



**I R O N
S H A R P E N S
I R O N**

**A 31-DAY PERSONAL JOURNAL
FOR MEN SEEKING TO LIVE
FULLY IN CHRIST**

A free gift from Men's Ministry at



st. peter's
United Methodist Church



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Dear friends,

No matter where you are in your walk of faith, the men of St. Peter's United Methodist created this free gift for you to help you take one step closer to living your life fully and boldly for Christ.

We asked some of the men in our church to share stories of their faith journey. For some it was a time when they were overcoming doubts, for others a time of hesitation about taking the next step in seeking a spiritual center for their lives, for others it was a time of working through unhealthy behavior or spiritual inactivity. We asked them to think about and write of how they took the next step in trusting God to help them become a healthier man, a better Christian man at work, or a more joy-filled child of God, living fully in God's promise.

These are their stories.

It is the prayer of all men at St. Peter's United Methodist Church that you find encouragement, peace, and a step forward in these pages. Over the next 31 days, use these devotionals to study God's Word, stimulate your conversation with God every day, and celebrate the love and hope He offers us.

You will notice that there is an email address with each devotional. When we say iron sharpens iron one of the things we mean is we are not meant to journey alone. If one of the devotionals particularly resonates with you would you reach out and connect with that person. God just might be trying to make a connection in your life to aid you in your walk.

Be encouraged, be hopeful and know for certain that you are not alone. Not only do we have an amazing God who loves you, but there are hundreds of men in the church who stand ready to help you navigate your way to walking closer with Him.



DR. PAT SPARKS
Lead Pastor



REV. ALEX ZEISIG
Senior Associate Pastor

• DAY 1 •

Written by: Butch Scherer
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“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not harm, to give you a future with hope.”

Jeremiah 29:11

This verse from Jeremiah is taped to my monitor at work. It started helping me almost 33 years ago, when I was young in sobriety and full of fear and not knowing what lay ahead for a recovering Alcoholic.

That is when I met Reverend Jim Foster at St. Peters United Methodist Church. Reverend Foster invited me to meet with him and share my story and my problems brought on by my drinking. He listened and did not say a word. He let me get completely through then all he said was “Your Sins are Forgiven.”

At that moment the room went dark, and it was as if a spotlight was thrown on me, then it went away. I had a feeling that I could not explain other than a true calming. I had experienced the Grace of God. Reverend Jim then shared this verse with me and said that I should use it as my shield to know that God is always with me and wants good things for me.

So, every time I am having a bad day or not feeling that I am a worthy person all I have to do is look at my monitor and see the words that started me on my Walk with Christ.

I hope that you to might use this verse or a verse of your choosing and put it either on your monitor or somewhere where you can see it daily and use as your shield as I have used this one now for many years and sober for 34 years.

• DAY 2 •

Written by: Bill Kleiber
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“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

Colossians 3:17

“Can you help?” came the whisper as a hand touched my shoulder. I looked up from my pew in the back of the small chapel of the church to meet the pleading eyes of the usher. It was almost time to pass the offering plates and the usher team was one short this Sunday morning. It had been a number of years since I had been involved in church. I had been attending church regularly but had settled into a routine of quiet anonymity. I had become a pew potato. I was comfortable coming to church and listening but not sure enough to actually be involved in the work of the church.

That Sunday morning, I somewhat reluctantly rose to my feet to help with the offering. Passing the plates, I looked at the people in worship that morning and wondered where they were in their faith. What had brought them to church that morning? Why had none of them been asked to help?!? This reignited a spark in me. I started to question my own motives for coming to church.

Shortly after this fateful Sunday, I was invited to an adult Sunday School class. I said “yes.” In the coming months and years, I was asked to join a Bible study, help with youth, attend a spiritual retreat, and serve on committees. Each time I said “yes” something new happened. I was able to grow deeper in my faith and relationship with Jesus. Instead of waiting to be asked, I began seeking out new ways to serve and invite others. This opened even more doors for growth.

If you are wandering in your faith today, ask yourself “Can you help?” It could be as simple as joining the Connection Team or saying “yes” to attending a Life Group or Small Group Study. Wherever you are, God is looking to build relationship with you. All you have to do is say “yes.”

• DAY 3 •

Written by: Jeff Campbell
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*“You see that a person is considered righteous
by what they do and not by faith alone.”*

James 2:24

I need to be doing something all the time. I am not one to sit around.

My journey in life and as a Christ follower brought our family from WV to Texas in 2001. We settled in and started looking for a church. We tried many, looking for a “small” church, but that was impossible. St. Peter’s filled our families need with services, classes, and activities.

I had chores at my own home and was active in Sunday school and Cub Scouts. The push to do more was there. Then I started going to workdays on campus. We served with classmates and met new members. All of which was building relationships I still enjoy today.

Then in 2005 the big hurricanes occurred (Katrina - LA, Rita - Beaumont, TX). The church was asking for volunteers, and I jumped at the request. I had never had an opportunity to serve in this way. Once you GO and experience a disaster area within the first weeks you get a real feeling for the magnitude of the suffering and tragedy. I was hooked. Working with my church family on service missions was my calling. To see what God could do through his people. We did so much in one day, yet it was only a small part of the larger recovery.

Sometime after that I was asked to join the St. Peter’s Missions team and have been active in serving and leading ever since. The need is great, but the workers are few. GO and be part of it.

Matthew 9:37-38, Luke 10:2-3, James 2:14-26

• DAY 4 •

Written by: Jim Miller
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Getting through the hard times.

There have been times in my life that have been difficult. Some of them were due to problems at work: problems with difficult people, concerns over my job, worry over upcoming tough discussions. There have been other times when I just felt blah with not much going on, or really feeling a lack of purpose or joy. Still others involved the loss of someone close.

Looking ahead, I know I will have more hard times. The difficulties may be different or similar, but they will come. But I hope I am better prepared for what awaits.

So how can I best be ready to handle what life throws at me?

- By remembering that God/Jesus/Holy Spirit is always present walking beside you, many times even in the others you contact. Look for him, talk to him.
- By looking back at some of the past issues and seeing how they managed to be not so big in the long run (that first high school crush that dumped you, that time you had to change jobs)
- By focusing on the good things in life. Each day from God is a gift to enjoy: the colors, smells, tastes sounds, and people. Unwrap your gift.
- By putting your attention on others. There are always those who have things worse. Love others as Jesus mentions and you will be surprised at how much is does for you.

If you can do things, you will grow closer to God, closer to his vision for you, and gain strength to handle the things that will come.

• DAY 5 •

Written by: David Hackney
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*“A man’s heart plans his course,
but the Lord determines his steps.”*

Proverbs 16:9

The world and the enemy attempt to crush our faith. Political powers limit people’s religious freedoms. Scientists attempt to disprove the truth of the Word of God. Intellectuals deny historical facts of the Bible. Advertising sells style over substance. Organizations push their own agendas to deny what is holy and right. And we are told to fit in with the culture and live to please ourselves.

I encourage you to set-down the world’s weapons of today- money, influence, and human reasoning. I want you to pick up the Word of God and enlighten yourself; the Word will crush the lies of the enemy. The Word’s wisdom will tell you what is true. It’s goodness will instruct you to know right from wrong. It will move you to mercy and love in a world full of hate.

“Unplug” today from the pride and foolishness around you. Turn off the news, the speeches, and social media’s ranting and ravings, STOP and SLOW DOWN. Be still with the Lord. Pray to God. Read God’s Word. Go to worship and let Him renew your mind so you can stand firm in Christ.

Remember, when things happen that are out of our control, it’s easy to become frustrated, feel afraid, and question what the future holds. If you put your faith in God’s plans, it allows you to trust that the events in our lives are meant to be.

I want to remind you that God is in control and encourage you to trust Him. I love you, but God loves you more!

• DAY 6 •

Written by: DK Willardson
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*“Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you,
for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.”*

Luke 6:26

This verse reminds us that seeking the approval of others can lead us down the wrong path and that our focus should be on pleasing God. As men, we often face pressure from society to be successful, to be strong, and to have it all together. It is easy to fall into the trap of seeking the approval of others and trying to fit in with the crowd. However, as Christians, we are called to a higher standard. We are called to live for God, to follow His commandments, and to be a light to the world.

Similar guidance is expressed in the following verses:

John 12:43 - “For they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.”

Proverbs 29:25 - “The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe.”

John 5:44 - “How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?”

As we reflect on these verses, let us find courage and strength in Him, trusting in His guidance and provision. Let us take action today and commit ourselves to living boldly for His purposes, even if it means going against the crowd. For it is in living for Him that we will find true fulfillment and purpose as men of God.

• DAY 7 •

Written by: Bill Cathey
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*“For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds,
and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”*

Matthew 7:8

For me, my walk with God has been anything but a straight, clearly defined path. To the contrary, for vast portions of my life, my walk has been like trying to teach our new puppy Daisy to obediently walk on a leash with me. Like Daisy, I have all too frequently strayed from the correct path, disobeyed directions, and was forced to be pulled along.

Although God has continuously attempted to guide me forward towards a better and stronger relationship with Him, I have often responded disobediently. I have frequently pulled away from our Lord’s lead, ignored his directions, did not pay attention, or lazily not move forward at all in my spiritual life. Seemingly, just like Daisy on our walks together.

Thinking back, even though we have attended St. Peter’s for many years, I was just worshipping in isolation. When the Sunday service was completed, I would exit quickly and would feel as if I had done my spiritual duty for the week. That tendency lasted for years unfortunately, even though God was always with me, working on me continuously, and slowly attempting to draw me closer to Him.

That changed for me three years ago when I had a spiritual awakening within me occur at a Good Friday evening service at the West Campus. During the service, Pastor Alex vividly described the sacrifice that Jesus made for all of humanity and I felt at that moment that God was speaking directly to me through Alex. As I contemplated that sacrifice, I felt as if I were being asked by God “What have you done to love and help others in your life?” When I returned home that night I thought about the answer to that question and I wept. I realized how far I have to go to become a better child of God, and I decided that evening to become more involved in the church, provide more help for the needy, mentor those seeking guidance, and to become a better example of a Christian person to all those that I encounter. I still have SO far to go in my relationship with God, but I know He is always there waiting patiently for me to take the next step in my spiritual life.

So, as I walk Daisy every day, I think of my own “walk”, and all my missteps I have taken and try to exhibit patience, love, forgiveness, and grace towards her. Just like our Lord has exhibited to all of us.

• DAY 8 •

Written by: Tony Custer
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“That which is hateful to you, do not do unto your fellow.”
- Hillel the Elder, Jewish religious leader (contemporary of Jesus) and scholar

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.”
Matthew 7:12

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”
Philippians 2:3-4

Empathy and Humility. This concept appears prominently in most of the world’s major religions. This is basic empathy, defined as fully entering into another’s feelings or motives. You have heard the saying “you need to walk a mile in my shoes.” Think about how different the world would be if everyone actually lived out this ideal. All evil in this world is directly traceable to the lack of empathy for another person. Are you struggling with how to be a better witness for Jesus? Step into the background and encourage your co-workers to personal success. Teach your children to be kind to others and not arrogant.

As the concepts above indicate, there are acts to avoid and life virtues to pursue. It is not enough to just avoid injuring another person. We are called to lift up others in their personal trials and difficulties. Empathetic people say to themselves, “If I were in his/her situation, what would I want or need from a friend”?

When I was a kid, my parents taught us that every person has worth and that we were no better than anyone else. Everyone we come in contact with has their own trials and hardships to overcome. The Holy Spirit can take a kind word or thoughtful gesture and turn it into a life altering event for someone who is struggling. Are you feeling unhappy, unfortunate, or misunderstood? Find a small group that embraces mission work that makes a difference in people’s lives, and you may get a glimpse of the Kingdom here and now.

• DAY 9 •

Written by: Rev. Bob Johnson
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I was devastated. And fearful.

Our real estate agent had just called and told me that another contract on our house had fallen through. You would think that as an engineer turned pastor, I would have more trust in God. But this was not the first contract to fall through. In fact, it was the twelfth.

It had been nearly six years since I made my “deal” with God. I would say “yes” to God’s call to ordained ministry, quit my job, put the house on the market, and start seminary. God would help me sell the house in a very down market. When we got a lease-purchase contract within days of that bargain, I naturally thought God was holding up his end of the deal. But a year later, after I had held up my end, the contract fell through leaving me holding the mortgage on a greatly reduced salary.

Our real estate agent secured another contract, but this too fell through when the buyer could not secure financing. This happened a total of twelve times.

I began to doubt whether I had correctly heard God’s call. I began to question whether I had done something to anger God. Truth be told, I began to doubt God. And I was a pastor!

On the thirteenth try, the contract held. We sold the house to a couple where the wife was blind. They believed the house layout was perfect for her. I learned in this process that you cannot make “deals” with God. I also learned that God remains faithful but, on his terms, not ours. Looking back, we were never without a tenant paying the mortgage. Even without making a bargain, God saw us through.

• DAY 10 •

Written by: Mike Fitzgerald
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*“Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” - Ecclesiastes 4:12 (NIV)*

*“By yourself you’re unprotected. With a friend, you can face the worst. Can you
round up a third? A three-stranded rope isn’t easily snapped.”
- Ecclesiastes 4:12 (MSG)*

Reading the bible for the first time at the age of 45, I had questions. Questions like, “What’s an Ecclesiastes?” “Why’s this important to me?” “How can I follow God’s Word if I can’t understand it? Then, in my search for understanding, I found The Message translation (MSG) of the bible. It helped me understand more of what I was reading, in language I could understand. I still refer to it often (I call it the Dude bible).

The message in Ecclesiastes 4:12 is simple. Men need other men. We grow and we learn together. We celebrate success, and we recover from failure together. We sharpen one another, holding each other up in adversity, and we grow stronger...together.

As my understanding grew, I found the courage to attend a men’s ministry event. There, I found guys who were admittedly as screwed-up as I was! Those men, and God, met me where I was to bring me along in my faith. They didn’t judge me or make me feel small. It changed my life.

Do you feel that way, unsure of the next step? Feel a tug to fill a void in your life, something that’s missing that might help you be a better man, father, partner, or Christian? I don’t have all the answers, but I have experience in finding the way forward that may be helpful to you.

Drop me a note. I’ll be there.

Proverbs 13:20, Proverbs 17:17, Proverbs 27:17

• DAY 11 •

Written by: David Eberly
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“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Romans 12:1-2

As I go about my day, do I stay focused on what God is wanting for me? Do I seek to share my faith with others by living in a way that reflects who I am in Christ?

In today’s society it’s so easy to get caught up in technology and what is constantly being pushed at us from the enemy. Let’s all be encouraged to hold fast to what Paul is urging us to do. Live our lives for Christ, knowing that there is truth in what we believe and eternal life.

• DAY 12 •

Written by: Frank Nance
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“His own iniquities will capture the wicked, and he will be held with cords of sin. He will die for lack of instruction, and in the greatness of his folly he will go astray.”

Proverbs 5:22-23

In these versus it talks about how sin will kill you and how it has a grabbed onto you. If I do not get rid of sin in my life, I can't have a relationship with God and receive instruction from him.

As I have been reading these lately, I need to be receiving instruction from God as well as discipline. In the footnotes it talks about death. “Death in Proverbs is presented as both a gradual descent and a sudden end.”

My prayer is to cleanse my heart regularly and avoid sin, if not run from sin every time. In the past I have been able to accomplish this with God's help by cleansing my heart through prayer. I will pray on a regular basis to cleanse my heart. I will pray daily for it.

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Lord, thank you for reminding me to work on my own heart and sin in my life. Have me pray daily for such cleansing. Amen.

• DAY 13 •

Written by: Joe Mireur
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“Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love.”

Romans 8:38

I was in my forties, and I owned my own business. And I was in financial trouble because I had failed to read a paragraph in a contract I had signed. I talked to my creditor and he verbally agreed to a new contract. I had my attorney draw up the new contract. A meeting was set for the next day for my creditor to sign it. My attorney said “I’ll push the signature page over to him and if he signs, you’ll be in good shape. If not, well, you won’t be any worse off than you are now.”

That night I woke up about 3AM. I was in a cold sweat because I realized if my creditor didn’t sign, I would actually be defenseless, I was really worried. I could lose everything my wife and I had worked for. We didn’t go to church then and I don’t remember praying or asking God for His help. However, peace, like a fog, settled over me right then all of a sudden. I had never gone hungry, always had something to eat. I had never been without a roof over my head, unless it was by choice. I always had clothes on my back. And I always had enough money. I had a mother and a father and a wife and friends. In reality, I lacked for nothing. At the same time I remembered reading or hearing, “Don’t worry about food or clothing. Look at the birds and flowers in the field. God takes care of them, and you’re more important to Him than the birds and flowers. God knows what you need.”

So I quit worrying that instant and went to sleep. The next day my creditor signed the new contract and in time I paid it off with no further problems. I wish I could say I never worried again, but the truth is although I still worry sometimes, I know how to quit worrying. And I know who to call on for help. Thank you God, for answering the question I didn’t know I asked.

I would add this to the quote from Romans at the beginning: **Not even our own foolishness!** Thank you Lord. I’ll try to stay in better touch.

• DAY 14 •

Written by: Bill Kemp
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“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”

Romans 12:12

When I was diagnosed with lung cancer in 2020 my life changed in many ways.

Not only was I beginning treatments, but we were also experiencing stress from the COVID-19 pandemic. A wonderful thing happened to me along the way. I received many prayers, cards and well wishes.

One card really stood out to me from a member of our St. Peter's UMC Care Team. It included a small 2x3 card containing the Bible verse from Romans 12:12. Wow, what a special blessing! I immediately researched this verse and learned these three commands for Christians from the Apostle Paul were key to my emotional and spiritual health.

Three years later, I keep this card in my home office and often refer to it as a reminder that hope in Christ, patience in any situation, and a consistent prayer life are God's blessings to live by!

• DAY 15 •

Written by: Todd Soltow
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“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:6-7

When we view the world around us, we often cannot help but to worry. It is certainly easy to feel anxiety when we think about the future of our families, our friends, our communities and our country.

When we see and read about some of the things going on around us, it seems our world is so troubled. We worry about how we are going to support our loved ones spiritually and even financially in a society that seems, in many instances, to have gone morally bankrupt.

God promises that if we turn to Him in our difficult times, he will provide our hearts and minds with peace and relieve us of our burdens. This peace which is beyond our understanding will guard and protect us and our loved ones.

Always remember, God is with you in all circumstances.

• DAY 16 •

Written by: David Hackney
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“Be strong and take courage, all you who put your hope in the Lord.”

Psalm 31:24

Why do we forget to stay close to God?

It's easy to feel disappointment after fulfilling a major commitment.

You are most vulnerable after a victory; when pride can make you feel overconfident. There is no longer a big goal before you and your emotions can take a nosedive. In no time, you can go from elation to discouragement.

Here are several ways to stay close to God:

1. Declare your allegiance to God every day.
2. Make the choice daily to live the way God wants you to live.
3. Obey God's Word faithfully and deliberately.
4. Find a place to serve God again right away, and do so with energy and enthusiasm.

With God on your mind each day, it's hard to forget Him!

• DAY 17 •

Written by: Mike Fitzgerald
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“Be still and know that I am God.” - Philippians 4:6-7

“Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.”

Jeremiah 29:12

There’s soccer practice, dance recitals, gymnastics, baseball, and school projects. The parents are getting older and need more of my time. There’s stress at work, and I’m expected to pick up the slack. And it takes time to make a marriage work, keep the house in order, and be a good friend.

Seriously, if I’m still long enough, I’m likely to doze off!

That’s what I always thought, until I looked back on my calendar. It was hard to accept, but I could see clearly that I was able to find time for what’s important...to me. So, I changed the question from what’s important to me to what’s important to God. The answer was clear—what’s important to God, is me. And what He wants from me is my time.

I was never good at prayer, until I realized there’s no such thing as not being good at it. There’s no right or wrong, no time requirement, no set structure. It was shortly after this realization that I saw an interview of Mother Teresa by Dan Rather. “What do you say to God when you pray?” Rather asked her. She was thoughtful for a moment, and then answered quietly, “I don’t talk, I simply listen.” After a briefly awkward moment, Rather pivoted, “Ah, then what is it that God says to you when you pray?” Mother Teresa smiled, and said, “He doesn’t talk either. He listens.”

Do what Mother Teresa did by just pausing, being still and listening. Pause, Stop. Drop to your knees spontaneously when you feel grateful, lost or confused. Often my prayer is simple, “Help!” Then I try to be silent...and listen.

Slow down. Make TODAY matter. Catch yourself doing something RIGHT. Then stop, pause, thank God, and...just listen.

• DAY 18 •

Written by: Phillip Arnoldy
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“God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each of us.”

Acts 17:27

Many years ago, while in the US Army stationed at Ft. Campbell, KY, my parents drove from our suburban Philadelphia home to visit. During their stay, I anticipated a question they'd ask. But it was the second question they asked that surprised me. Sure, I expected to be asked if I was saving my money. I always had money leftover at the end of the month, so technically, I was saving money. But they also asked if I was going to church. That I didn't expect! Being raised Catholic, we went to church every Sunday. Never missed going. Now though, I was too busy, too caught up living a GI life in a GI town. I missed going to church, but I said "someday I'll go back". That "someday" didn't come for 10 years. Now married, the urge to go back to church grew strong. My wife was Methodist, so that's where we attended.

In Acts 17, Paul is in Athens talking to the Greeks about God. He said God put men in a certain time & place because he wanted them to seek him, reach out and find Him. He tells them God is not far from us. I believe that was the urge I felt. It was the right time & right place. God was right next to me & wanted to renew our relationship. All these years later, my relationship with God has grown deeper & stronger and I believe I'm a better man for it. I look forward to church. Have you been away from attending church regularly because your life is too busy? Do you feel perhaps you might not fit in at a church? That's OK, because all of us have felt that way sometime in our life. However, there is a better chance you are at the right place & right time. God is next to you, wanting to be in relationship with you. He cares for you, wants to talk with you, wants you to learn more about His word. I pray I'll see you this Sunday.

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Lord, give me the strength to come see you. Help me learn your word. Help me become part of a community of believers and that You welcome me with open arms. Amen

• DAY 19 •

Written by: Bill Wolfs
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Her instruction to me was clear, “Be assertive, but not pushy. Be married to God. He will never leave you!”

At age 7, my mother’s family sailed into New York. They learned English. As a teen, she struggled with 6 siblings, school, and teenage temptations. As a young mother, she endured a world war, and built a loving household as her husband fought abroad.

In the 60s, she lost her husband, but became a respected single mom to 5 kids. We didn’t know we were poor. We felt rich. A loving home. Church every Sunday. In the 70s, she fed the poor and visited them. I often went along. She said, “Just let the old ladies hug and kiss you. It won’t kill you, and they’ll be soooo happy!”

In the 80s, she lost her second husband, and decided to marry God. She established a Bible study and prayer meetings. Music filled the house. In the 90s, her meetings outgrew our house, so she used her assertive charm to gain access to church facilities for her ‘charismatic’ prayer meetings. The priests were reluctant, to say the least. She told me, “Don’t settle for no, son. They will eventually say yes!”

By the turn of the century, she filled churches all over our area to capacity hosting “charismatic” ministers from around the country. She said, “Always serve, son. You will be fed by your service.” As I grew, I became more aware of the thousands of lives she had touched, altered, and even saved with her PERSONAL ministry!

When she passed at 99.9 years of age, the church was overflowing. Her funeral mass had 3 priests officiating, including the one she had butted heads with early on. He had become a believer in her assertive soldiering for God!

Anne K. Gardner. My mom. Married to God. A soldier for her personal ministry. Not pushy, just assertive. A life poured into the lives of others, creating a legacy that will endure forever.

What legacy and lesson are you leaving your children?

• DAY 20 •

Written by: Zachary Walters
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Most working Americans hear of three subjects that are always “taboo” to discuss at work: money, politics, and religion. The first two because each can cause us to become quick to anger: “we aren’t getting what we deserve” or a difference of opinions changes our perception of others. When we harbor those thoughts, then work becomes tough and we put up walls. When it comes to religion it’s no longer just a personal issue, but also a company issue. Companies are afraid that we will offend someone by discussing faith and religion with others, which causes more work for them.

In my working life I was scared to broach the previously mentioned topics because I didn’t want to become a problem. However, conversations about these “taboo” topics became normal as I learned more about my coworkers. Many times, conversations about my faith started because I mentioned that I was working with Student Ministries, I was headed to a bible study (some shade from coworkers because it was at No Label Brewing Company), or I simply mentioned that I went to church over the weekend. These mere mentions set seeds for future conversations with people of varying faiths and belief systems. The conversations are always approached due to curiosity. That curiosity brings the parties involved to an understanding, and always leads me to a deeper connection with Christ. We may disagree, but my convictions are broken down and built back up during these conversations. Mind you I haven’t had one of these introspective conversations for some time as those on my current team have similar convictions. I am fortunate to have a supervisor that is open to talking about faith even though we are from different denominations.

The challenge for you and me is to have conversations about faith despite the outside world telling us they are “taboo”. The challenge is not to go talk to the first person you see at work today or tomorrow, but to plant those conversational seeds that can lead to fulfilling conversations. Heck, conversations about faith are “taboo” even within our social circles. Start the conversation with family or in a friend group outside of work. Maybe not in the group chat, but one on one with someone. Remember that God has your back all the time. You may be surprised by the impact it has on you and others.

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A prayer for BOLDNESS: Father God! Bring me together with who you want me to be with today. Give me the words they need to hear, and let me be a spirit of encouragement, comfort, and witness. Thank you Lord for the opportunity. AMEN!

• DAY 21 •

Written by: Bill Kemp
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“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

John 3:16 (NIV)

I was born in East Texas and raised in the Methodist Church. I remember John 3:16 was the first Bible verse I memorized in Sunday School. It has always been with me along the mountain tops and valleys that I faced. It has been my “go to” verse no matter what I have experienced along the way. It is sometimes difficult for me to fully comprehend the love that God has for me. But when I slow down and meditate on this verse, that God sent Jesus into our world to live among us, to die on the cross and be resurrected so I will have eternal life with him, it is such a reassuring passage of faith, hope and eternity. What a blessing!

• DAY 22 •

Written by: Bill Kleiber
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*“The Beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom.
Though it costs all you have, get understanding.*

Proverbs 4:7

The Bible can be intimidating. Depending on what kind of Bible you have, it could be 2,000 pages or more. And it doesn't even go in order, so trying to read it from front to back can be confusing as well as daunting. Many years ago, I heard a wise person say he reads Proverbs every day. “It is simple,” he said. “Just read one each day. There are 31 chapters in Proverbs, so you never have to know where to start. If it is the 24th, read Proverbs 24. Then do this over and over every month.” At first, I thought this sounded crazy. Who wants to read the same thing over and over? Despite this hesitation, I decided to give it a try.

The book of Proverbs is now the most worn book in my bible. Over the years, I have underlined, circled, boxed, highlighted, drawn, written notes in the margins, scribbled thoughts, and more. Each month I discover new truths and insights as I reread these pages. I have found Proverbs to be an incredible instruction manual for life.

Some examples:

- **Hard Work:** Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth. He who gathers crops in summer is a prudent son but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son. (10:4-5)
- **Generosity:** A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed (11:25)
- **Smart Finances:** One person pretends to be rich, yet has nothing; another pretends to be poor, yet has great wealth (13:7)
- **Friendship:** A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity (17:17)
- **Raising Children:** Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it (22:6)
- **Accountability:** As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another (27:17)
- **Partnership in Marriage:** A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value (31:10-11)

If you are looking for a place to Get Wisdom today, I would encourage you to spend time in Proverbs. Whatever today's date, flip to that chapter number in Proverbs and give it a read. Ask yourself what stands out today. Then do the same thing tomorrow. If you miss a day – no worries! It is easy to pick up wherever you are. You don't even have to worry about missing part of the story. Just keep going. Then, “you will understand what is right and just and fair – every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.” (Proverbs 2:9-10)

• DAY 23 •

Written by: Wyatt Brennan
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“If anyone has caused pain, he has caused pain not so much to me but to some degree – not to exaggerate – to all of you. This punishment by the majority is sufficient for that person. As a result, you should instead forgive and comfort him. Otherwise, he may be overwhelmed by excessive grief. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him. I wrote for this purpose: to test your character to see if you are obedient in everything. Anyone you forgive, I do too. For what I have forgiven – if I have forgiven anything – it is for your benefit in the presence of Christ, so that we may not be taken advantage of by Satan. For we are not ignorant of his schemes.”

2 Corinthians 2:5-11

“According to the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”

Hebrews 9:22

I spent a lot of time struggling with the forgiveness of a childhood bully from my elementary school. After much prayer and study, I landed on these two verses.

My revelation?

My refusal to forgive someone from my past that caused me great harm was a direct disobedience to God. I didn't have a full understanding of the sacrifice that Christ made on the cross. Through much of the old testament and in Hebrews above, that harm can only be purified with blood. Brother, your sins were and are forgiven with Christ's sacrifice on that cross. Let go of the hurt and lay that with Christ.

• DAY 24 •

Written by: Mike Fitzgerald
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“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Romans 8:1

I bought my first Bible when I was 45 years old. Before that, some guy named Gideon kept leaving his in my hotel rooms. I'd open it if bored, but I never understood what I was reading. It just wasn't my thing.

It was shortly after 9/11. Aside from anger, I felt sadness, hopelessness, and overwhelming despair. But as I looked around me in Atlanta, I saw people praying. They weren't in despair. They had hope. They had faith. I wanted what they had.

I still didn't understand everything I was reading, but I knew that something was missing in my life. I wasn't a bad man, but I wasn't the total man that my family needed. So I kept reading. It terrified me at the time, but I started dipping my toes into the local church, and in their men's ministry, as well.

One of the guys I met shared this verse with me (Rom 8:1) and everything started to change for me. I circled the word, “Now.” What I was looking for wasn't something I had to earn. Grace is a free gift. Available NOW. Mine for the taking. It was the first time I understood that I will never understand. That's the beauty of grace, and God's love for me...and my family.

Be strong. Be courageous. Fear not. Step out. Get connected with a guy in the church who can help you grow at your own pace, as a child of God, and as the spiritual head of your household.

Rom 12:1, 2 Cor 5:17, Phil 2:3-4, Pro 27:17

• DAY 25 •

Written by: Lee Chapman
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The story of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Isaac, is one of the most powerful stories in the Bible. It is a story of great faith and obedience, a reminder that God calls us to offer our all to him.

As men, we often feel the pressure to be strong and in control of our lives. We strive to provide for our families, build successful careers, and make a name for ourselves in the world. It can be tempting to put our own desires first and to rely on our own strength rather than trusting God's plan for our lives.

The story of Abraham challenges us to put our faith in God and to be willing to offer him all that we have. Just as Abraham was willing to sacrifice his own son, we must be willing to surrender our own dreams and ambitions to God's plan. This does not mean that we should give up on our goals, but that we must hold them loosely and trust that God knows the way.

When we are willing to sacrifice for God, he blesses us beyond our wildest imagination. Abraham's act of faith not only pleased God, but it also led to God's promise that he would make Abraham into a great nation, and that through him, all the families of the earth would be blessed.

In the same way, when we are willing to offer ourselves completely to God, we open ourselves up to his blessings and to a life that truly brings joy and purpose. May we trust in God's plan for our lives and be willing to sacrifice all we have for his glory.

• DAY 26 •

Written by: Joe Mireur
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Be still and Know That I Am God

I retired in January 2020. I started two successful, but small businesses. And I was tired of being there for them. Owners can't really ever quit, but if you have two sons, then, Hey, what are sons for? So I said, do it your own way, but keep it going. Call my cell if you need help.

They've done well. Shepherded both businesses through the Covid pandemic and lived to tell about and have not been eaten alive by inflation. And I have been allowed to "retire".

I found myself sitting around the house with nothing to do. At church, I was active in Stephen Ministry and occasionally worked on the Walk To Emmaus. On Sunday, I pass the plates, help with communion and served for a few years as a delegate at the Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. Just little bits of time here and there. So what could I find to do? A really good friend of mine was faced with a similar situation once. He went back to school and got his MBA. A couple of years later he felt the MBA didn't amount to anything in his situation. So, he went to seminary. This time he received a Masters in Biblical Studies. And a new overriding purpose in his life, to spread the Good News throughout his world, which was still the world of business. Now he has retired and moved away. His purpose is simplified, to spread the Good News to as many as he can. I'm one of many whose lives have been improved by his efforts.

So as I looked at the wall I thought to myself, neither business school nor seminary will accept me, what can I do? One day I was reading and ran across the line, "Be still and know that I am God." I remembered going to mass with my dad when I was a small boy. And I remembered his words to me, "Sit still and be quiet." And I thought about the similarity of the two lines, one by my biological father and the other by my real Father. My biological father having long ago returned to dust, I concentrated on the words of my real Father, "Be still and know that I am God." Sitting still was never one of my talents, but I am making an effort to hear God's words to me and even more, to act on them when I hear them. I never really hear them, not ever. No voice in a thunderstorm or anything like that. What happens for me is I realize He has spoken to me - I didn't hear it, but no matter, He spoke and I know it after the fact. It's kind of difficult to explain. I think it's based on my belief in Him. The more I believe, the more I hear. And the more I hear, the easier it is to hear.

Still can't sit still though, sorry Dad.

• DAY 27 •

Written by: Jonathan Fasullo
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Rise up, O men of God!

There is a burning inside our souls that calls us to be men of God. We know this because there have been many men from the Bible that have shown us their examples. Their stories share their examples of success and of failure. Moses questioned his abilities, Nehemiah was a slave, and Saul persecuted Christians!

Being a man of God is not an easy path. The path is winding and challenging, though as shown to us in the Bible, only through sheer tenacity can we strive toward being the Godly leaders that our homes and community need us to be. So how do we rise to the task you may ask? You must suit up, of course!

In High School I attended a Christian Brother's school. Here, our education was not only algebra and reading Chaucer, but heavily centered around instilling in our hearts the covenant God has made with us all. In my time as a student, we would sing; it was a requirement!

One of the most memorable songs we sang was this simple hymn by William P. Merrill that I want to share with you: Rise up, O men of God!

1. Rise up, O men of God!
Have done with lesser things;
Give heart and soul and mind and strength
To serve the King of kings.
2. Rise up, O men of God!
His kingdom tarries long;
As faithful workmen, watch and pray
And light the night of wrong.
3. Rise up, O men of God!
The church for you doth wait—
Your strength unequal to the task,
But Christ in you is great!
4. Lift high the cross of Christ;
Tread where His feet have trod;
As brothers of the Son of man,
Rise up, O men of God!

I feel the third verse hits the nail on the head: "Your strength unequal to the task, But Christ in you is great!" We must never cease to seek Christ in all that we do. Seek wisdom in his word and seek accountability from our church community surrounding us. So, men, I challenge you to take up your cross as Christ did and tread where his feet had trod. As brothers of the son of man, Rise up, O men of God!

Live Jesus in our hearts, forever.

• DAY 28 •

Written by: Matt Aymond
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*“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”*

Psalm 139:23-24 NIV

Ever feel the need to be perfect? For a long time, I believed that I had to be in order to be loved. Knowing then that perfection is unattainable, instead of trying, I just ran in the other direction. Couldn't be a perfect Christian so, why go to church? Couldn't be a perfect son so, I hid from my family. Couldn't be a perfect friend so, I chose "friends" that I didn't have to look out for because they weren't really looking out for me. And this worked for a while. I was "free" to do what I wanted, when I wanted, and with whom I wanted...with no repercussions...until there were.

Then one day, I found myself unemployed and divorced with no idea what to do next. I felt alone and terrified. The only way I could fall asleep at night was to repeatedly pray the Lord's Prayer. I believe this was the Holy Spirit, reaching out to me and leading me to find a church to call home. Eventually, I started being intentional about daily prayers and time spent with His Word. Then I started going to a Sunday School class, volunteering to help out at services...I even joined a small group.

What I found was that I don't need be perfect because He is. And because He is perfect, so long as I am seeking His guidance, then I'm on the right path. The more I seek His guidance, the more I find myself surrounded by people and events that support me and encourage me to grow. Not in a transactional way...I do good things so I get good things. Because what I have found is that they were always there, He was always there, patiently waiting for me to be ok with not being perfect.

It's about progress not perfection. Which is why I love this verse so much. I pray it every day...usually several times. If I can just be a little better today than I was yesterday, then today was a success. Not every day is successful but, that's ok. He's still there. And I am grateful every morning for a new opportunity for progress.

• DAY 29 •

Written by: Sterling Jowers
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“He said to him, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.’”

Matthew 22:37-40

“Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.”

Romans 12:2

As men, it's so natural to get caught in the busyness of family, work, and mundane tasks.

So, I challenge you to look for the good and the bounty of Christ that comes with each of your everyday interactions. Equally as important, refresh your mind each day, so you're able to see new and exciting things even in the ordinary interactions of daily living.

Take a chance to be patient within the drop off or pickup lines, to allow someone to go before you in traffic. And, to listen to a significant other when they are sharing a joy or frustration with you. The challenge is to show the love of Christ to those around you, even in the struggle of busyness.

To understand that you may be the only example of Jesus you may show someone is the greatest challenge.

Application:

1. How Did I show or share the love of Christ today?
2. Did I have the correct mindset starting, enduring or finishing the day?
3. Did I miss an opportunity to bring someone closer to Christ today?
4. Did I share the love of the spirit with those around me?

• DAY 30 •

Written by: John Sturgeon
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*“For I, the LORD your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you,
‘Fear not, I am the one who helps you.’”*

Isaiah 41:13

Once when I was young (16 years old) my life was really in tough shape. Personally, and spiritually. I was the oldest son of an alcoholic father. There wasn't a play book to give me the answers I was seeking. Why is this happening to me and my family, the abuse, embarrassment, fear was almost unbearable.

A friend of mine asked me to come to a youth group session at church. There a spark was made in my life. A glimmer of light, but not the sunshine yet, that I was to experience as I got older.

The path I was on when I got out of the service, was a blur. Nothing really made any sense to me until my close friend from the Army introduced me to his church and family. He also introduced me to my wife of 47 years. The spark that happened to me 5 years previous began to become a small flame. I started to see that God was leading me in a path I had not experienced before.

When I took the vows of marriage, something began to take hold when I heard the words of the service. God, again, was leading me, not pushing but leading me in a path that would lead to greater light and understanding.

During the last 47 years, my faith has become stronger and stronger. My duty to my family was to provide spiritual leadership. By setting an example to my family I found that I am to be a testament to others. I find solace in knowing God is at my right hand and will not let go.

The light continues to get brighter as I learn more through the scripture. God has put people in my life that I have learned more and have become not only comfortable in my faith, but truly know that God has led me to salvation from understanding that the Grace of God has given me an opportunity to feel alive. More alive than I've ever been.

I still am human, have sinned and try to always do the right thing. Reading the Bible and God's words, enable and strengthen me each day. In doing so, I also want to continue to “pay it forward”, God's gift to us thru Jesus Christ, by being a person that helps to shine the light for others to come to Him.

Adoration: Lord, I do praise you for Your guidance and love through the Holy Spirit. Confession: Lord, as I say in the testimony, I am a sinner and ask for forgiveness and strength to do what You lead me to do.

Thanksgiving: Lord, I really do thank you for all the blessings of people that have come into my life in order to see the greater light of salvation. Supplication: I bring these prayers and testimony before you now, that I may gain even more understanding and see the Word that you have shown me and that I may be a prism for others to see also.

• DAY 31 •

Written by: Charlie Crawford
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*“For a man’s ways are in full view of the Lord, and he examines all his paths.
The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast.
He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly.”*

Proverbs 5: 21-23

God, creator of heaven and earth, land and sea, light and dark knows everything about us already. He knows our thoughts and behaviors before we do. All our ways and paths are in full view and examined by God.

Why does he let us go astray?

Where does discipline come from?

How do we get discipline?

What does it mean?

-

Lord, please view my ways and examine my paths. Please lead me to your path of discipline and wisdom and away from my sin and folly and foolish stuff. Amen

• PERSONAL JOURNAL •

Copy this page to continue your daily study or ask one of the men who contributed to this devotional for ideas to continue your daily routine, or ask how to get plugged-in to men's ministry.

Day:

Scripture/study:

Interpret and apply today's Scripture references:

Why I'm thankful today:

Prayer concerns:

Silent Confession

Engage God in prayer and be silent.

Wait. Listen. Journal what you hear!

The Five Pillars of Men's Ministry

To live our lives like we might be the only Bible some people ever read.

Connection

Build relationships with other men of the church and foster life-on-life

Activity

Come together to meet and enjoy shared interests

Spiritual Growth

Find spiritual nourishment and be met wherever you are on your journey

Service

Give back to the community through building, repairing, mentoring and more

Life Issues

Find advice to confront and work through the challenges of life

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