

Live Out Loud!

*A 30-Day Journey
of Refreshment and Challenge*



By Susan H Lawrence

About the Author:

Susan Lawrence is passionate about encouraging and equipping women. She has coordinated women's ministries for many years and has worked as a consultant with several international women's ministries and denominations, creating resources, providing training, and encouraging leaders. She's thrilled when she gets to connect with and pour into women at conferences, retreats and other events.



Susan is the author of four Bible studies (*Pure Purpose*, *Pure Emotion*, *Pure Growth*, and *Pure Faith*) and *Farm Days*, a collection of stories about growing up on the family farm. When she's not writing and speaking, Susan enjoys life in central Illinois, taking long walks on country roads and baking dozens of chocolate chip cookies and homemade breads. She and her husband have been married over twenty years and have raised two wonderful daughters.

Be sure to connect with Susan personally. She'd love to hear your story!



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Introduction

It's a thrill to join you for the 2013 Lay Leadership Webcast! God is good, and I've anticipated meeting you and pouring into you. I want you to know God is passionate about you. He loves you and is pursuing you, because he has a purpose for you. He wants to nourish you along the journey. In the coming 30 days, you'll build on what we've talked about at the webcast, digging deeper into what living out loud means through applying God's Truth to your everyday life.

As I speak at women's events around the world, I am thrilled to see the excitement on women's faces. I see them get rejuvenated by worshiping in God's presence. I watch as they thrill at something God is revealing to them. But I've also been a woman at events and know the weeks that follow are critical. It's too easy to get back into a routine of daily life without letting our experiences at an event steep in our lives so that they make a difference in the way we live.

That's why you hold this devotional in your hands. God meets you right where you are, but he's not content to let you stay there. If he challenges you in a moment as he pours his truth into you, he intends for you to incorporate it into your life. His nourishment is intended for our spiritual growth. And in order to grow, we must be disciplined.

Don't give up. Ideally, you'll begin this devotional the day after the webcast and continue for 30 consecutive days. However, I know you might miss a day. God knows you might miss a day. Don't give up too easily. Don't let guilt of missing a day—or even a couple—discourage you from continuing. Stick with it. God will honor your determination.

Each day includes a key Scripture, then includes

Ponder It. Three questions to help you consider what the topic means to you.

Receive It. A brief teaching on the specific topic.

Live It. A challenge to live out God's Word in a practical way that day.

I hope you'll share your experiences with others around you, perhaps someone with whom you attended the event or someone you met while there. I'd love for you to connect with me personally as well. My Facebook page ([facebook.com/PurePurpose](https://www.facebook.com/PurePurpose)) is a great place to share, and I'd love for it to be flooded with questions, stories and praises. I'm praying for you. You are a blessing. Draw near to God, believing him for every promise he's given to you. He loves you. I'm praying for you, my friend. You are a blessing. God will fulfill his promises.

Blessings! *Susan*

Day 1: First Steps

Nothing will hold you back; you will not be overwhelmed. (Proverbs 4:12)

Ponder It.

What steps have you taken to get you to where you are right now?

What steps have you taken that have distracted you from what's ahead?

Where do you want to go and what do you want in life more than anything else?

Receive It. First steps take effort. You might consider first steps as the monumental steps of a child or someone in rehabilitation after an accident, but widen your view. What about the first time you stepped into a school? The first step you walked down the aisle of a church to commit to Jesus, ministry, or marriage? The first step behind the steering wheel of a car? The first step into sobriety? The first step into an exercise routine? The first step into a new Bible study? We have plenty of first steps, but sometimes we have difficulty identifying something as a first step. We can become paralyzed into the fear of taking the first step or we can become lackadaisical in attributing the importance and significance of a first step.

Every first step is important, because the next step can't be taken without the first step. You might not be certain of where the second, third, one hundred and third, and two thousand seven hundred and eighteenth steps will take you, but none of them are possible without the first step. You don't need to know the entire process in order to begin the journey. In fact, your journey has already begun. I'm certain you don't have it all figured out (and if you happen to think you do, you might want to reconsider, because you're probably wrong), but if you wait until you do, you'll never move on from where you are right now. God wants your trust. He wants your obedience. He has a purpose and a plan, and he intends for you to proceed with his provision and timing. So, today is your little push (or big push, as it might seem) to get moving. Take a step. Ask God. Listen to God. Respond with the assurance that only he can give, because while you don't know all the details, he certainly does.

Live It. Pay attention to where you're stepping today. Every step should be deliberate. If you dipped your shoes in bright orange paint and left a mark wherever you went, would you be satisfied? Would God?

Day 2: Time to Know

Who knows the thoughts that another person has? Only a person's spirit that lives within him knows his thoughts. It is the same with God. No one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we did not receive the spirit of the world, but we received the Spirit that is from God so that we can know all that God has given us. (1 Corinthians 2:11-12)

Ponder It.

When have you excused your behavior by claiming “I didn’t know”?

What is the difference between what God knows and what you can know?

How patient are you with your learning process?

Receive It. Two words are both translated as “know” in the verses above. God created us with some knowledge and insight. In other words, because he created us in his image, he infused us with some knowledge. This is what *oida* refers to. Call it intuition or conscience, but whatever you call it, you have it. You might not listen because you’ve been walking far enough away for so long, and it’s difficult to bridge the distance, or you may listen to your own or culture’s voice more. Either way, it’s disobedience. The other word translated as “know” is *ginosko*, which refers to learned or acquired knowledge. So once you *ginosko* something, you can no longer say “I didn’t know.” God created you with some knowledge and gives you other knowledge through the learning process. In other words... *Who [is intuitively aware of] the thoughts that another person has? Only a person's spirit that lives within him [is intuitively aware of] his thoughts. It is the same with God. No one [learns] the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we did not receive the spirit of the world, but we received the Spirit that is from God so that we can [be intuitively aware] all that God has given us.*

You know more than you want to think you know. At the same time, you don’t know as much as you think you know. Let God decide what you already have and what you need. Respond in what you know and be prepared for what you’ll learn along the journey. Know in God’s time.

Live It. As you learn, consider whether it’s something you’ve learned because you’ve acquired the knowledge in your own approach and timing or because God has revealed or provided it for you. Keep a tally throughout the day. Invite God to reveal to you what and whom you primarily seek.

Day 3: Schedule Change

So you have every gift from God while you wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to come again. (1 Corinthians 1:7)

Ponder It.

Do you prefer predictability or adventure? Why?

What is the most adventurous thing you've done?

What are you willing to do for God?

Receive It. Some seek the comfort of safety and predictability, while others seek the thrill of adventure. God gives you each as you need it, but when you try to take control of what you most need and want, you'll miss out on the best of his plan. God gives you predictability and safety when you need it. He doesn't give you a place to hide when you need to face a conflict, person, or fear. He knows when you're depleted or in danger versus when you're running to hide from something or someone you need to face. He gives you security in both situations, whether you need to retreat to his safe haven or advance with the security of his boldness and provision. If you enjoy the comfort of safety, God will challenge you with adventure. If you prefer adventure, he will challenge you with stability. A relationship with God includes safety and thrill, routine and adventure, the known and the unknown. So in a sense, even adventures are safe with God.

Your schedule, no matter how neat, tidy, and color-coded it is or no matter how messy and disjointed it is, isn't really your schedule. You're living on God's time. If you want to know how to set your agenda, you need to ask him. Be prepared, because God's agenda isn't always predictable. It's not always convenient and comfortable. It's not even always safe by our own standards of safety. But it's always best. It's better to be bold for God and unsafe by the world's standards than safe by the world's standards yet timid for God. He gives you what you need—peace in chaos, boldness in adventures, and strength in both.

Live It. Do you long for adventure in the predictable routine of your day? Do you long for a moment of predictability among the chaotic adventures of your day? Set aside your own preference today and ask God to meet you just where you are. Notice the details of how he provides and pours into you just where you are.

Day 4: Relationships I Need

Speaking the truth with love, we will grow up in every way into Christ, who is the head. (Ephesians 4:15)

Ponder It.

What do you look for in a friendship?

What purposes do your friendships fulfill?

Who is holding you accountable right now?

Receive It. Not every friendship is a healthy one. Not every friendship that you enjoy is a healthy one. Just because a friendship is fun and feels good doesn't make it worthwhile. We all need 2 a.m. friends. They're the friends you can call at 2 a.m.—literally or figuratively—with your mascara and nose making a mess of you. They don't mind. In fact, they'll usually clean you up. They'll listen to you, hug you, find a way to make you laugh, and stay with you through the darkness. But there's something about 2 a.m. friends that sets them apart besides the fact that they'll rush to you or pick up the phone when you need them. The important thing about 2 a.m. friends is that they don't leave you where you are. They listen to you but at some point say, "I'm sorry you're going through this, and I'm here for you, so what's the next step? Let's move on together." 2 a.m. friends will meet us where you are but won't be content to let you stay there. Just like God.

Women like affirmation. Sometimes our need for affirmation overwhelms our need for accountability. You need friends who won't just affirm you, agreeing with and supporting you through the ups and downs of your life. You need friends who will say the tough stuff to you when it's needed. You need someone to speak the truth in love. If a friendship isn't strong enough to withstand truth-speaking, it's probably not worth continuing...or at least, not deepening. Invest in relationships that are filled with God's love and truth. When you invite the tough stuff of accountability, there will be moments of discomfort, but they'll transform into seasons of growth.

Live It. Intentionally invest in a friendship today. It might be someone you see regularly, someone you've lost contact with over the past months, or someone who you don't know well but has come to mind and crossed your path many times recently. Friendships require cultivation. Make the effort.

Day 5: Pruning the Unnecessary

That Day will appear with fire, and the fire will test everyone's work to show what sort of work it was. If the building that has been put on the foundation still stands, the builder will get a reward. But if the building is burned up, the builder will suffer loss. The builder will be saved, but it will be as one who escaped from a fire. (1 Corinthians 3:13b-15)

Ponder It.

How does fire destroy?

What are the benefits of fire?

How does God refine us?

Receive It. Fire can be excruciating. It's overwhelming. It's destructive. But the refining fire that God provides produces a fresh, beautiful growth unrivaled by any other growth. Consider tangled messes you've had in your life. If you're honest, you might realize that you've actually found comfort in the messes sometimes. It's like being in the thick vegetation of the jungle. The longer you live in it, the more accustomed you become to it. Even though it's difficult to maneuver, you know the path and can find your way through the tangled vines and dangerous places. It might take you more time than if you had a clear path, but you're probably okay with taking a bit more time, because it's the path you know...and would prefer to keep.

However, you don't see the dangers lurking under the heavy vegetation. You easily trip. You waste time. And while it might be more comfortable to you because of the habit, you also have to realize...all habits aren't good. When you let God clear the path, you're faced with a couple realities. (1) You don't get to pick and choose what goes and what stays. God's refining fire is pure, getting rid of the unnecessary junk and leaving the nonnegotiable necessities. (2) You likely won't recognize your surroundings for a little while. You'll need to orient myself again. But one thing is for sure. You'll grow a lot better after the pruning process.

Live It. Get rid of the unnecessary today. Whether it's cleaning out a closet, setting aside your burdens, asking forgiveness in a relationship, or crying out to God to burn away the nonessentials, reach out and trust God to provide. The process might be painful, but it will refine.

Day 6: Sifting What's Good and What's God's

Jesus looked at them and said, "For people this is impossible, but for God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26)

Ponder It.

What is the difference between doing something good and doing something good in God's name?

What percentage of the time do you filter what you're doing through God's filter?

What is something you do that is a good thing but not necessarily what God intends for you now?

Receive It. Not everything that is good is God's will for you. Christians don't struggle as much between good and bad as they struggle between good and good. When a great idea or need comes along, we think we must respond, because if it's a good thing, it has to be a God thing, right? Of course, all goodness comes from God, but you are not intended to grasp all the goodness in this world. God doesn't guide you by telling you to do anything and everything that's good. He guides you by telling you to do anything and everything that he's telling you to do. That takes a trusting relationship. That takes listening. What God requires of you in one season of your life will likely differ in another season. What he's guiding someone else to do isn't necessarily what he's guiding you to do. It's not that God changes. It's that he created you for relationship with him, and he created you to uniquely fit into the big picture of his kingdom work.

God doesn't call us into "good enough." He calls us into "best." And the best can only be determined by God. After Jesus fed the multitudes, he sent his disciples ahead and went to spend time with his Father. There are many things that would have been considered good things for him to have done: healing, teaching, feeding to name a few. All things he had done and would continue to do—when the time was right. For that particular moment, only one thing was right: solitude. It was essential for spiritual renewal. Jesus sets the example for you. It's time to grow beyond "good enough." Settle for only one thing: God's best.

Live It. Make space today for what is God's. Set aside one minute to sit completely by yourself in silence. Close your eyes and clear your mind. Try to think of nothing. Sweep it clean. Of course, it will be a struggle, but don't give up. Keep cleaning for a full minute. At the end, you might not have swept every thought clean, but you'll hopefully have more space than before. Ask God to fill it.

Day 7: Who Needs to Know?

A wise person will know these things, and an understanding person will take them to heart. The Lord's ways are right. Good people live by following them, but those who turn against God die because of them. (Hosea 14:9)

Ponder It.

When have you been on the receiving end of gossip?

When have you been on the giving end of gossip?

How discerning are you when you share?

Receive It. We need to do life with others, and that requires sharing. We need to always share ourselves authentically with others. However, that doesn't mean we share everything with everyone. We must discern with whom to share what. We shouldn't rationalize why it's okay to share with someone when we know we shouldn't, and we shouldn't rationalize why we're not sharing with someone even when we know we should. So, how can you know what to share with whom? We need to discern. Consider a few influential factors.

First is your influence on others. You don't want to cause someone else to stumble. If someone looks up to you as a maturing Christian, she might need to hear of your own weaknesses and mistakes in order to keep her own in perspective. What constitutes sharing or withholding "too much" requires you to set aside your own reasons and concerns and replace them with God's guidance. What God says, goes...even when it leaves you feeling a bit vulnerable or restrained. Second, you must discern your reasons for sharing. Are you simply sharing to hear yourself share? Are you trying to make yourself look better or worse? If you say, "I'm just being real," but spewing all over the place is not being real. It's being viral! Finally, ask yourself what is the purpose of our sharing? Is it self-centered, other-centered, or God-centered? When it's all about God, you'll consider others and the impact what you're sharing can have on them. You'll allow God to keep your motives in check. You'll talk a lot less, but what you say will be much more significant. What you say and how you say it will reflect God's character. You'll partner with God as he weaves your lives through others' lives to build your individual relationship with him.

Live It. Check your motives as you share throughout the day. Ask yourself if your sharing is self-centered, other-centered, or God-centered? If it's not God-centered, stop.

Day 8: Time to Soak

Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens. (Psalm 68:19)

Ponder It.

How often are you spiritually still?

How do you struggle with spiritual stillness?

What do you anticipate from God through spiritual stillness?

Receive It. God meets us where we are, but we don't always meet him face-to-face. We skirt around him because we're too busy, or we fail to focus on him even in the stillness. We often struggle with stillness, because we don't seem to find the time to be still. We feel guilty because we're not still often enough or long enough. We see the shortcomings of our stillness. Or sometimes, we're *too* still. We refuse to move out of fear. We all need a slight nudge, whether it's into stillness or out of the wrong kind of stillness. Stillness doesn't equate inactivity. We can be engaged with the activities of life but find a stillness deep within, where God gives us his peace and grace to sustain and fuel us. Stillness can also be a moment, when we close our eyes to our surroundings and open our hearts to be surrounded by God and his grace. We can be still when the chaos or noise of life surrounds us, and we can be still when nothing but the sights and sounds of nature surrounds us. Spiritual stillness begins in our hearts and consumes our minds. But spiritual stillness is always teeming with God's presence.

Live It. Experiencing God's Word through multiple senses helps you put an exclamation point on a verse. For example, consider today's verse, Psalm 68:19, as you try the following experiences.

- Close your eyes and go about your routine for five minutes. As you experience challenges, praise God for opening your eyes to his provision and direction, and acknowledge the burdens he carries without your awareness.
- Hold a can of vegetables in your outstretched hand while praying. Put down the can of vegetables as you close in prayer and commit all your burdens to God.
- Listen as you repeatedly read the verse aloud, emphasizing different words with each reading. Consider what aspect of the verse resonates with you.

Day 9: Peace Among Chaos

In Christ we were chosen to be God's people, because from the very beginning God had decided this in keeping with his plan. And he is the One who makes everything agree with what he decides and wants. (Ephesians 1:11)

Ponder It.

How is your life currently chaotic?

How does chaos in your life affect your mood, behavior, relationships?

How do you define peace?

Receive It. Peace. We all seek it. Bubble bath. Candlelight. Sun and sand. A relaxing book. Quiet. Perhaps your sense of peace involves something besides what I listed. But quiet always goes with peace, right? Or is that our own definition of peace? Peace isn't a static status. You don't arrive at a place of peace and camp under it. Suffering on earth is inevitable. We experience peace through suffering – through anxiety. Our suffering (and anxiety) on earth is temporary, not eternal. It's relevant to your everyday life. Nothing goes unused by God. Suffering is understandable. Perhaps you don't understand it, but God certainly understands each and every moment of your life. Peace isn't something we sit back and receive.

In Matthew 5, Jesus says *peacemakers* are blessed. *Making* peace is active. To make peace is active, yet it requires surrender. In order to make peace according to God's will, we must surrender our own will. We might think surrender is holding up the white flag, and it's similar as we consider giving ourselves up to God's will. We place ourselves in his hands and are willing to be used by him. However, surrender is not inactive. Surrender isn't possible without a fight or struggle. Surrender comes out of a fight or struggle. In the case of making peace—or setting aside our own emotional responses to any godly emotion—the surrender precedes making peace with any other person or situation. The conflict often happens within ourselves. Finding peace among chaos isn't about a personal strategy or effort. It's about yielding to God's way. Are you willing?

Live It. Stand in the light. Look around you and see how the light impacts what you see and how you see it. Change your perspective, turning your body or taking a step into or away from the light. Pay attention how the changes you make impact your perspective. The light doesn't change. Your perspective changes. How are you perceiving peace and chaos in your life?

Day 10: Do-Over

But you are a chosen people, royal priests, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession. You were chosen to tell about the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. In the past you had never received mercy, but now you have received God's mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

Ponder It.

When have you wanted a do-over?

When have you clung to an experience or lesson for too long?

How do you need to trust God more in your “today”?

Receive It. Have you ever wanted to change a situation or timing in order to learn from it better or enjoy it more? Perhaps you’ve read a book and thought, “If only I’d heard that ten years ago.” Perhaps you’ve listened to a speaker and thought, “If only so-and-so was here to hear this.” Perhaps you believed your vacation was almost perfect, but one family member was missing—or, perhaps it would have been perfect if one family member had been missing! Even when your preference for a slight or major change, or re-creation, of something is driven by good intentions, the bottom line is that you’re dissatisfied with something. You might use statements such as *if only* or *what if*.

What if you turned *what if* into *what is*? Focusing on what you’re missing can easily lead to discontentedness, and it can pull your attention away from the purpose and provision God has for you. You can miss the blessing God intends by looking away from him. As you trust and follow God, he is recreating your life. He created it in the first place. He knows you intimately. He knows your past, present and future. He knows the hope and promise of your life. He knows how to weave the disappointments, mistakes, and suffering into your purpose. God gives you freedom to choose, and he’ll use whatever choices you make, but you must trust his timing and wisdom along the way. Growth takes time and effort, and you have to yield, respond, and be obedient in order to get results. You can trust your Creator to re-create the best you possible on this earth. God knows what he’s doing.

Live It. Find a dark space. Close your eyes, trying to shut out all light for a full minute. Before opening your eyes, ask God to call attention to the dark places in your life, then respond by inviting his grace to consume those spaces.

Day 11: Job Descriptions

Whoever serves me must follow me. Then my servant will be with me everywhere I am. My Father will honor anyone who serves me. (John 12:26)

Ponder It.

What are the non-negotiables in your life?

What drains you?

How do your roles overlap or work alongside others?

Receive It. What if it's not your job to get something done? Will you still do it? Some of us will answer with a resigned "Yes" because the work needs to get done and if no one else is going to do it, we feel the obligation to get it done. Some of us will answer with an emphatic "No!" because if we're not responsible for it, we don't want to take the responsibility for it. God is a lot less concerned about job descriptions than we are. His job description for us basically includes "Listen to me and respond in obedience so you're always following my will and purpose." It doesn't have to do with the just distribution of tasks, merit system, or rank and files of titles and positions.

If you say "no" to something, it must be because God says "no." If you say "yes" to something, it must be because God says "yes." The only way you're going to know which he is saying is to continually seek to know him so that when you have a question of how to respond, you know what's consistent with his Word and character. You are in tune with the Holy Spirit enough to recognize his voice, and you respond in obedience. Sometimes it's an unwavering response, and sometimes it's a bit more tentative because you don't have enough details to be certain. But make no mistake: God will prompt you to respond. So the next time you get into a tug-of-war with someone (even God) about what's required or expected (or not required or expected), pause and filter it through what God intends for you. His input will often not be about the task involved but about the relationships involved—relationships with other people as well as your relationship with God.

Live It. Each time you make a decision today, flip a coin. The results don't have to actually influence your response; in fact, you don't have to actually call heads or tails. You might just give the coin a little toss into the air. Use it as a reminder that choices aren't haphazard. Commit to being intentional in how, what, and who you choose.

Day 12: My Strengths

The Lord is my rock, my protection, my Savior. My God is my rock. I can run to him for safety. He is my shield and my saving strength, my defender. (Psalm 18:2)

Ponder It.

What are your strengths?

How have your strengths become your strengths?

What does God say your strengths are?

Receive It. Consider a time you learned you could do something. Perhaps you ran a short distance, made a new recipe, earned a raise at work, or saved money at the store by using coupons. You got excited because you accomplished something you never accomplished before, but was it a one-time thing or could you repeat it? Then you did it again, and your accomplishment was reconfirmed. Perhaps you've won a difficult game repeatedly, or you've completed a do-it-yourself home project. Something you hadn't done has now been done. Something you didn't know is now known.

You consistently reconfirm your faith. You know the truth of God's Word and who he is. You don't just believe in God, you know him. You learn more about him, which prompts you to grow more closely to him. You watch for him working in your life, and as he does, you give him credit for what's happening. Because you're looking for him, you recognize him. You don't excuse away his provision and guidance as coincidence and chance. Your reconfirmation doesn't change who God is. He is unchangeable. Your reconfirmation changes your relationship with God. You can trust him to convict you of what beliefs to tweak in order to more completely know the one and only true God. Your strengths aren't about the things you're good at; your strengths are rooted in the humility you have in faith. Your strength is actually God's strength. And if you don't rely on him for all that you need and have, any strength you believe you have will fall with pride.

Live It. When you think about your spiritual journey or everyday life, what's one word that comes to mind? Look up the word (a synonym or concept) in a Bible concordance and see where God leads. For a quick online search, visit BibleGateway.com, and type in the word you want to search.

Day 13: My Weaknesses

But he said to me, "My grace is enough for you. When you are weak, my power is made perfect in you." So I am very happy to brag about my weaknesses. Then Christ's power can live in me. (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Ponder It.

How do weaknesses impact your daily life?

How do weaknesses impact your faith?

What would God say about your weaknesses?

Receive It. Repentance. It's a word we either don't like to hear, don't understand, or simply ignore. Repentance requires acknowledgement of something being amiss, and we don't necessarily like to admit we're wrong. It seems to indicate weakness, and weakness is...well, a weakness! But it's not. When we repent, we admit where we are, not to get stuck, settle into a place of defeat, or give up. We repent, because we're willing to move beyond where we are. We acknowledge where we are isn't where we should be. It doesn't mean everything in our lives is bad. In fact, as we grow in faith and let God consume our lives more completely, we realize he challenges us to repent of even the slightest details of our attitudes and intentions, pruning the tiny weeds before they grow into trees.

We often respond in faith forgetting the importance of repentance. We ask for blessings, we praise God, we expect God's promises...but we haven't done a heart-check first. We need to ask ourselves if there's anything between us and God as we approach him, and since we work toward developing an ongoing connection with him, we need to be adamant about consistently asking him to identify anything that's creating any amount of distance between us. That also means we have to be willing to listen as he reveals the distance. We need to be willing to respond. A lack of repentance impacts personal faith, and it also impacts community. Each person is responsible for his/her own repentance. Each person is also able to ask for repentance for the community. It must be done with a pure heart. We don't ask for repentance because "that person" did something wrong. Going to God in repentance for our community assumes our association among that community.

Live It. Write words or phrases that indicate anything that might be between you and God: distractions, sin, priorities, anxiety, and so on. Pray over the paper, then shred or burn it, trusting God to take care of everything you bring to him with an authentic heart.

Day 14: Puzzle Pieces

Evening passed, and morning came. This was the third day. Then God said, "Let there be lights in the sky to separate day from night. These lights will be used for signs, seasons, days, and years. They will be in the sky to give light to the earth." And it happened. (Genesis 1:13-15)

Ponder It.

When have you experienced a death or loss that you later saw an area of growth spring forth?

How can a loss of innocence lead to growth?

How do you and God differ in how you put together a puzzle?

Receive It. Life is full of transitions. I've watched many sunrises and sunsets, marveling at their beauty and majesty. I would miss it all if the transition between night and day was simply a flip of a switch, similar to what I experience when I walk in or out of a room in my house and turn a light on or off. I would miss vibrant colors that cannot be seen any other time of the day except during the transitions of sunrises and sunsets. I'd miss the anticipation of a new day as I begin in the dark but see a hint of light in the eastern sky. I'd miss the reminder of the pending darkness near the end of the day, when I know I must finish an outside task before I need a flashlight.

God created seasons, and each season has benefits. Each season involves potential for growth. Each season also includes potential for decline and decay—which can eventually be used for growth. As we work through the spiritual seasons of our lives, may we always widen our vision to take in as much of God's perspective as we can. That's why we study God's Word. That's why we seek his will. That's why we yield in obedience. God understands the sunrises and sunsets of our lives. Even in the midst of our experiences and our longings to understand, our comprehension will be limited. When we strive to understand our seasons outside of the context of God's plan, we try to put together pieces of a puzzle with no box as a reference point. Putting together the puzzle is difficult anyway, but without studying and regularly glimpsing at what the big picture is, we will be less effective and more distracted. As challenging as it is, let's savor what God has for us.

Live It. Watch a transition today. It might be a sunrise or sunset. It might be watching someone fall asleep. It might be someone learning a new skill. As you experience the transition, thank God for the transitions in our lives. Find the beauty among the challenges as he puts each piece in place.

Day 15: Emergency Room Visits

But respect Christ as the holy Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to answer everyone who asks you to explain about the hope you have (1 Peter 3:15)

Ponder It.

When have you been involved in an emergency situation?

On a scale from 1 to 10, how calm do you usually remain during an emergency?

How might your definition of an emergency differ from God's?

Receive It. Emergencies happen. They startle, even shock, us. Depending on the situation and our personal involvement, we might panic or feel overwhelmed, but regardless of our feelings, we must respond. Someone is in need, and it's time for us to step into action. We work through the details, meet the needs, cope with the clean-up of the situation, and we seem better prepared for the next emergency. As immediate and urgent as the emergency first feels, we can experience a let-down, an overwhelming exhaustion somewhere along the process. We can't live in emergency-mode every moment of our lives. Emergencies are serious, urgent, and often dangerous. They're not simply the unexpected, inconvenient things that happen every day. If you treat every difficulty, change, and challenge as an emergency, you'll soon exhaust yourself.

Emergencies can be physical, situational, and spiritual. While physical emergencies can't be predicted, we can have training complete and supplies available. Situational emergencies are more specific, so their toll is usually more personal. We can trust God to surround us with people and resources as well as fill us with his peace and provision. Then there are spiritual emergencies, when we seem to be blindsided by doubt, isolation, anger, or anything else that seems to drain our relationship with God. If we're actively seeking God to pour into us, if we're consistently accepting the spiritual challenges in front of us, if we're staying in his Word and praying on a continual basis, we'll be ready even when spiritual emergencies come our way. Really, they're the most critical of all emergencies, so they need the most intentional preparation.

Live It. Begin to assemble an emergency preparedness kit. Write key Scriptures on index cards or in a small notebook as you read and study God's Word. Keep them with you to read and declare as you get discouraged or are faced with spiritual emergencies.

Day 16: Chronic Care

Comfort me with your love, as you promised me, your servant. (Psalm 119:76)

Ponder

How have you given or received chronic care?

How difficult is it for you to accept help?

When you get into the routine of everyday life and ministry, how can your spiritual life suffer?

Receive It. Emergencies are sudden and urgent, while chronic situations are long-lasting. Both require care, but it's not just the timeframe that is different. Each requires and takes a different emotional, physical, and spiritual toll on us. While the emergency situation is immediate, it also ends. The repercussions of the emergency might be long-lasting as it moves more into a chronic situation. In chronic situations, we can become exhausted because of the constancy of need. And when the need is spiritual, it can become dangerously depleting if we're not careful.

We cannot chronically care for others without fully relying on God. We don't have all the answers, and we don't have all the resources. In today's global society, where resources and connections are readily available, we can get into a habit of relying on what we can access in our own ways. As we know who to contact for what we need, we can get out of the habit of fully relying on God for all we need and trusting him for even the smallest connections and resources. God is the best chronic-care provider. He doesn't get exhausted. He knows what we need and when we need it. He knows when we need a little push, and he knows when we need rest. He knows who will come alongside us and when. But we have to trust him. You need chronic care. Your entire spiritual life is about the chronic care that God is giving you. It's about your need and your reliance on and trust in God to provide it. Are you trying to care for yourself and others without him?

Live It. Continue to work on your emergency preparedness kit. God provides the preparation we need, whether for an emergency or a chronic situation. Stay in God's Word, asking God to pour into you. As you write a verse, remember any preparedness you do is just the tip of the iceberg of what God can do when you continually yield to the Holy Spirit and trust him to fill, challenge, and guide you.

Day 17: In Time of Mutiny

Then Jesus said to his followers, “If people want to follow me, they must give up the things they want. They must be willing even to give up their lives to follow me. Those who want to save their lives will give up true life, and those who give up their lives for me will have true life. (Matthew 16:24-25)

Ponder It.

When have you been attacked or accused?

When have you been faced with the truth, and how did you respond?

How does God speak to you through others—in times of support and in times of attack?

Receive It. To be attacked and accused when it’s justified is one thing. Being faced with the truth can be difficult, but you really can’t argue with the truth. Being wrongly attacked and accused is something else. And it’s difficult to take. When the fight gets personal, it’s tempting to fight back with the same tactics. It’s tempting to assume intentions, fling accusations, and choose the words you know will sting the most. But there’s another way.

Try to leave the “I’m being attacked so I need to attack back” mentality behind, because looking beyond it makes way for God’s intentions. Even as someone throws one blow after another, you can have an overwhelming peace of God’s presence. He invites you to peek into what might be the reality of what was going on. He will often remind you of another’s hurt. Even when you’re blamed, it often isn’t about you. Instead of anger toward being unjustly accused, you can feel compassion. You can respond with respect instead of retaliation. Trust God to shoulder the pain and hurt. Even though it feels personal, God often assures you he doesn’t see it that way. He can remind you of the pain he endured for you and remind you that he’s equipped you to endure some pain for him. You don’t take up his cross because you can handle it. You take it up because *he can*. You can’t do it in your own strength. You can only respond in his strength. Because you have a personal relationship with Jesus, you don’t have to take a lot of other relationship issues too personally. It’s personal when God says it’s personal.

Live It. Are you letting your emotions and assumptions guide how you respond, or are you relying on God to guide you? Today, keep a tally of when you respond on your own versus when you trust God. Let the Holy Spirit convict and guide through today.

Day 18: Extra Grace Required

Now I am putting you in the care of God and the message about his grace. It is able to give you strength, and it will give you the blessings God has for all his holy people. (Acts 20:32)

Ponder It.

What person or situation drains you?

On a scale from 1 to 10, how patient are you?

On a scale from 1 to 10, how patient is God?

Receive It. Some people are needier than others. They seem to take more attention and time than others. Whatever is going on in their lives is paramount above anything else. If they're unhappy, they're going to tell you. If they have complaints, hurts, offenses, assumptions, agendas, you're going to hear about it. Have you ever wanted to avoid someone, perhaps even taking a different route through the grocery store or even the church building? It's not unlike rejecting a call or pretending you're not home or in the office. And it's not a simple boundaries issue. You can rationalize that it is: "Oh, I just don't have time to deal with her right now. I'll be sure to get back with her. If she wasn't so needy, I wouldn't have to respond this way."

How often does God respond in that way to you? After all, you're extra-grace required, too. You might see more differences with your extra-grace required person than similarities, but if you consider how you sometimes approach God, you might begin to see the connections. Do you take more complaints and needs to God than praises and appreciation? Do you ask him for more than you give? Do you expect attention and feel slighted when you're not getting what you expect? God has all the grace he needs to pour into us, because he *is* grace. He doesn't run out. And neither do we when we rely on him for the grace need...to extend to others. We can't do it on our own. We'll end up exhausted. We'll end up not picking up the phone when we're supposed to answer or answering in frustration and impatience when we need to extend God's patience. Anytime we try in our own strength and grace, we'll fall short. God has all the grace we need, including extra grace required.

Live It. Extend God's grace today to someone who you experience as difficult. Be generous.

Day 19: Whose Time Is It?

Wait for the Lord's help. Be strong and brave, and wait for the Lord's help. (Psalm 27:14)

Ponder It.

What is the most difficult thing about waiting to you?

When have you recently had to wait for something beyond what you wanted to wait?

When have you benefitted from a waiting period?

Receive It. Waiting isn't easy. We're taught more and more that we don't have to tolerate waiting. If there are more than three people in a checkout line, another cashier is summoned. If our internet or phone connections are slow, we can upgrade. Movies are available on demand. We can record television shows to watch at our leisure. Books are delivered to our e-readers in an instant. Waiting isn't easy because we don't exercise our waiting muscles.

We can easily generalize the speed of available information in every life to the response of God. After all, God is always present. He knows all. Why can't he respond instantly? Well, he can, but that doesn't mean he does. Time isn't an issue for him. He can command a mountain to move, but he might not remove a small stumbling block from your path for years. Why? Perhaps he's building his relationship with you. He wants you to experience him. He wants you to rely on him. He wants you to trust his timing instead of demanding your own. When we acknowledge his omnipresence and omniscience, we also have to yield to his will. He knows more than us, so wouldn't he know better what the perfect response timing would be? Perhaps he has you in wait-training to build your spiritual muscles.

Live It. Purposefully sit quietly today. Exercise your muscles of "wait." You don't have to be waiting for anything specific. Sit in anticipation of God working in your life. Sit in his presence, trusting him to prepare you for something coming soon in your life. Try not to fill up the space and time of your waiting with your own requests and expectations. Keep your anticipation purely on God's presence.

Day 20: How Can I Really Know?

I say it is better to be content with what little you have. Otherwise, you will always be struggling for more, and that is like chasing the wind. (Ecclesiastes 4:6)

Ponder It.

What does contentedness mean to you?

In what areas are you most discontent?

How are you growing in contentment?

Receive It. A recently popular acronym is PUSH or “Pray Until Something Happens.” While we might like the concept, it’s not biblical. We like to think our persistence pays off, and yes, God wants us to repeatedly go to him, but our relationship with God isn’t about a push; it’s about a pursuit. Pursuing God’s will isn’t about praying until something happens. Something is happening – God is present when you go to him in prayer, seeking and trusting him. God is listening, and he will not let you down. The “something” that happens in prayer might not be what you had in mind. From God’s perspective, the best “something” for you might be the process of waiting or struggling and growing closer to God during that time. Even though you might question when and how he’s going to answer, he’s answering and he’s pursuing you. As you find rest in the process of pursuing God, you’ll find contentment.

Contentment isn’t a static status; it’s a process. We don’t arrive at a place of contentment and camp under it. We move ahead in obedience, and we trust God to guide and provide. As we trust, we find contentment. Suffering on earth is inevitable, but we can experience contentment even in our suffering. We may not understand what’s going on in our lives, but we can be content to know that God understands each and every moment. God doesn’t waste a single opportunity to teach us a lesson; it’s just that sometimes we’re not listening.

Live It!

God will not waste the opportunity to teach you about contentedness today. Anticipate it.

Day 21: Into God's Word

In the beginning there was the Word. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were made by him, and nothing was made without him. In him there was life, and that life was the light of all people. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overpowered it. (John 1:1-5)

Ponder It.

How do you feel as if you fall short getting into, staying in, and living out God's Word?

To whom do you compare yourself when you consider the standard for being in God's Word?

How does God's Word impact your life on a daily basis?

Receive It. Not everyone claims God's Word as absolute truth. In the short-run, it seems easier to set absolute truth aside. Seeking, finding and living by absolute truth takes effort, discipline and sacrifice. It's easier to make up our own rules, so we can be comfortable. We can shift what we believe and how we live based on a whim. We can change as our life seasons change. To accept God's Word as absolute truth requires submitting to authority, which isn't easy. God's Word is absolute whether we choose it or not. We're given choice. We crave choice. We want rights. We fight for options. But our choices don't negate absolutes. Our choices only acknowledge the reality of absolutes or not. There are consequences to every choice we make, including whether we accept the absolute truth of God's Word—or not.

You might accept God's Word as absolute truth, but do you live it as absolute truth? Believing in God's truth is one thing. Believing it with full trust and faith that impacts everyday life is another. When you live it out, your life will change. God's Word doesn't change but it changes everything and everyone it comes in contact with, because it is alive and active. God breathed life into his Word, and his Word breathes life into you. It's life-changing and life-sustaining. It will encourage and challenge you. Are you up for it?

Live It. Take the next step. Read God's Word. Speak it. Journal it. Start somewhere and begin to grow.

Day 22: Miscommunication

It will not really be you speaking but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. (Matthew 10:20)

Ponder It.

When have you been on the receiving end of miscommunication?

When have you been on the giving end of miscommunication?

How can you trust God through communication?

Receive It. Each time we communicate, we bring our background with us. We use it to make sense of what we're saying. Others bring different background to their communications. We may have some similarities, but no two people's lives are exactly the same, and no two people will communicate in exactly the same way. We filter what we say and what we hear. So, every time you say something, it goes through two filters: yours and the person's to whom you're talking. Every time you hear something, it goes through two filters: yours and the person's who is speaking to you. Understanding our filters helps us understand our communications better. There are at least two people involved in communication. Both have filters. Does it really matter who's right and who's wrong when there is miscommunication? If the goal is communication, and communication isn't complete or effective, strive to focus on the goal-communication instead of getting stuck in a blame game. Building relationships with healthy communication is always worth time and effort.

Here's my list of communication tips.

- No one is a mind-reader. If you want or expect someone to know something, tell her.
- Take a breath before speaking. Once it's spoken, you can't swallow it.
- Communication will fail. Do your best, but know it's not foolproof.
- Communication is not avoidable. You can be quiet, but you're still communicating.
- Communication assumes...based on past experiences, relationships, and personality.
- Communication involves relationship. It's not just about you, your intentions, and your goals.

Live It. Consider the filters you most use as you communicate today. Ask and trust the Holy Spirit to equip and challenge you to use his filter before any others.

Day 23: Living God's Love

The Father himself loves you. He loves you because you loved me and believed that I came from God. (John 16:27)

Ponder It.

What passions has God instilled in you?

What bewilders you about God's love?

How have you experienced God's love?

Receive It. We can love only because God loves us. Our love flows from his love even when we don't acknowledge the source. Without God, there is no love, and his love isn't a dormant love. He loved so much that he gave his Son, Jesus, to come to earth and die an excruciating death so that he could live again on earth briefly before returning to heaven and providing a way for us to have eternal life with him. God's love spurred action—an amazingly extensive sacrificial action. No matter what we do out of God's love, we will never be as sacrificial with it as God was. Thankfully, God doesn't ask us to be. He simply wants us to respond in obedience as he pours love into us. He wants us to pour it onto others. In order to do so, we must know what God loves.

In order to know what God loves, we must stay in his Word. We must be familiar with him. We must be able to discern what he wants us to know about a situation and, more important, how he wants us to respond in obedience. Sometimes love is with words and sometimes it's with actions. Sometimes God wants us to be silent and step aside, because speaking up or stepping out in the specific timing might not be the expression of love someone needs. The important thing is for us not to justify our own responses. We don't decide what people need; God does. He knows the details; we don't. He is capable of the most growth-producing response. We'll often strive for the comfortable response instead. Loving what God loves isn't easy—no matter how passionate we are about God. Loving what God loves is sacrificial, but it doesn't come close to God's sacrifice for us.

Live It! Express God's love to someone in the next 30 minutes. Listen. God will let you know how.

Day 24: How to Decide?

A wise person will know these things, and an understanding person will take them to heart. The Lord's ways are right. Good people live by following them, but those who turn against God die because of them. (Hosea 14:9)

Ponder It.

How do you struggle with discernment?

How have your skills in discernment changed over time?

How has this series of devotions impacted your ability and desire to discern God's will for your life?

Receive It. We've become accustomed to saying, "I don't see anything wrong with it," when it's not obvious to us what God thinks about something. Perhaps we don't think he's interested in the issue, but God has interest in everything we do. He is invested in our lives. Instead of forging ahead if we don't see something wrong with what we're doing, thinking, or feeling, try flipping the question and ask, "What's right with it?"

God's wisdom isn't human wisdom. When we mix a little of God's truth with a lot of stuff we learn from everyone around us, we can become as disoriented as a blindfolded child trying to pin the tail on the donkey. We can rationalize that something is "kind of truth," because it looks a little like truth, but there's no hybrid truth with God. God pours himself into you because he wants you to fully know him. He wants you to discern what's of him and what's of the world, what's okay to turn away from and what you need to face head on, when you need to speak up and when you need to be quiet. God's wisdom can only come from God and is fully intended to glorify God. If we only ask and accept it, the Holy Spirit will give us this guidance and wisdom to live every moment of every day to glorify God.

Live It! When faced with a decision today, ask yourself, "Is this taking me one step closer or one step farther from God?" Commit every decision you make today to God, asking for and trusting his guidance.

Day 25: Through the Seasons

I say it is better to be content with what little you have. Otherwise, you will always be struggling for more, and that is like chasing the wind. (Ecclesiastes 4:6)

Ponder It.

How would you describe your current season of life?

What's your favorite season of the year?

How have you struggled through seasons of life? How have you trusted God and grown?

Receive It. Seasons change. We have many “whens”: whens of frustration, whens of exhilaration, whens of pain, whens of loneliness, whens of belonging, whens of celebration. Consider the “whens” of your past, seasons you’ve experienced. Between each “when” is a “then.” “Then” is transitional. It indicates something came before and is now to be followed by something different. There’s an adjustment, a change, a season. A “when” can last for a very short or excruciatingly long period of time. A “then” is often less noticeable. It usually happens in a blink of an eye or gradual increments. Either way, the focus is typically on where we’ve been or where we’re going, so the “then” gets less notice. However, it’s important, because it’s where the breath of anticipation or relief occurs.

God provides for your purpose. You might not have everything your neighbor has. You might wish you were in a different situation. You might not feel as if God is providing, but look more deeply. He always provides for his purpose. Lack of provision might indicate you expect his provision to be something different than what he intends for it to be. Or, you’re not whole-heartedly seeking and fulfilling God’s purpose for you, so what you think he should be providing has nothing to do with his purpose. God will provide what you need for his purpose, but he doesn’t promise to provide for what’s outside of his promise.

Live It! Identify whether the spiritual season you’re in right now is most like winter, spring, summer, or fall. Then reflect on how the season you’re in is important in the cycle of all the seasons. What can happen in this season that’s essential for other seasons to follow? What happened in previous seasons that made this season possible?

Day 26: Intimacy with God

To choose life is to love the Lord your God, obey him, and stay close to him. He is your life. (Deuteronomy 30:20a)

Ponder It.

How close do you feel to God right now?

What do you long for in your relationship with God?

How has the experience of these devotions affected your intimacy with God?

Receive It. A relationship with God won't automatically grow. No relationship will automatically grow. Any relationship will default to atrophy. Without intentionality, we'll become distant. We'll question the importance of the relationship. We'll wonder why we were in the relationship in the first place and might even begin to reframe it in negative ways, justifying why we're no longer in it.

Faith takes nurturing. If ignored, it will cease to grow at all or grow in unhealthy ways. We have to pay attention. We have to invest. And we have to remember the relationship is not just about us. Our relationship is with God, which means he has significant input. We have to listen to him. We have to become familiar with him. We have to respect him. He is God and doesn't need to prove his trustworthiness and sovereignty, but his consistency proves it in time as we interact with and rely upon him. We pray, not just sharing requests but praising God and allowing him to pour his encouragement and admonishment into us. We study, not just for head knowledge but for heart knowledge, placing intimacy with God far above familiarity for trivia. We worship, not just during a weekend service but as a lifestyle, striving to praise and honor him in everything we do.

Live It! How is God challenging you to become more intimate with him today, pouring life-sustaining water into you? Don't wait. Respond today. Small steps are fine. Inactivity is not.

Day 27: God's Grace

The Lord's love never ends; his mercies never stop. They are new every morning; Lord, your loyalty is great. I say to myself, "The Lord is mine, so I hope in him." (Lamentations 3:22-24)

Ponder It.

How do you define God's grace?

On a scale from one to ten, how fully do you live out of God's grace every day?

What do you need today? What does God say about your need(s)?

Receive It. God's grace gives you what you need to live. What do you need for today? How you define what you need and how God defines what you need are likely different. We can become accustomed to assuming we have a right to something when we're not promised by God to the same things we're promised by the world. There's a chasm between the two. Even when we claim the promises of God, we often live by the promises of the world, and we don't like it when the promises of the world don't pan out. The truth is...the world lies. God doesn't. We can trust God's promises, but we can't trust the world's. We don't think God's grace is sufficient because we don't fully experience what God's grace is. We try to fit it into a box of what we think it is. We want to believe God is big enough to take care of everything about us and our lives, but we also want to understand everything about what he's doing. We want to micromanage, give our instruction, and rely on him to make the adjustments we most want.

We can't make God into what we want him to be. He can't be both big enough to be sovereign yet small enough to be understood by those who he created. What we want and prefer doesn't change who God is. God's grace is sufficient, because God is sufficient. He is all you need. It might not be comfortable, easy, or burden-free, but you have what you need to deal with every moment and situation. Not in your own strength, but in his. Not in your own wisdom, but in his. Not in your own plan, but in his. Are you willing to fully yield to him and trust him for grace at the beginning of today, tomorrow, and every day?

Live It. How is God providing for your needs today? Keep a running list throughout the day, acknowledging each time God provides for you. Be sensitive to notice even those things you might not consider as needs and provision.

Day 28: God's Provision

You cannot add any time to your life by worrying about it. If you cannot do even the little things, then why worry about the big things? Consider how the lilies grow; they don't work or make clothes for themselves. But I tell you that even Solomon with his riches was not dressed as beautifully as one of these flowers. God clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today but tomorrow is thrown into the fire. So how much more will God clothe you? Don't have so little faith! Don't always think about what you will eat or what you will drink, and don't keep worrying. All the people in the world are trying to get these things, and your Father knows you need them. (Luke 12:25-30)

Ponder It.

How does worry impact your life?

When do you rely on God the least—through the big or little things of life?

How is worry connected to control?

Receive It. God cares about every aspect of your life, because every aspect of your life reflects your relationship with him. Even as you stand in front of the sale rack, determining whether to buy the blue or the red shirt, God cares—not because he's into color-coding and fashion but because of how you process your decisions, how you prioritize, and what consumes your life. He wants you to rely on him for all guidance, no matter how insignificant you think a decision may be.

God doesn't need for you to need him. He invites you into relationship because he's invested in your life. He created you with purpose. He wants you to not only catch a glimpse of his plan for you but to fully grasp it and respond in each moment to it. He'll sometimes have you wait patiently to hear from him in order to trust his perfect timing. Other times, he'll prompt you to step out before giving your response much thought. It's about obedience. It's about trust. Living in a dynamic relationship with God requires you to rely on him for everything and be active in your obedience. God is trustworthy. He will reveal his will to you. Will you be trustworthy with his provision and guidance?

Live It! List the top 3 “big” things and “little” things on your mind right now. Then hand them over to God.

Day 29: God's Purpose

So God planned another day, called "today." He spoke about that day through David a long time later in the same Scripture used before: "Today listen to what he says. Do not be stubborn." (Hebrews 4:7)

Ponder It.

Is the majority of your focus on yesterday, today, or tomorrow?

How much do you take today for granted?

What do you have planned for today?

Receive It. We can easily become so consumed with the yesterdays and tomorrows of our lives that we miss out on the todays. Yesterdays are simply past todays that we can no longer change. However, we can change how we respond to yesterdays in our today. Tomorrows are simply future todays we cannot yet live. However, we can prepare for our tomorrows in our today. Yesterdays and tomorrows shape our todays; there's no doubt about that. We can't completely ignore yesterdays and tomorrows, yet they often consume our todays. Today is what we have to live fully right now. Why waste it?

There are possibilities in today. We can grasp the moment we have or resign ourselves to it. We can find purpose or meaninglessness, be encouraged or discouraged, and stand on a firm foundation or stumble across shaky ground. God gives us many choices, but he gives them to us one at a time. We often focus on the big opportunities of our days—or we turn something small into something big—and we're soon so consumed with one thing that we miss out on many others. Or we focus so much on the way in which we reached our today, basically focused on yesterday, that we miss out on the opportunity to shape our tomorrows. You get only one today. As you read this, the moment is gone. You can't grasp the moment and keep it. You can only choose well and live it fully. Will you?

Live It! Keep a small notebook with you and jot one word each time you experience the opportunities God is providing you through the day. As you experience God more, you'll watch for, notice, and acknowledge him more.

Day 30: Next Steps

Brothers and sisters, in the past I could not talk to you as I talk to spiritual people. I had to talk to you as I would to people without the Spirit—babies in Christ. The teaching I gave you was like milk, not solid food, because you were not able to take solid food. And even now you are not ready. You are still not spiritual, because there is jealousy and quarreling among you, and this shows that you are not spiritual. You are acting like people of the world. (1 Corinthians 3:2-4)

Ponder It.

In what areas do you most struggle spiritually?

How does your spiritual life coordinate with the rest of your life?

How is God challenging you to take “next steps” spiritually?

Receive It. Spirituality can take on many meanings from a variety of religions to a concoction of self-mixed beliefs and assumptions. But spirituality is biblical. God created us to be spiritual people. He wants us to live by the Holy Spirit and set all other influence and guidance aside. Living by the Spirit should rationally be easier than living on our own. After all, the Holy Spirit is God working within us. His influence comes from within, guiding each step, decision and response.

However, living such a spiritual life is easier said than done, mainly because it involves yielding. We soak in the world around us and feel as if we have some control over how we respond to it. We learn to live from the outside in because it seems more natural. We absorb and respond. We feel we have more control when we’re actually becoming passive in allowing what’s around us shape us. Allowing God to work through us is active. We must actively still and yield ourselves in order to listen and respond. How God directs us might not make sense to us, but it’s because we have a limited perspective. God sees all the details. He knows absolute truth. He will never misguide us. We, on the other hand, will generally get ourselves into messes no matter how confident we are. We have a choice to live primarily on our own or to sacrifice ourselves and yield to God. What will your next steps be?

Live It! Are you ready for solid food? Take your time as you chew today. Consider what God is spiritually feeding you and how you’re responding. Ask him to make necessary changes in your spiritual diet.