

# 1 HOPE REDEFINED



## Receive

### Revelation 21:1-4

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Revelation 21:3-4, NIV)



## Reflect

*What causes me to feel hopeless at times?*

*Do I really feel like God dwells with me, right in the midst of the grit and sin of my life?*

*How can I really find this place of hope in my heart?*

Sometimes when we read these promises from God, we understand them in an intellectual sense but miss the truth of the promises in our hearts. These promises about a rich eternal life that will happen *someday* feel far away, but we wonder about right now, about our present circumstances and hardships. *Is God with me in the here and now?* The truth is, God gives us hope today, for the moment we are living right now. Remember what Jesus told the disciples at the Great Commission: “I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Not just someday. But right now.



## Respond

**Ask for Change:** *Lord, help me remember that your hope is with me always.*

**Consider What’s Real:** Think about the bigness of God, the fact that He goes before you and follows you from behind, protecting you on all sides, laying His hands on you and guiding you toward a deeper, more fulfilling life with Him.

**Additional Verses to Consider:** Matthew 28:16-20

# 2 PERSECUTION



## Receive

### 1 Peter 2:19-25

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (1 Peter 2:24-25, NIV)



## Reflect

*If running toward God is how we grow spiritually—especially in times of insurmountable challenges—then what is holding me back from doing that?*

*Why does it sometimes feel like I am taking two steps forward and one step back in my faith?*

*What happens when I feel as if I've returned to God, but then I err again ... and again?*

Once we've made that transformational turn toward God—the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls—it's easy to assume that the path will always be straight or that that we will no longer be faced with precipitous curves along the road. But the fact that we have proclaimed our faith doesn't ensure that we will live without sin or that we won't make grave mistakes on our spiritual journey. The truth is: we will *always* sin, we will *always* make mistakes, because we are a flawed and broken people. But the greater truth is that Jesus loves us unconditionally and forgives us completely—no matter how many times we err or how egregious our transgressions. By His wounds we are healed. Again and again and again.



## Respond

**Ask for Change:** *Lord, help me return to You for healing and forgiveness over and over again.*

**Consider What's Real:** We need to return to Him with our whole selves in order for Him to recreate us in His image. Consider this passage by C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*: “He said, a thistle cannot produce figs. If I am a field that contains nothing but grass-seed, I cannot produce wheat. Cutting the grass may keep it short: but I shall still produce grass and no wheat. If I want to produce wheat, the change must go deeper than the surface. I must be ploughed up and re-sown.”

**Additional Verses to Consider:** 2 Corinthians 30:9, Hebrews 10:17-18

# 3 SCRIPTURE



## Receive

### 2 Timothy 3:10-17

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17, NIV)



## Reflect

*In my heart of hearts, do I trust God's Word?*

*Why, if I know that reading the Bible can make a concrete difference in my life, do I often relegate it to the last priority in my day?*

*What can I do to make Scripture-reading the first priority in my life?*

So often we fail to make Scripture a priority. We succumb to our hectic schedules and busy lives while the Bible sits unopened on our nightstands and book shelves. We tell ourselves that we'll get to it later, when we have more time, when life slows down. Yet a close look at these verses clearly details the necessity of Scripture-reading in our daily lives. Delving into God's Word on a regular basis teaches us, guides us, corrects us, inspires us, and speaks to the exact place and circumstances of our personal lives. Without the guidance of God's Word, we are ill-equipped to overcome life's hurdles and unable to discern God's will for our unique purpose on Earth.



## Respond

**Ask for Change:** *Lord, help me make Your Word the first priority in my day, rather than the last.*

**Consider What's Real:** As the start of this week, make a commitment to read the Bible at least four times, and pay close attention to what guidance He may be offering that is specifically relevant to you and your personal circumstances. Try to read just a few verses at a time, slowly and thoughtfully, rather than hurriedly trying to get through it and onto something else. Perhaps keep a notebook and a pen by your side, and jot your thoughts and reactions as you mull over God's Word.

**Additional Verses to Consider:** Ezekiel 2:9 and 3:1-3

# 4 GOD'S FRIENDSHIP



## Receive

### John 15:12-17

“I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.” (John 15:15, NIV)



## Reflect

*For whom would I lay down my life?*

*How would I describe my relationship with God—close and comfortable or distant and formal?*

*How does the fact that God considers me His friend affect my view of our relationship?*

Think about what Jesus is telling us here: that *everything* he learned from His own Father, He shares with us. He keeps nothing from us; all that is His is ours, too. That kind of relationship sounds a bit like the kind you might share with your closest friend—and that’s exactly what Jesus wants. Sure, He desires our obedience; sure He wants us to follow in His steps and live as He commands. But Jesus doesn’t want us to hold Him at arm’s length, merely going through the motions of prayer, worship, and religion. More than anything, He wants our hearts and our love. Jesus wants to be in a living, breathing relationship with us.



## Respond

**Ask for Change:** *Lord, I want to experience a real relationship with you. Help me grow closer to you each day.*

**Consider What’s Real:** If you’re more inclined to practice a formal method of prayer, perhaps try a more relaxed, conversational type of prayer with God today. Try to engage in a conversation with Him, not just at specific, set times during the day, but continually, as you go about your everyday life. Ask Him for guidance before you make decisions at work. Ask Him for advice as you parent your children or navigate other important relationships in your life. Thank Him for the small blessings He bestows on you throughout the day. Integrate Jesus into your daily life.

**Additional Verses to Consider:** 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Jeremiah 29:12-14

# 5 LOVING GOD



## Receive

### Mark 12:28-34

“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: Hear, O Israel Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” (Mark 12:29-30, NIV).



## Reflect

*What does it mean to love God with all my heart, mind, soul and strength?*

*What would my life look like if I lived out this commandment every day? Would my life change significantly? Would anyone notice this change?*

*What's one small step I can take to move closer to loving God this way?*

At first glance it sounds easy, doesn't it? Jesus summarizes all Ten Commandments into two: love God, love your neighbor. How hard can love be, right? What's clear in these verses, though, is that Jesus doesn't want a mundane, everyday kind of love; He wants a game-changing love. He wants us to love Him with every fiber of our beings, every bit of our essence: not just in our hearts, but with our minds, too, and with all of our strength. What does this all-encompassing love really look like? And is it even possible—can we ever open ourselves to that depth and breadth? Jesus tells us yes. It's possible, because all things are possible through Him.



## Respond

**Ask for Change:** *Lord, I want to love You this way, with every bit of my heart, mind, soul and strength. Show me the way. Take my hand and guide me toward a deeper love for You.*

**Consider What's Real:** Loving others is a real and tangible way not only to demonstrate your love for God, but to grow that love, too. Today, ask yourself periodically throughout the day if you are loving others as God desires. Before considering a course of action, ask yourself if that action will demonstrate love for God and love for others.

**Additional Verses to Consider:** John 3:16-17