways, we should confess our sins and ask for forgiveness whenever He reveals to us ways we "fall short of the glory of God." He has saved us not because we could measure up but because Christ measured up for us! But as we grow in Christ, we will become more like Jesus!
8. But here's the condition: if we are not forgiving others when they hurt us, we may not have really received Jesus into our lives! He not only forgives us, He helps us forgive others! I know that is hard to swallow, but you will not grow in grace if you do not forgive as you have been forgiven. (See Matthew 6:14-15)

9. Lead us not into temptation sounds funny, because we know God doesn't tempt people the way Satan does. He does allow circumstances to test our faith, though, and if we are really His bad circumstances make us better people, not bitter people. Here Jesus is saying that we should want to be led away from sinful temptations, because that's what God wants!
10. To be led away from temptation will also mean resisting Satan, the evil one. In the book of James it says, "resist the Devil, and He will flee from you." It also says, "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you." That's what this first part of verse 13 means!
11. We end the model prayer where we began, praising God for how important His rule in our life is, for the power that comes when we abide, and for the glory He will get if we truly submit to Him!

We will say a little more about prayer tomorrow, but take a few minutes today to use Jesus' model prayer here in Matthew 6:9-13 to talk to your Heavenly Father.

Day 7

Tips on prayer-second day!

You may still want help with the HOW question! I try not to give too many formulas because you don't follow a formula when you are talking with your friend- you just TALK WITH YOUR FRIEND! Prayer is conversation with the one you respect the most- your Savior, your God, your Heavenly Father, your Friend!

I do want to share with you a simple Acronym that some people use to pray that helps them-A.C.T.S.

A is for Adoration

C is for Confession

T is for Thanksgiving

S is for Supplication

So if you were using this "formula" you would read your Bible passage for the day, and then spend a few minutes Adoring the Lord for who He is. Then you would spend a few minutes Confessing any sins and asking for forgiveness and displaying humility because He is God and you are not. Then you would spend a few minutes Thanking him for all He has done in your life, and for prayers He has been answering! Then you would make Supplication- SUPPLI-WHAT? That's just a big word for telling Him your prayer requests- for yourself and for others, what you hope God will *supply*!

Remember the country song- "sometimes I thank God for unanswered prayer?" Well, the song is wrong – God does answer all of our prayers! There's no such thing as unanswered prayer.

God always answers prayers according to what is best for His children! Sometimes He answers "Yes;" Sometimes He answers "No," Sometimes he answers, "Yes, but not yet-wait my child!" Beth Moore says, "When God says no, it is for a greater yes." Trust God, he'll do right by you in his perfect timing!

Next let me advise you to begin praying with other people out loud for prayer requests!

Very little will help you grow more than having someone pray out loud with you! Don't be embarrassed to find someone and initiate this prayer relationship with them. Also, make full use of your church's prayer meeting, where you can pray with a variety of others!

Write the words of Matthew 18:19-20 here:

Where does God promise to be when 2 or 3 are gathered in His name?

This passage is specifically speaking about a very tough situation- when sin is going to need to be dealt with. God promises when we come together in a Spirit of prayer to deal with even tough matters, He'll be right there in our midst!

Let me encourage you also to get into a good habit as you begin your Christian faith. Don't tell someone you'll pray for them- stop right there and pray with them! This is an incredibly effective way to feel the Holy Spirit's power in prayer!

As you pray today, use the ACTS model to pray! Adore God, Confess your sins, Thank Him for life and answered prayer, and Share your requests with Him! God bless you as you seek His face!

Day 8-

Today I want to give you some tips for listening to a sermon!

These are days when many people simply don't like to hear preaching. God wants His people to love preaching from the Bible, and act on what they hear!

Read 2 Timothy 4:1-5 now.

List 3 things you feel are emphatically said in these verses:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Now write 1 Corinthians 1:21 here:

Now we've established that preaching is always valuable in God's eyes! His people are accountable to Him for receiving the word proclaimed by preachers!

But HOW?

I'm glad you asked! Let me give you some tips on listening to a sermon!

First, when you are going to church to hear a message, ALWAYS pray a prayer like this: "God please speak to me today- help me to hear Your Word and apply it to my life by the power of Your Holy Spirit."

Second, in every sermon you hear, you should be listening for an action point. Bring paper or a preaching notebook, take notes, and then go back over them and write down at least one action point God gave you that day. Then apply it to your life.

Thirdly, Be a Berean! A BERE-WHAT? A Berean. Real quick, turn to Acts 17 and read verses 10-15. Now be like a Berean- always check out what a preacher says by the Word of God. Preachers can get it wrong sometimes- That's why they should always be preaching the Word (the Bible- which is always right) and the listener should be checking it out by the Word!

Fourth, you should try to get to church early and sit as near the front as possible! The farther back you are, the more easily you are going to be distracted! Don't let it happen to you!

Finally, EXPECT God to speak to you. If you come expecting nothing, that's probably what you'll get! I decided as a young Christian always to take notes and always to apply something the preacher said- And God has blessed my Christian growth greatly!

As you pray today, ask God to give you a love for preaching. Ask forgiveness if you have had itching ears, wanting to be have your felt needs met instead of the real needs that preaching shows you have. Commit now to being a hearer and doer of the Word!

Day 9

Today I'm going to give you **the Secret of Victory in the Christian Life!**

But I'm going to make you work for it! Above each symbol write in the letter that corresponds with what's in the decoder below!

Σ Α Ψ Ψ Ε Σ Τ Ο Γ Ο Δ Τ Η Ε Η Ο Λ Ψ

Σ Π Ι Ρ Ι Τ , Ο Ν Ε Δ Ε Χ Ι Σ Ι Ο Ν Α Τ Α

Τ Ι Μ Ε

Key:

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
A	B	X	Δ	E	Φ	Γ	H	I	ϑ	K
L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V
Λ	M	N	O	Π	Θ	P	Σ	T	Υ	ς
W	X	Y	Z							
Ω	Ξ	Ψ	Z							

There it is! The secret of victory in the Christian Life!

Through the Bible, through your conscience, through other believers, and through circumstances God the Holy Spirit will bring you to decision time.

If you say 'yes' to Him, you'll experience the blessings of faithful obedience to God. If you say 'no' to Him, you'll get hung up right there at that point for as long as it takes to obey.

You'll grieve God (Ephesians 4:30), and you'll quench His work in and through your life (1 Thessalonians 5:19). You'll not see the fruit of the Spirit unleashed in your life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22). Instead, since you are in disobedience to God, you'll see the works of the flesh increasingly rule: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like (Galatians 5:19-21).

For the Christian, when God the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures calls for obedience, the matter doesn't even really need to be prayed over. **Obedience is the prayer that God is calling for.** Until you start quickly obeying the Spirit when He calls a matter to your attention, there will not be victory in your Christian life!

A friend of mine at church really showed this one Sunday morning. During our time of singing God impressed on me that I was not to preach that morning, but that I was to go over to Tom and ask him to share the testimony of how he had made things right with his father after over 20 years of being alienated from one another. Tom got up and shared one of the best messages we have ever had at our church! In the congregation that day was a young lady who was estranged from her parents. The Holy Spirit pierced her heart with that testimony, and before the day was over she had reconnected with her parents!

Later I asked Tom if it was hard to share his testimony "on the spot" like that. He said, "Danny, I couldn't say no, because I already said yes to God." Tom is a very ordinary man living an extraordinary Christian life, because he has learned the secret of victory in the Christian life:

SAY YES TO GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT ONE DECISION AT A TIME!

Day 10

One good way to obey the Holy Spirit of God when faced with a decision is to ask the question: What Would Jesus Do?

There is no greater example to follow in the Bible and all of life then the one Jesus set for us in the Bible! No matter what you are facing, the Bible says Jesus can relate, and when He was faced with something similar, He obeyed God. With the Spirit of God inside you through salvation (Ephesians 1:13), He will guide you into living a life that glorifies Jesus (John 16:13-14).

Fill in the words that are missing from John 14:12 (NKJV)

“Most assuredly I _____ to you, he who _____ in Me, the _____ that I do he will do also; and _____ works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.” -John 14:12

I like this little saying:

I can't, but God never said I can- “Jesus can, and He promised that he would.”

If a basketball player asked the question “What Would Lebron Do?” it would not mean he could then go out and play like Lebron James.

But the Christian can ask the question “What Would Jesus Do?’ and then go out and do that thing that Jesus wants done. This is not because we are able to in our own strength, but because we are not alone; God the Holy Spirit is with us to help us obey God in that tough moment. What God asks us to do, He gives us the power to do! Christians have even had the power to face death because they stepped out in faith and obedience and God did the rest.

Write Matthew 10:19-20 here:

One last thought on this. If you commit now to walking with God in every area of your life, you won't be perfect like Jesus, but the Holy Spirit will allow you yourself to begin having the kind of Christian life others will want to imitate! We'll close today with what a Christian leader named Paul was able to say because he lived for Jesus:

“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ!” (I Corinthians 11:1)

Day 11

“Why should I get baptized?”

That is the question for today!

First, Jesus did! Jesus will never ask us to do anything He didn't personally model for us, including baptism. It is an honor to “follow the Lord in believer's baptism.

Read Matthew 3:13-17. Write verse 13 here:

Second, the first Christians did! They did gladly because they had been saved and their baptisms testified to others that they belonged to Jesus now!

Read Acts 2:37-41. Write the first part of verse 41 here:

Note that those who believed *gladly* did what Jesus had done and what their fellow believers had done! Baptism showed they were trusting Christ alone for salvation, and were committed to one another in the body of Christ- they belonged to God and each other now! See Also I Corinthians 12:13.

Third, baptism by immersion under water shows a great picture of what has happened to us as believers in Christ! Read Romans 6:4-11.

When I baptize people I always say, “Buried with Christ in baptism” when I put them under the water, and I say “raised to walk in newness of life” when I pull them back out! Baptism is a beautiful picture of how Christ has saved sinners so that they could now walk with God. The water does not represent a holy washing, it pictures death, which Jesus has lifted us out of because we are now “In Christ.” All true believers will want to be baptized as an outward picture of their trust in Christ for the inward salvation they have already received!

Baptists point to the Bible in saying that baptism should only be performed on those who are able to testify that they have given their lives to Jesus as an act of their will.

Therefore Baptists don't agree with infant baptism, because infants are not yet able to personally choose Christ. Baptists also think that whenever possible the baptism should be under water, not sprinkling, because the word itself means “to immerse,” and the New Testament examples of baptism occurred in places like rivers! People got very wet! If you have not yet been baptized as a believer, talk to a Pastor about obeying God in this area.

Day 12

Why do we pay preachers when we could just watch and/or listen to a sermon from a better preacher on television or the radio or the internet or a podcast? Perhaps a more common way I hear this one is “What do you do the rest of the week?”

What I’m getting at is an attempt to understand what the Pastor’s role is so we can better understand our role in the church and the body of Christ. You see, Pastor’s are given to churches to preach, and that is one of their biggest roles, but we do a lot more during the week than just prepare for Sunday Mornings! Let’s take a look at how the Bible describes the Pastor’s role!

Read Ephesians 4:11-16. Write verse 12 here:

Here we see that the Pastor’s role is to equip the saints so they can do the work of the ministry, and to edify, or build up, the body of Christ!

The Pastor is like a Coach, who gets the team ready on Sunday, so they can minister throughout their sphere of influence all week long! I guess it’s more fair to say he’s like a player-coach, because all week long he will be out ministering also! The wise Pastor will have members along as he ministers, so they’ll learn how to share their faith, speak to those who are hurting, and see and meet needs. God’s plan is not for church to mean we come and sit while one man preaches and does the ministering. God’s plan is for the whole team, under the leadership of a pastoring team (like a coaching staff), to be the church all week long as we go to our homes, our neighborhoods, our schools and workplaces, etc... **The church is not only a place you go to, its what you are as a body of believers in the world all week long!**

A television or radio or internet or podcast preacher can share the word with us, but he can’t be there to help ‘coach’ us in the unique spiritual battles we are facing in our area. He can’t be there to encourage us when we’re down, rebuke us when we are sinning, celebrate with us when we advance the cause of Christ, or cry with us when we lose loved ones.

To see all that this kind of pastor is to be in the life of a body, read Acts 20:25-38 now! Write verse 28 here:

Pastors are under-shepherds who lead churches on behalf of the Chief Shepherd of the church, Jesus Christ (see I Peter 5:1-5). In the New Testament multiple men of God labored as the shepherds, with one usually regarded as “the first among equals,” like James among the Jerusalem leaders (see Acts 21:17-18). These pastor/shepherds use their spiritual gifts to lead the church. And then all members of the church use their spiritual gifts to minister to each other, so there is plenty of work for everyone! We’ll talk more about this tomorrow. For now, thank God that He gives churches pastors who love them and serve alongside of them!

BONUS:

You may be listening to the wrong TV preacher if...

...they ask you to send money to the Lord but they give you their address!

...the people they heal in Houston bear a striking resemblance to the ones they healed in Los Angeles the week before!

...3 words: no air-conditioned doghouses!

...they lay on top of a pile full of letters and guarantee that God will answer each prayer!

...they utter the all-time most patronizing statement- “if you had had enough faith, your friend would have been healed.”

...their hair takes a can of hairspray per show!

...their wives single-handedly keep make-up companies in business!

...they say the Spirit hasn’t led them to disclose their financial reports just yet!

Day 13

Yesterday we talked about preachers - today we will talk about spiritual gifts.

God gives each Christian at salvation a spiritual gift that He wants them to use to minister to others. When a large number of people in a church are using their gift, the church is healthy and it grows. When only a small number of people in the church are using their gifts, the church will not be healthy. It may grow under a preacher with a strong personality, but eventually it will be shown for what it is- a very shallow church that is not really healthy. The church has always been strongest when everyone does their part, and appreciates and works with those who have different parts to play!

Write I Peter 4:10 here:

I want to make a big statement here: in the Christian life it is just as important to give your time to the Lord through using your spiritual gift as it is to give of your money to the Lord! It probably is more so, because too many people think they have done their part if they come and give some money. But God wants all believers to minister their gift to one another, as *an act of stewardship (management) to God!*

Take a moment and skim Romans 12:3-21. It is one of the passages that get specific about what spiritual gifts are!

Now let's try a little matching game that shows the genius of God in all of this. On the left side will be the need in people's lives, and the right side will list some spiritual gifts that God has given to meet those needs! Draw a line from the need to the gift that God gave to meet that need! (This idea was adapted from a book called The Pastor's Playbook).

People's Need:

1. Salvation
2. Awareness of Sin
3. Doctrine
4. To Know How
5. Shepherding
6. Comforting
7. A Helping Hand
8. Financial Aid
9. Leadership

God's Provision:

- A. Administrators
- B. Mercy Show-ers
- C. Pastor/ Shepherds
- D. Givers
- E. Evangelists
- F. Exhorters
- G. Teachers
- H. Servers
- I. Prophets

Answers: 1-E

2-I

3-G

4-F

5-C

6-B

7-H

8-D

9-A

Isn't God wonderful in the way he uses us all to grow and advance the church?!

Now there is another part of this that is interesting. Each gift is also a command!

In other words, we are all called to be ready to share the gospel with a friend, but there are those who are especially gifted at being evangelists. Almost every gift is like that!

Two observations should be made, a negative one and a positive one:

First, no one should use as an excuse, "that's not my gift." If obedience calls you to share the faith or meet a need by financially giving or volunteer in an act of service, do it!

Secondly, though, we should all appreciate how God has gifted some in areas that are not our strength, and work together instead of thinking our gift is better than someone else's!

An example of this was when Barnabas had Saul come with him to Antioch to teach, because Barnabas' main gift was exhortation, and Paul's was teaching!

You may be asking, what is my gift?

Well, friend, that is why you need to be involved with other believers at a church.

Over time they will begin noticing what you are especially gifted in, and they'll help you put it into service. You can also take a spiritual gift test, like the one offered at Injoy.com.

Pray today that you will become aware of your gift, and minister it to others!

Day 14

Yesterday we talked about using our spiritual gifts for the Lord. Jesus also gave us certain talents and competencies that we have used one way or another before we knew the Lord. God can greatly use these now also!

A man named Brother Lawrence who lived a long time ago said something profound: “Our sanctification (or living out our Christian faith) involves now doing for God what we used to do for ourselves.”

Write Colossians 3:17 & 3:23 here:

Do you have skills as a Computer Technician? As a Doctor? As an Engineer? As a Mechanic? Are you an Artist? A Musician? A Singer? An Athlete?

God can greatly use these and other talents to advance His Kingdom!

Most people think that if they really get right with God they will become like their spouse or like the preacher- EGADS!!!

But God wants to take your natural talents and likes and the spiritual gifts He gives new Christians and use those in a unique, one of a kind profile that will only fit you!

DON'T DISOBEY! Let him use you! He can take even bad memories and use them to help others- like ladies who have had an abortion becoming volunteers at Pregnancy Help Centers. Even guys that love to hunt and fish can use those loves to reach out to men and boys who need Jesus! The church always needs more musicians and singers and people who can build and fix things! There are now endless numbers of mission opportunities locally and around the world for specialists! Start by seeing how your talents can help in your local church, but don't forget great organizations that meet pressing needs like God's Pit Crew!

Day 15

Well, you knew we'd get to it! Today I will give you Tips for sharing the gospel!

All the word gospel means is “good news.” It is the truth that “God so loved the world that he gave His only Son, that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but inherit eternal life.” Isn't that good news?! If you really believe it and have experienced it, and others see the joy and peace in your life, it won't be that hard to share!

For some reason, though, nothing makes us more fearful than sharing our faith.

I guess it's because it's the one thing Satan doesn't want to happen, because if a person hears your message and gives their life to Christ, Satan has lost their soul forever.

So Satan will let you do nice things for others and say you'll pray for them, but when you begin really sharing how a person can be saved, he throws all the resources of Hell at you.

Let me give you some tips to help you get over the fear of sharing:

1. Recognize it is a spiritual battle, so earnestly pray for God to help you be courageous and make the most of every opportunity
2. Live the genuine Christian life before people, not being perfect but humbly walking with God, and confessing whatever is sin in your life and going forward in faith. Don't believe Satan's lies that you don't measure up. Of course you don't measure up – but Jesus measured up for you! If Jesus is really at work in your life, it will show!
3. Recognize that God is in control, and He has been preparing others hearts before you speak with them. The Holy Spirit is active in the world convicting people of their need of a Savior (see John 16:8-11).
4. Look for windows of opportunity the Spirit gives, and share as much as is appropriate for the moment. Be bold but not obnoxious.
5. Begin picking up tracts (booklets) at your church and carry them with you. There will be places you can leave them. There also may come opportunities to simply read all the way through a tract with a person. People have been saved that way!
6. Many churches have an organized way of training people to share their faith. Take advantage of it! It really is worth the investment of your time!
7. When people ask questions you can't answer, don't panic- tell them you don't know but you'll ask someone who does- then ask your pastor or Sunday School Teacher, and if possible, tell the inquirer what you find out!

8. Recognize it is a spiritual battle, so earnestly pray for God to help you be courageous and make the most of every opportunity

That's right, number 8 was the same as number 1! Remember, friend, the only thing you can take to Heaven with you is other people! Don't let fear keep you from winning souls. As we close today, look up and write down I Peter 3:15 here:

Day 16

Yesterday we talked about sharing our faith. Of course, evangelism is always best when it is real and personal. You are basically saying, 'Jesus changed me - He can change you also.'

Today I want you to think about your own testimony, or how Jesus has changed and is changing you, and I want you to be able to say it in a few words!

Write here what life was like before you became a Christian, and how you came to know you were a sinner in need of salvation (Don't include all the sinful details, but how you came to know of your spiritual need):

Now write how you became a Christian, how you personally received Jesus as your Savior & Lord (include people, circumstances, and any scriptures God used):

Now write some of the things that God is doing in your life now, the difference he is making:

Hey, you have done it! You have shared your testimony! That's all it takes! Look for opportunities to share with others what life was like before Christ, how you were saved, and what He is doing now!

Spend some time praising God now for the difference He has made in your life!

Day 17

I want to talk to you today about spiritual warfare, specifically the necessity of the Christian visualizing the Spiritual Armor God has given us to do battle with our enemy the Devil.

Read Ephesians 6:10-18 now.

Notice in verse 11 that it takes having the armor on to stand up to all that Satan will throw at us. Half the reason many professing Christians live defeated lives is that they don't view life as a spiritual battle.

Verse 12 makes it clear that there is a spiritual battle behind the things we face daily. People are never our enemy! We want all people to be saved! We don't believe that anyone is beyond hope. If we don't realize that there is spiritual warfare going on in people's lives, we will tend to lash out against those who lash out against us instead of viewing them as people for whom Jesus died! The coworker angry about a conservative politician's views on abortion may be dealing with guilt because she herself had an abortion in the past. If you realize that there is often more to a situation than "meets the eye," you'll be a "leg up" in being ready to minister in that situation.

Verses 14-18 give the "armor" the Christian is supposed to wear.

In the blank next to each item, write your own comments on why you think God relates that spiritual item with that piece of armor-

The Belt of Truth: _____

The Breastplate of Righteousness: _____

Gospel Shoes: _____

Shield of Faith: _____

Helmet of Salvation: _____

Sword of the Spirit (the Word of God): _____

Fervent, Watchful Prayer: _____

Each morning I visualize putting on the armor of God. I don't want my pants to fall down, so I visualize living by God's truth. I want the integrity of "doing the right thing" to be my breastplate, so I pray I'll make right, God honoring choices this day. And Christ's righteousness protects me when I falter! I have my own plans of where I am to go today, but I also want to be open to the gospel shoes taking me where God can use me to share the faith.

When fired on by Satan with fiery darts, I want to knock those darts aside by strong faith in Christ, and not give in to doubts and discouragement, fear and mistrust. Because I'm saved I won't bust my head open! And I will take up my offensive weapons- the power of living and sharing Biblical truth, and praying early and often for God to work in the midst of my life today!

I hope you will take time daily to refresh yourself to the fact that spiritual realities lie beneath “your stuff” today. Take time now to visualize yourself “putting on the full armor of God.”

Some Bonus passages on Spiritual Warfare:

2 Kings 6:13-17

Daniel 9:20-23

Daniel 10:10-21

Luke 22:31-32

John 10:10

1 Peter 5:8

Another recommendation: purchase or check out of the library a good and readable copy of the classic book “Pilgrim’s Progress” by John Bunyan. It was written in the 1600’s, and pictures many things the Christian faces as they travel through this life on their way to Heaven. I try and read this classic each January as I start the year, and I often use the “pictures” it put in my mind as I do spiritual battle. For instance, when Christian is in the Doubting Castle’s dungeon being harassed by the Giant named Despair, he remembers at salvation he was given a key that fits any lock – the promises of God. He is able to unlock the dungeon’s doors, escape, and get back on the right path!

Day 18

Sometimes Christians have been so excited about Heaven in the future that they have forgotten that Christ calls us to make a personal difference here and now also! The best Christians have always followed the example of Jesus in not only sharing the gospel so people will live forever, but also in helping meet physical needs in the here and now!

There are some incredible verses that make that truth plain!

Fill in the missing blanks in these verses:

Galatians 2:10- They desired only that we should remember the _____, the very thing which I also was _____ to do.

Titus 3:14- And let our people also _____ to maintain good works, to meet _____ needs, that they may not be _____

James 1:27- Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit _____ and _____ in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

I John 3:17- But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in _____, and shuts up his _____ from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

Before we move on to commentary, skim Matthew 25: 31-46.

List some of the kinds of things that will be true of the sheep on judgment day:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5,

A great preacher of the past, George Whitefield, said:

“I hope to grow rich in Heaven by taking care of orphans on earth.”

Friend, I believe the Bible teaches that real Christians will have a heart to share the word about Heaven in the future AND have a heart to help change the world they live in now by ministry to not just the up and out but to the down and out.

What do you do that takes the gospel to and meets the needs of the least of these?

These verses call us to a reality check- We better wake up and learn as Paul told Titus, to “meet urgent needs.”

Ask God to lay a ministry on your heart to someone less fortunate than yourself!

Day 19

Today I want to share some resources that many new Christians are not aware of that will help them grow in Christ!

Most people spend a lot of time in their car! Many times new Christians are not aware of Christian Radio stations in their area! If you take a little time and surf the AM and FM dials, you will probably come across several stations. Some of them will play Christian Music, others will have Preaching and Teaching. Either way it's better for your soul than listening to secular music or angry talk radio! Many people in our area begin or end their day by listening to Tabernacle Time with brother Bob Barber!

Helpful books and resources can be found at your church library, Lifeway Christian Book Store or at CBD.com. Ask Christians you trust to recommend a good book to read. You can find any type of music you like with Christian lyrics. You can find fun Christian videos for the children. You can find devotionals to help spend time with God. You can find Study Bibles. You can find other study tools like Concordances (where you can look up all the times a word occurs in the Bible, so you could do a study on what the Bible says about Grace).

Of course there are also a lot of helps on the Internet now, accessible via internet or smartphone. Here are some sites I have found helpful:

Thetabernaclefamily.org	Our Church's site!
blueletterbible.org	Look up words and phrases in any version you like
christiananswers.net	Answers on all kinds of topics; movie reviews!
truelife.org	Great teaching videos on lots of topics
gospelcom.net/mnn	News from the mission field- very relevant stuff
mbn.org	Moody Radio- great trustworthy preaching

Some smartphone apps I like are:

Baptist Press	Stories on lots of topics of interest to Southern Baptists
Joshua Project	Allows you to pray for an Unreached People Group daily
Voice of the Martyrs	Allows you to pray for persecuted Christians daily
Answers in Genesis	Lots of helpful answers to questions people ask
C2C Tract	An app to help you share your faith
Life on Mission	An app to help you share your faith

Some smartphone podcasts I like are:

The Tabernacle Today	Our church sermons
The Briefing	AL Mohler gives insightful commentary
The World and everything in it	Daily news from Biblical Worldview
Rainer on Leadership	Help for church leaders

Let me just mention one other resource for young Christians: Most Pastors are like me: I love to spend time talking with hungry to learn Christians about growth issues. Make an appointment with your Pastor to talk about your questions!

Day 20

Today I want to speak with you about handling “Spirit-Quenchers.”

I really don't know how else to identify them. Some of them mean well. Some of them don't. Some of them come across as just plain mean. I don't know why it is, but some of the meanest people you'll ever meet are in churches. I guess the church is the last place that will put up with them. Who I'm speaking of is people in churches that feel it is their responsibility to set new Christians straight.

Well-meaning ones simply will try to lay more knowledge on you than you are able to handle at the time. The “ism” they are pushing may even be something you need to know someday, but you just need time to grow before you can “go there.” These folks usually are just guilty of trying to feed you (a babe in Christ) steak when you are only ready for milk. I've been guilty of that before!

The mean ones usually view you as a threat. You just want to say ‘yes’ to the Holy Spirit of God, one decision at a time (where have I heard that before)! They want you to know their church has “never done it that way before.” These are the folks who spend time lining up others in their way of thinking for business meetings so the vote will go their way. They are so used to making decisions in the flesh, and getting worked up over things that really don't matter, that they truly don't know where you are coming from when you say, “I just love Jesus and want to do whatever He tells me to.”

Here are some tips for dealing with the mean SpiritQuenchers:

1. Love them anyway! Even though they should be looking out for you the weaker brother in the faith, sometimes little brothers have to remind older brothers that the reason we're all here is that Jesus can change lives! Keep your enthusiasm!
2. Pray for them! Try to Pray with them!
3. Don't respond in the flesh- keep a humble spirit- there may be something that you can learn here even if it comes gift wrapped wrong!
4. Don't compromise what scripture calls for to “appease them.” At the same time, don't argue with them. Realize that there is spiritual warfare going on, and maybe you need to pull back and describe the encounter to a Spiritual Christian you trust for some insight.
5. Don't forget all the one another's we learned about- bear with one another in love- God may have saved you to bring revival to His church!

I know this has not been the most encouraging advice, but as I look at this devotional this may be some of the most important advice I wish I had received early on in my Christian life.

We all tend to be very naïve at the beginning.

The fact is that when sinners gather there is junk. And even though Jesus has saved us Satan does everything he can to stop the kind of revival where a church keeps Kingdom ministry first.

Many times a church becomes an organization that must be maintained at all costs instead of an organism that is dynamic and changes to accept the contributions of the old and the new.

As you think about these things, let them lodge in your mind, so when you are a leader in a church one day you will seek to keep it focused on Kingdom ministry, and not maintain your plans. It is the Lord's church, not ours!

Day 21

Today's topic is giving! The Bible probably has as much to say about the use and misuse of financial resources as any topic!

Read Acts 2:42-47 Write Verse 45 here:

From this verse we see 2 central points about giving in the Bible:

1. It ALL belongs to God- we are merely stewards (managers) of God's money
2. After our basic necessities are met our surplus is for advancing God's Kingdom

Skim all of 2 Corinthians Chapters 8 & 9 now to see this further born out!

Beside each verse listed, write a point made about Christian giving in that verse:

8:3 _____

8:5 _____

8:7 _____

8:9 _____

8:12 _____

8:13 _____

9:3 _____

9:5 _____

9:6 _____

9:7 _____

9:8 _____

9:12 _____

9:13 _____

9:15 _____

That last verse really sets the tone- we can never out-give God for the gift of Jesus!
Our giving should be the joyous response to all that God has done in our lives!

NOW FOR THE BIG QUESTION: ARE CHRISTIANS STILL OBLIGATED TO TITHE, or give 10 % of their income to the Lord?

Consider these verses:

Abraham tithed when he encountered God in Genesis 14:8-10 (interpreted in Hebrews 7:1-6)

Jacob promised God that if God would be real in his life he would tithe (Genesis 28:22)

In Leviticus 27:30-33 we see that God used the tithe to take care of the needs of the Temple and the needs of the priests who serve in the temple.

In Malachi 3:7-12 God says the people have robbed God by not tithing. They need to bring the tithe into the storehouse (the temple). He says that obedience in this area will open the “windows of Heaven” to them.

Write Matthew 23:23 here:

Jesus says here that justice and mercy and faith are more important than things like tithing, but then says that BOTH are to be done. What He’s saying is what we said above, that God wants us to remember to give from the right spirit, and indeed make financial offerings come after the fact that we have given ourselves and our time to him already!

I believe that the tithe should go to a person’s local church. Any time you see a church that has an appropriately compensated church staff, lots of healthy ministries, and lots of missions giving, you can count on the fact that many people within that church tithe through their church, and often give above the tithe both within and outside the church for kingdom impact. As they give the Lord blesses their church!

The tithe should be viewed more as a beginning place that helps us learn to give than as the most we would give. One godly man I know told me with a grin that he stopped tithing 30 years ago. I said, “Do you mean that since then you have given far above the tithe?” He said, “That’s exactly what I mean!”

Perhaps the best word on the matter is this: “freely you received, freely give!”

Day 22

We all know what a last will and testament is! It tells us the last thing a person wants us to know before they die. Among Jesus' last words are some verses that tell us what he wanted his followers to concentrate on.

Fill in the blanks to complete Matthew 28:18-20:

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “all _____ has been given to Me in Heaven and on earth. _____ therefore and _____ of all the nations, _____ them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, _____ them to observe all things that I have _____ you; and lo, I am with you _____, even to the end of the age.”

This has been called the Great Commission of Jesus!

Now look at Acts 1:8 and write it here:

Jesus was telling them that they would be witnesses where they were, also in the rest of their country, to the people in the next country who were a little different (okay a lot different!), and all the way to the end of the earth!

I'm glad those first disciples took that call seriously, because from Jerusalem North America is the end of the earth going in one direction! If previous generations hadn't taken this seriously, we might never have been saved! As Christians are taking this seriously in our day, the end of the earth going the other direction is pretty well being closed in on. We get to participate in bringing the gospel to others even as it was brought to us!

Let me encourage you to have a personal strategy for missions. Here's mine:

1. I pray for the needs of missionaries and un-reached people when they come before me. I also take the time to look up prayer items for countries in a book called Operation World and other prayer resources. I receive e- mails and prayer letters from missionaries so I can pray better for them.
2. I take time personally to correspond with missionaries and have them in my home when possible.

3. I witness and meet needs in my area, and have participated in short-term mission trips in North America and now overseas.

4. I try to increase my standard of giving each year to missions' causes.

Pray today about beginning your own strategy for missions. Over time it should include prayer, encouragement, hands -on involvement, and giving!

Day 23

Today I want to talk with you about battling temptation, about the believer's fight with sin! Look up and draw a line from the Bible verse(s) on the left with the truth it shares given on the right.

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| 1. James 1:13-18 | A. Jesus was tempted, but didn't sin. Because He obeyed perfectly we can come to Him for help in time of need. |
| 2. I Corinthians 10:13 | B. We will find mercy if we confess our sins; we will not prosper if we try to hide them |
| 3. Hebrews 4:14-16 | C. The Christian has an internal battle with sin because even though he struggles with sin like all people do he wants to choose God's ways over the flesh. He is free from condemnation not because he always does the things the spiritual man now wants him to do but because he is "in Christ Jesus." |
| 4. Romans 7:15-8:1 | D. Temptation is common to man- God will provide an escape! |
| 5. Proverbs 28:13 | E. Temptation if given in to leads to increased sinful desire for the object of temptation, until it becomes actual sin, which leads to death. God is not behind this but works to give us good gifts that lead to life. |

Answers: 1-E 2-D 3-A 4-C 5-B

There are some wonderful helps here in our struggle with sin. Let me give you some tips for battling temptation based on these verses:

1. The initial temptation is not sin. Jesus was tempted but didn't sin. Our problem is that we don't turn away from the temptation but begin to dwell on it (that's sin, and it festers until it results in some sinful action). The time to say no is at the very first encounter with a temptation!

2. The fact that there is a desire in you to please God is a good sign. Non-Christians often just give in to sin, and are even proud of the sin (like the teenage boy bragging about his first sexual conquest). The Christian does struggle but in his converted heart wants to obey God and not the old fleshly nature. The problem is when there is not guilt and shame- those are signs of a lost man's heart, not a Christians!

3. Romans 8:1 reminds us that our salvation is not based on our own ability to measure up but because Christ did the measuring up for us at the cross. We need to remind ourselves that what is at stake is our sanctification (over time becoming more like Jesus), not our salvation. We didn't earn salvation by doing enough good things, we don't keep salvation because we do enough good works! That's freeing!

4. There is a way out when the temptation comes- using the armor, being in the word and in prayer. And then we need to have an accountability partner of the same sex who knows our biggest struggles and will help hold us accountable to work on those areas where Satan's attacks are the most effective.

5. Don't stop serving God. Satan's plan is to discourage you so you don't impact other lives. He can't have your soul- so he wants to keep you from winning others. Jesus won the war for your life. Satan is trusting that if he can win a battle or 2 it will sideline you from winning others. Don't stop serving God! Persevere! NEVER, NEVER, NEVER GIVE UP!

6. Don't hide your sin from God when you blow it. The sins we try to cover, God will uncover for all to see. But the sins we uncover in confession He will cover over with His blood!

Let's end by looking at I John 1:8-9 and write it here as we close- Use it to confess whatever needs confessing!

Day 24-

I want to take a moment or 2 to speak with you about what the Bible calls the LAW.

In the Old Testament there were hundreds of rules or laws from God. Many Christians assert that after Jesus came none of these are binding on Christians. For some, they act like the entire Old Testament is simply a footnote to the New Testament, irrelevant to living. You will sooner or later hear someone say something like, “Well, we shouldn’t tithe because we are not under law but under grace.”

I want to tell you that there is some truth in what they are saying, but they are being too simplistic because there are also several hundred rules in the New Testament to follow, many of which perfectly complement Old Testament law.

The way to reconcile this is that there are actually 3 kinds of law spoken of in the Old Testament, and part of being a careful Bible student is knowing which kind you are looking at! Let me give you a helpful way to think of those 3 kinds of law:

1. In the Old and New Testament there is Moral Law, or rules that are timeless and all the people of God should abide by always. The 10 Commandments are mostly this kind of law- Don’t lie, don’t commit adultery, don’t steal. An easy way to remember what falls under moral law is this: Anything repeated in the New Testament as sin is moral law, always sinful for the believer. That means Christians should be masters of what the New Testament teaches!

2. In the Old Testament there is Ceremonial law. This is all the laws relating to the priests and the sacrifices, all of which looked forward to the perfect sacrifice of Christ, and were so fulfilled in Him that further sacrifices are completely unnecessary. See Hebrews Chapter 9.

3. In the Old Testament there is also Civil law, which are laws given to the nation of Israel for a limited purpose. We can learn from these, but are not bound to these. The dietary restrictions on the Jewish people in Old Testament times shows God acting to keep his people healthy, but Acts 10 clearly shows that such restrictions are no longer binding on Jewish or Gentile Christians. Capital punishment for offenses such as “being disobedient to parents” were part of this civil law that is no longer in effect in this age of the church. We can still learn about the character of God as we read and meditate on how God was looking out for His people, particularly the vulnerable, through the civil law.

I hope that’s helpful! The Old Testament is two -thirds of the Bible, and much more than a historic footnote. The law can not save a person! It shows where we fall short, and it makes us cry out to Heaven for a Savior! After we’re saved, the moral law reminds us of the kind of people God wants us to be, although Christians go well beyond the law by living the “law of love.”

Day 25

I'd like to challenge you today to become the kind of person that sets up spiritual markers in your life that will remind you of God's great working in your life!

Read Genesis 21:33-34

Let me give you the context. Abraham had been told by God that the Promised Land would be for his descendents. Abraham was advancing in years, and with great faith in God believed the Lord's promise. But he knew the promise would not be fulfilled until well after his death. The Promised Land belonged to the Philistines for now. So Abraham planted a tamarisk tree, a spiritual marker of sorts, and there worshipped God. He knew his descendants would see the tree and remember the promise, that the everlasting God would keep his promises to His people and would bless his descendants' years after he was gone!

Throughout the Bible men and women set up spiritual markers like Abraham's tree. The festivals Israel has each year are reminders of God's faithfulness. Passover, the main one, is celebrates how God redeemed his people from slavery by the blood of the lamb. No wonder that in the New Testament Jesus is called our Passover Lamb!

The whole point of spiritual markers is revealed in Joshua 4:6, where it is recorded that Joshua anticipated future generations seeing the stones and saying, "what mean these stones?" And then the people of Israel would get to talk about God's faithfulness again! I don't know why, but we are made to have lasting mental images burned into our mind.

The African American preacher, Tony Evens, revealed what it meant as a child to see his dad erect a "marker" of sorts. After salvation, his dad went through the house, and emptied the beer in his fridge, saying, "there won't be any beer in the Lord's house, son." Then he went to the bedroom and threw out the Playboys, and said, "there won't be any pornography in the Lord's house, son." That day became a "marker" in Tony Evans life, and God later called him into the gospel ministry.

Martin Luther was one time asked what he would do if was going to die tomorrow. He said, "plant a tree." Luther knew about spiritual markers! His courageous posting of his 95 Theses on the church door at Wittenberg was a marker of the things he stood for.

In the Bible, spiritual markers were creative! Yours should be also! I have several keepsakes in my office that remind me of how God has worked in my life. When others ask me about one of them, I tell the story of what God has done in my life! Others leave an estate gift that will testify to their faith after they are gone or honor the faith of another person they admired. The key is being reminded to give God all the glory for what He has done!

Glory to God in the Highest!

Day 26

I'd like to share with you today about the hope of Heaven for those who believe!

John 3:16 says that if you believe you will not perish but have everlasting life! That life is in Heaven with Jesus, and it starts the moment after a person dies! I want you to know the verses that this hope is based firmly upon!

Read Luke 23:39-43

Where was the thief who turned to Christ in repentance and faith going to be the very day he died?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:1-9

When a Christian dies will they be absent from the Lord, or present with the Lord?

Read Hebrews 11:4

What does the Bible say Abel is doing in Heaven because of his faith even though he is "dead?"

Read 2 Samuel 12:19-23

What was David's certainty about his dead child?

Read Job 19:23-26

What was Job's certainty about what he would be able to do after his skin was destroyed?

Read I Corinthians 15:51-58

In light of the certainty of believers getting heavenly bodies after death, what kind of people should we be?

Truly Christians have a tremendous promise from the Lord that when they die they will be absent from this body and present with the Lord, and will be clothed with a perfect Heavenly body and spend eternity in the presence of Jesus and all the redeemed!

Thank God today for these tremendous truths, and write the verses in your Bible so you'll be able to point others to them quickly!

Day 27

One of the things people love to spend a lot of time studying in the Bible is the end times and specifically the book of Revelation. I can't in one day guide you into exactly which view you should adopt, but there are some clear things the scripture says about the end and these I want you to know!

First I'll give you a little help with some definitions you'll hear thrown around.

Skim Revelation Chapter 20 real quick!

Whew!!! There's a lot there, isn't there!

One thing you see in Revelation is it referring to a thousand year reign of Jesus Christ on earth. A thousand years is also known as a Millennium. There are 3 big "schools of thought" about the Millennium.

Amillennial folks believe that this is just "spiritualized" language and that there will be no literal thousand-year reign of Christ on earth.

Postmillennial folks believe that Christians will make the world such a better place that their efforts will usher in a time of "millennial" bliss, not necessarily a literal thousand years.

PreMillennial folks are the only ones that think there will be a literal thousand year reign of Christ on earth, taking Revelation 20 at its word.

I am a PreMillennialist because I believe that is the best way to literally read and apply Revelation 20.

Now Premillennialists also literally believe the Bible to speak of a Great Tribulation period of 7 years that will occur before the Millennium.

Somewhere before or during that time Christians expect the rapture of I Thessalonians 4:13-18 to happen, the lifting up of saints out of the world who will then come back at Christ's second coming when he sets up His rule on earth.

PreTribulationists think this rapture happens at the beginning of the Great Tribulation (that's what I believe), MidTribulationists think it happens in the Middle, and PostTribulationists think it happens at the end.

Confused? So Am I! Those are all very interesting things to study, but I want to show you a passage that really boils it down to the essentials all believers should emphasize.

Skim Matthew 25:13-30

All Christians need to concentrate on the following facts:

1. Jesus IS coming back, and we don't know when!
2. We should be found ready by Him, having invested ourselves in the advancement of Christ's kingdom.
3. The future is in the right place, Christ's hands- and He will rule all of eternity!
4. There will be a judgment day- and if our name is not in the Book of Life we will be cast into the Lake of Fire.
5. That's true for others also, and so there should be a sense of urgency as we share THE gospel with others. Not one of us is guaranteed tomorrow!

JESUS IS COMING BACK- ARE YOU READY?

Day 28

Today I want to talk with you some more on the subject of forgiveness. One of the most powerful aspects of the Christian Life is that because of the work of Christ we who confess our sins and turn to Christ have been forgiven of all our sins.

Write 1 John 1:9 here:

The heart of the gospel message is forgiveness by God and restored relationship with the Heavenly Father! That's what the heart of God so wonderfully demonstrates in the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15.

Read Matthew 18:21-35

Write the main point of the parable here:

Friend, nothing will hold back your ability to have joy and peace in your Christian life more than letting bitterness consume you. God can give you the strength to forgive and ask for forgiveness. And some of the greatest stories of grace in the world started by acts of forgiveness.

In *Les Miserables*, Jean Val Jean had stolen expensive candlesticks from a priest, and was caught, and the policeman brought him to the priest to confess. The priest looked at him and said, "I'm glad you are back, Jean Val Jean, you forgot the best one." The policeman let him go, and the priest said to him, "I have bought you for God, Jean Val Jean." Jean Val Jean went on to be a tremendous man of God also. Perhaps in no way do we act more like Jesus than when we forgive those who have hurt us.

In Genesis 50:20 Joseph, the same Joseph who had been sold into slavery by his brothers, recognized that God can overcome even the worst of men's intentions, and in a great display of forgiveness, wrote some incredible words. Please look up and write it down:

Friend, live forgiveness! Ask God now to give you a forgiving spirit that loves mercy!

Day 29

One of the greatest chapters in the Bible is I Corinthians 13.

This passage was read at Princess Diana's funeral in England. People jammed the switchboards trying to find out where it was from. It was from the Bible, with Paul being its writer under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit! I want you to turn now to I Corinthians 13, and fill in the blanks on all the things that love is...

v. 4 Love suffers long (is patient)

Love is _____

Love does not _____

Love does not _____ itself

Love is not _____ up (conceited)

v.5 Love does behave _____

Love does not seek its own (act selfishly)

Love is not _____

Love thinks no _____

v.6 Love does not rejoice in _____

but love rejoices in the _____

v.7 Love _____ all things

Love _____ all things

Love _____ all things

Love _____ all things

v.8 Love never _____

What a beautiful list about love! I think God wants to use this text to make you and I more loving. Learn to interact with scripture. Think through it this way.

Am I patient?

Am I kind?

Do I envy?

Do I parade myself?

Am I conceited?

Do I behave rudely?

Am I selfish?

Am I provoked (because I'm in the flesh)?

Do I think evil of others?

Do I rejoice in iniquity?

Do I rejoice in the truth?

Do I bear all things?

Do I believe all things?

Do I hope all things?

Do I endure all things?

Pray today that God will make you a more loving person! That's my prayer!

Day 30

Here we are! The very last day!

On this day I wanted you to look again at the fact that not only were you saved by faith, but your entire life is to be lived by faith in God. Turn to God's Hall of Faith, Hebrews chapter 11. By each name written below tell something they did by Faith!

Abel_____

Enoch_____

Noah_____

Abraham_____

Sarah_____

Moses_____

Rahab_____

I believe that in a very real way this chapter kind of keeps going on today. I think that because for 2000 years now others have been living by faith and doing great things for God by faith!

Don't you want to be a history -maker in your land?!

Then decide now to live by faith!

The key will be to commit to exactly what starts the next chapter- faithfully running our race for Jesus! Write Hebrews 12:1-2 now to close our study -

As you pray today, ask God to help you live the rest of this life by faith in Jesus!