

THE *journey*

For the next 7 weeks, it is our hope that every member of the VCC family engage in a daily journey of connecting with Jesus. One of the primary goals of *thrive* is for God to do a transformational work in you during this season. As you process through what God is provoking in you, remember that He wants to do this with you; we're His accomplices in this plan!

WALK WITH ME AND WORK WITH ME – WATCH HOW I DO IT. LEARN THE UNFORCED RHYTHMS OF GRACE. I WON'T LAY ANYTHING HEAVY OR ILL-FITTING ON YOU. KEEP COMPANY WITH ME AND YOU'LL LEARN TO LIVE FREELY AND LIGHTLY.

MATTHEW 11:29-30

In this section you'll find daily devotionals and a weekly batch of questions to help guide your time in community with the members of your life group.

Set aside a few minutes a day to simply make yourself available to God. Perhaps you might want to repeat this prayer each day...

Jesus, thank you for loving me and caring about me personally. I invite you to speak to my heart today and change me through this time together with you. Do what you need to do in me so I can be your accomplice in this life.

WEEK 1: DARING FAITH

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS & DAILY DEVOTIONALS

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Why is the way God sees things more important than the way we see them?

"I PRAY THAT THE EYES OF YOUR HEART WILL BE FLOODED WITH LIGHT SO THAT YOU CAN SEE THE WONDERFUL FUTURE GOD HAS PROMISED TO THOSE HE CALLED." EPHESIANS 1:18

2. Was there a time in your life that God opened your eyes to see something from his point of view?

JESUS SAID, "HAVE FAITH IN GOD! IF YOU HAVE FAITH IN GOD AND YOU DON'T DOUBT, YOU COULD TELL THIS MOUNTAIN TO GET UP AND JUMP INTO THE SEA, AND IT WOULD. WHATEVER YOU ASK FOR IN PRAYER WILL BE YOURS, IF YOU ONLY HAVE FAITH." MARK 11:22-24

3. *Meditate on Mark 11:22-24.* God works miracles when we stretch our faith. What can we do to increase our faith in God so God can open the doors for miracles in our lives?
4. Share how God has moved mountains in your life, or name current mountains in your life you want God to move.

"GOD ... IS ABLE TO DO FAR MORE THAN WE WOULD EVER DARE TO ASK OR EVEN DREAM OF." EPHESIANS 3:20

5. Faith turns God-given dreams into reality. How can we distinguish God-given dreams from selfish or worldly dreams?
6. What are some possible examples of God-given dreams?

DAY 1 LET GOD EMPOWER YOUR PURPOSE

"I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength." - PHILIPPIANS 4:12b-13

You need more than positive thinking to live a life of faith. You need the power of God. In Philippians 4, the Apostle Paul says it like this: "I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength."

In other words, you can do anything – with God's help.

A man came to Jesus and asked him to heal his son. He said, "If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." Jesus said, "If you can? Everything is possible for him who believes." Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mark 9:22b-24). That's one of my favorite prayers in the Bible. It's so honest! And that's what God wants from you in prayer-honesty. If you pray that prayer, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief," God will answer. He wants you to be strong in your faith. He wants you to overcome your unbelief.

FAITH MEANS WE BELIEVE THAT JESUS CAN DO WHAT WE ASK, AND THAT WITH HIS HELP, WE CAN DO WHAT HE ASKS US TO DO TOO.

Have you been trying to live life on your own power? If so, I guarantee you're getting nowhere—at least on the things that really matter in life. You need the supernatural help of God to live a life of faith. Surrendering your life to Jesus is the safest decision you'll ever make. It will teach you to trust God, and it will stretch your faith as you see that indeed you "can do everything through Christ, who gives you strength."

DAY 2 FAITH COMES FROM HEARING GOD'S WORD

"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." - ROMANS 10:17

A gardener can plant the same kind of seed in three different locations and get three different results. In one spot, they'll get giant tomatoes. In another, they'll get small tomatoes. And in a third, they'll get nothing. What's the difference? It's not the seed, it's the soil. The soil must be prepared for the seed.

The same is true when you hear God's Word. It's why you can take two people to church, sit them side-by-side, and one will walk out thinking God really spoke to him, while the other won't get anything out of the service. The heart of one person was prepared; the other's heart wasn't.

How can you prepare the soil of your heart for the Word? In James 1:19-21 the Bible says, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you."

THIS PASSAGE TEACHES US TO HAVE FOUR ATTITUDES:

- 1. YOU MUST BE QUIET.** "Be quick to listen, slow to speak." You can't hear God if you're doing all the talking.
- 2. YOU MUST BE CALM.** "Slow to become angry." If you're frantic, you're not going to hear God.
- 3. YOU MUST BE CLEAN.** "Get rid of all moral filth and evil." Before you can meet with God, you need to take out some emotional and spiritual garbage. Get rid of the stuff that stinks in your life by confessing your sin to God and agreeing with him that what you did was wrong.
- 4. YOU MUST BE HUMBLE.** "Humbly accept the word planted in you." Be ready to do whatever God tells you from his Word. A prideful attitude makes a hard heart.

HOW'S YOUR SOIL TODAY?

DAY 3 FAITH MEANS I TRUST IN GOD'S PROMISES

"All these people earned a good reputation because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised. For God had something better in mind for us, so that they would not reach perfection without us." - HEBREWS 11:39-40

It's not easy to live by faith. We live in a broken world. When God kicked Adam out of Eden, he told Adam that life would be hard. And it is. There's a cosmic battle for your life going on both inside and outside of you. The weather doesn't work right. Our bodies don't work right. Our relationships don't work right. You battle with your own sinful nature. You also battle against Satan himself, who wants nothing more than to "steal, kill, and destroy." And sometimes it just gets to us. We just want to give up.

But in Hebrews 11, God urges us to hang on. God hasn't forgotten us, and he will fulfill his promises one day. He promises to give us a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11). He promises to take away our tears (Revelation 7:17). And he gives us many other promises throughout his Word.

Hebrews 11 mentions a variety of biblical heroes who demonstrated faith in God's promises: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Gideon, Samson, and David, just to name a few. Though they endured many difficulties, they kept going in their spiritual journeys.

Then Hebrews 11: 39-40 says, "All these people earned a good reputation because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised. For God had something better in mind for us, so that they would not reach perfection without us."

When you feel like giving up, remember the heroes of the Bible and imitate their faith.

**ONE DAY, YOUR FAITH WILL BE REWARDED,
AND WE WILL ALL REACH PERFECTION TOGETHER.**

DAY 4 FAITH COMES FROM HEARING GOD'S WORD

"Therefore since we are surrounded by a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith..." - HEBREWS 12:1

What do you do when you feel like giving up? We all have those moments when we just can't see any light at the end of the tunnel. We've been struggling with something – maybe a health issue, a broken relationship, financial problems, or depression – and we start to wonder if we have the strength to keep going.

If you find yourself at that point today, I want to share some encouragement with you from Hebrews 12 and give you a powerful reason to keep on keeping on.

Hebrews 11 is the "faith chapter" that tells us about great people of the faith: Abraham, Moses, David, and many others. Their stories are sources of encouragement in and of themselves. But a phrase that starts off the first verse of the next chapter is what I want to focus on. Hebrews 12:1 says, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith..."

God is saying, "Don't give up, because heaven is watching and cheering for you." That's encouraging news!

You have an audience. Nothing you do is private. Nothing you have ever done has been hidden from heaven. God sees it all. As Job says, "He sees everything I do and every step I take" (Job 31:4). And Jesus tells us, "Every hair on your head has been counted" (Luke 12:7) God knows every detail of your life. And he loves you in spite of it all!

When you start to get discouraged, remember that people who have gone through much worse circumstances are watching to see how well you're enduring. They're cheering you on from the grandstands of heaven!

DAY 5 GRATITUDE BUILDS MY FAITH

"Sink your roots in him and build on him. Be strengthened by the faith that you were taught, and overflow with thanksgiving." - COLOSSIANS 2:7

Anybody can thank God in good times. But if you can thank God even in the bad times – when life doesn't make sense and your prayers go unanswered – your faith will grow stronger and your roots will go deeper. Gratitude helps you remember the faith-lessons that God has already taught you. It helps you "sink your roots in him and build on him," and to "be strengthened by the faith that you were taught."

When the Old Testament prophet, Habakkuk, went through tough times he said, "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior." (Habakkuk 3:17-18)

In the midst of his trouble, Habakkuk rejoiced. What was the cause of his gratitude? "I will be joyful in God my Savior." When everything else stinks in life, you can be grateful because the Lord is your Savior. You can be thankful to God just for being God. He has promised to see you through those tough situations, and your faith will grow even stronger because of it. Just say, "God, I know you're in control. I know you love me, and I know you can bring good out of this. I'm thankful that you're bigger than my problem."

That is the ultimate test of the depth of your faith. Can you thank God when life stinks?

**WHEN YOU'RE GOING THROUGH TOUGH TIMES,
DON'T LOOK AT WHAT'S LOST.
LOOK AT WHAT'S LEFT, AND BE GRATEFUL FOR IT!**

DAY 6 **GIVING TO GOD STRENGTHENS MY FAITH**

"Bring all the tithes into the storehouse... If you do," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!" - MALACHI 3:10

God uses finances to test your faith. You only have so much money – where is it going to go? This is a test. God is saying, "Do you really believe that I can take care of you? Or do you think you have to take care of yourself on your own?"

He says, "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse... If you do, I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Put me to the test!" In essence, God is saying, "I dare you! I dare you to see what I will do if you become a giving, generous person. Tithe, and see what happens to your life."

Did you know there are more promises in the Bible about giving than any other subject? Jesus talked more about giving than he did about heaven and hell combined. I believe this is because giving is the essence of being like Jesus. In fact, the Bible says God is a giver: "God so loved the world that he gave..." (John 3:16).

**WHEN WE GIVE, IT SHOWS GOD THAT WE TRUST HIM
AND BELIEVE HIS PROMISES TO PROVIDE FOR US. GIVING
STRENGTHENS, STRETCHES, AND TESTS OUR FAITH.**

Do you really believe God will take care of you? If you're struggling in this area, ask God to help you in your unbelief. Then take a step of daring faith and begin tithing. He wants to help you find the freedom in your finances that only comes from trusting in him. As you pray about your financial needs, write them down and then watch to see how God provides.

DAY 7 **FAITH = LOVE+TRUST+ACTION**

"If you love me, you will obey what I command."
JOHN 14:15

The word obey has a negative connotation today. We view obedience as a forced, unwilling decision to do something we don't want to do because we're afraid of punishment. But that's not the kind of obedience God wants from us.

Obedience is not about being afraid of God, but about being in a loving relationship with God. As Jesus said in John 14:15: "If you love me, you will obey what I command." Obedience comes from knowing that God loves you and you loving him in return.

Out of love comes trust. If you know God loves you and you love him, then you will trust what God is saying to you.

Then trust will lead to action. This is the essence of living by faith: We believe God loves us and we love him back, we trust what he tells us, and that leads us to live the way God wants us to live.

Love without action is just mere talk, and action without love is just routine religion.

Think about the story of Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus. He wasn't convinced that Mary was telling the truth about how she became pregnant, but an angel told Joseph to believe her. The baby would be the Savior of his people.

Joseph accepted the truth because of his relationship with God. He knew God loved him, and he loved God. He trusted God and made the choice to do what God asked him to do, even though he didn't understand what was happening. And that choice changed everything.

**FAITH = LOVE + TRUST + ACTION.
DO YOU LOVE GOD? DO YOU TRUST HIM?
THEN TAKE ACTION AND DO WHAT HE TELLS YOU TO DO.**

WEEK 2: HOW TO BE PART OF A MIRACLE

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS & DAILY DEVOTIONALS

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS

"BUT HE ANSWERED, "YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT." THEY SAID TO HIM, "THAT WOULD TAKE MORE THAN HALF A YEAR'S WAGES! ARE WE TO GO AND SPEND THAT MUCH ON BREAD AND GIVE IT TO THEM TO EAT?"

MARK 6:37 (NIV)

1. Have each member of the group identify an unsolvable problem (where they need a miracle) in their life. Then take a moment and discover each person's response to the problem: procrastination, passing the buck, or worrying. How does knowing Jesus is standing right beside you change how you view this problem?

"HE ASKED THIS ONLY TO TEST HIM, FOR HE ALREADY HAD IN MIND WHAT HE WAS GOING TO DO." JOHN 6:6
2. Before he even saw the 5,000 and had compassion on them, Jesus knew he would feed them. How often do you speak of trusting the Lord, but in reality you lean on an earthly source of supply? Make a list of ways God has provided for you over the past year. What has this taught you about Him and how He provides miracles in your life?
3. **READ MARK 6:41** :: How does putting everything into Jesus' hands tap into the inexhaustible fullness of the power of God? This miracle not only met the needs of the people, but caused the disciples to grow in their knowledge of Jesus. If you are waiting on a miracle in your life, what might God want you to do so that you draw closer to him?
4. **READ JOHN 12:24** :: In what ways can you apply this truth of the kernel of wheat to other aspects of our lives?
5. The greater the sacrifice, the greater the result. What is God asking you to sacrifice by faith for a greater result? What one specific thing can you do by faith this week as an expression of your surrender to God?

DAY 8 FAITH IN JESUS TURNS A LITTLE INTO A LOT

The Miracle of Feeding the 5,000

MARK 6:34-44

This week's devotionals we will take a look at the most famous miracle of Jesus Christ. Jesus feeds five thousand people! He took one little boy's lunch and was able to feed the five thousand. It had to be a miracle. It was God demonstrating how he is able to turn a little into a lot.

Many times for the rest of your life you're going to need God to turn a little into a lot. You've got a little talent... you need God to turn it into a lot of talent. You've got a little opportunity... you need God to turn it into a big opportunity. You've got little connections or relationships ... you need God to turn it into some big relationships, some big connections. You've got a little bit of health...you really need great health. You've got a little bit of money... you need God to turn it into a lot of money.

Many times in your life God is going to turn a little into a lot but he doesn't do it to show off. Every miracle is to teach a spiritual truth. And the spiritual truth of Jesus feeding the five thousand is to show us how to prepare for a miracle where God turns a little into a lot in your life.

**ASK GOD TO OPEN YOUR HEART
TO THE POSSIBILITY OF MIRACLES.**

DAY 9 **TURNING IMPOSSIBLE INTO POSSIBLE**

The Miracle of Feeding the 5,000
MARK 6:34-44

The feeding of the 5,000 miracle is so important it's the only miracle of Jesus told four times in the New Testament. It's in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Here's a summary of the day's events:

JESUS WENT OUT INTO THE JUDEAN DESERT AND SAW A LARGE CROWD AND TOOK COMPASSION ON THEM. HE BEGAN TEACHING THEM MANY THINGS AND AT THE END OF THE DAY THE CROWD OF ABOUT 5,000 GREW HUNGRY.

THE DISCIPLES CAME TO JESUS AND SAID, "LORD IT'S LATE IN THE DAY AND EVERYBODY'S HUNGRY." AND JESUS SAID, "YOU FEED THEM."

THEY REPLIED, "THAT WOULD TAKE EIGHT MONTHS OF A MAN'S WAGES! ARE WE TO GO AND SPEND THAT MUCH ON BREAD AND GIVE IT TO THEM TO EAT?"

... (JESUS) TAKING THE FIVE LOAVES AND THE TWO FISH AND LOOKING UP TO HEAVEN, HE GAVE THANKS AND BROKE THE LOAVES. ...AND THE DISCIPLES PICKED UP THE TWELVE BASKETFULS OF BROKEN PIECES OF BREAD AND FISH. THE NUMBER OF THE MEN WHO HAD EATEN WAS FIVE THOUSAND.

What seems impossible in your life today? Is it a relationship that seems beyond reconciliation? Is it a financial dilemma?

Is it a broken heart or a broken dream? Whatever it is in your life that seems impossible, let God increase your faith. Let Him show you how He performs miracles.

**ASK GOD TO OPEN YOUR HEART
TO THE POSSIBILITY OF MIRACLES.**

DAY 10 **ARE YOU READY FOR A MIRACLE? DECREASE PROCRASTINATION**

The Miracle of Feeding the 5,000
MARK 6:34-44

In Mark chapter 6, "When Jesus... saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them... so he began teaching them. By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came and said, 'This is a remote place. Send the people away so they can go and buy something to eat.' But Jesus answered, 'You give them something to eat!' They said, 'That would take eight months of a man's wages!'"

When we have a problem we can't solve we just keep putting it off. We procrastinate. We know we need to solve it but we don't know how to solve it so we just keep putting it off. We delay. We pretend it doesn't exist. We look the other way. The phrase in this passage says, "by this time it was late in the day." The disciples were procrastinating.

Procrastination only makes a problem worse in your life. If you have cancer you deal with it now, not tomorrow, not next week. You deal with it now. Procrastination has never solved any problem. It only makes it worse.

I wonder what problem you have been procrastinating over. I wonder what problem you know is there and you're pretending it isn't a problem. What problem are you pretending isn't in your marriage? What problem are you pretending isn't in your finances?

**LET'S STOP PROCRASTINATING
AND ASK GOD FOR A MIRACLE.**

DAY 11 ARE YOU READY FOR A MIRACLE? STOP PASSING THE BUCK

The Miracle of Feeding the 5,000
MARK 6:34-44

The disciples said, “send the people away.” What are they doing? They’re passing off responsibility. There saying, “We didn’t invite these guys out here. We didn’t ask them to come eat. We didn’t promise them food. We didn’t invite them to come hear Jesus teach. Just send them away. Out of sight, out of mind. We didn’t ask them to come. Let them find their own food.” Pass the buck. It’s not our problem.

How many of us avoid responsibility, we pass the buck. What we do is blame other people. We say, “It’s not really my problem. It’s her problem. It’s their fault.” We blame others. You spell blame...b-lame. Every time you blame you are being lame.

God wants us to be His vessel. He wants to perform miracles in and through us. He wants to use us in others’ lives. Are we willing to be used by Him? The coolest part about God’s Kingdom is that EVERYBODY gets to play a part! That starts with YOU!

Today, will you stop pointing fingers at others and turn your finger around and point at yourself?

Each one of us has a choice. We can choose to accept the things we can’t change, and learn to act on, with God’s help, the things we can change. We grow in faith when we decide to stop blaming others for our dilemmas and start taking responsibility for our own choices.

Are you willing to stop passing the buck?

**ASK GOD TO USE YOU TO PERFORM MIRACLES
IN AND THROUGH YOU TODAY!**

DAY 12 ARE YOU READY FOR A MIRACLE? STOP WORRYING

The Miracle of Feeding the 5,000
MARK 6:34-44

In the passage of the Miracle of Feeding the 5,000, we find the disciples saying, “Lord it would take eight months wages just to pay for these guys.” The disciples’ anxiety goes into overdrive. I can just imagine Peter doing this cost analysis. Imagine the expense! Five thousand people! How are we ever going to import the food? How are we going to keep it hot? How are we going to distribute it? How are we going to do the clean up? Who’s going to get the health permits? What about liability insurance? Their minds are just going into overdrive. Worry, worry, worry.

I love what Jesus says. He looks at these twelve guys and he says, “You feed them. You feed them.” Peter goes, “Me? Are you kidding? We can’t do that.”

We worry. You worry, fret, stew, get anxious, and get stressed out.

What are you so worried about?

In Matthew 6:25-27 we find:

“THEREFORE I TELL YOU, DO NOT WORRY ABOUT YOUR LIFE, WHAT YOU WILL EAT OR DRINK; OR ABOUT YOUR BODY, WHAT YOU WILL WEAR. IS NOT LIFE MORE THAN FOOD AND THE BODY MORE THAN CLOTHES? LOOK AT THE BIRDS OF THE AIR; THEY DO NOT SOW OR REAP OR STORE AWAY IN BARN, AND YET YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER FEEDS THEM. ARE YOU NOT MUCH MORE VALUABLE THAN THEY? CAN ANY ONE OF YOU BY WORRYING ADD A SINGLE HOUR TO YOUR LIFE?”

**ASK GOD TODAY TO HELP YOU STOP WORRYING
AND BE OPEN TO THE POSSIBILITY OF A MIRACLE!**

DAY 13 **GIVE GOD ALL YOU'VE GOT!**

The Miracle of Feeding the 5,000
MARK 6:34-44

Jesus says to the disciples I want you to do a little investigating. Go out and see if somebody's got any lunches. He says, "How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked. 'Go and see.' [He sends them out on a little investigation to five thousand people.] When they found out they said, 'Five small loaves of bread and two fish.'"

Out of five thousand people, only one guy brought a lunch? He's the only one. He gives God what little he had.

Why did Jesus say, find out how many lunches are out there? Find out how many loaves of bread are among this crowd? He didn't need anything to do a miracle. He could just say, Bread for everybody! There's a million different ways to do this. Why did he do this?

God always starts with what I have. It may not be much but I give it to God. God, I don't have much time, but here's my time. God, my finances aren't much, but here's what I've got. God, my talent isn't much but here's what I can do.

I give you everything in my life. I give you my reputation. I give you my heart, my soul, my past, my present, my future. It isn't much but I'm going to give you my five loaves and two fish.

In your life God always knows the answer before you even know what the problem is.

So why are you worrying?

**I ADMIT I HAVE AN UNSOLVABLE PROBLEM.
I GIVE GOD WHAT LITTLE I HAVE.**

DAY 14 **GOD MULTIPLIES WHAT WE GIVE HIM**

The Miracle of Feeding the 5,000
MARK 6:34-44

Mark 6:42 "Everyone ate [all five thousand!] and had enough. Afterwards they collected 12 baskets full of... leftovers!"

They're going home with doggy bags!

That's why they call it a miracle.

Whatever I give, I always get back more. The little boy who gave all he had, not only blessed five thousand other people, he ends up with more than he ever imagined.

You cannot out give God.

The big lesson is that God likes to do miracles through people. Not independently. He likes to work through ordinary people.

**WHAT WE WAIT FOR GOD TO DO FOR US,
GOD IS WAITING TO DO THROUGH US.**

During Thrive, God wants to turn you into a miracle machine. He doesn't want to just do a miracle for you. He wants to do a miracle through you. Like he did through this little boy who gave him – it wasn't much but it was all he had – and he gives it to Jesus. God takes it, breaks it, blesses it and multiplies it.

God wants to take what you have and multiply it! Expect God to put His super on your natural as he does something extraordinary in and through you!

**WILL YOU ALLOW GOD TO
TURN YOU INTO A MIRACLE MACHINE?**

WEEK 3: DARING TO BELIEVE

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS & DAILY DEVOTIONALS

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS

**“YOU SAY YOU HAVE FAITH, FOR YOU BELIEVE THAT
THERE IS ONE GOD. ... EVEN THE DEMONS BELIEVE THIS.”**

JAMES 2:19

1. Even the devil, who tried to tempt Jesus, believed there was only one God and that Jesus was his son. What is the difference between that kind of knowledge about Jesus and the kind of belief that God wants from us?

**“IF YOU DECLARE WITH YOUR MOUTH, “JESUS IS LORD,”
AND BELIEVE IN YOUR HEART THAT GOD RAISED HIM
FROM THE DEAD, YOU WILL BE SAVED.”**

ROMANS 10:9

2. What do you think “Lord” means here?
3. If you pray to God every day asking to live by God’s will and not your will, what changes might take place in your life?
4. Why is this kind of suffering a privilege? Why would God want us to suffer for our belief?

**“FOR YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN NOT ONLY THE PRIVILEGE
OF TRUSTING IN CHRIST BUT ALSO THE PRIVILEGE OF
SUFFERING FOR HIM.”**

PHILIPPIANS 1:29

5. What kinds of sufferings based on your beliefs in Jesus have you experienced that truly impacted your life in a personal way?
6. You may think you believe in Jesus, but how can you know for sure? What evidence should there be in your life to show that your heart believes in Jesus, and not just your brain?

DAY 15 DO YOU DARE TO BELIEVE?

*“This is what God wants you to do:
believe in the one he has sent!”*

JOHN 6:29

Everything I’ve ever done wrong is forgiven. Because of what Jesus Christ did on the cross in dying for your sins and mine God forgives you freely, completely, instantly and repeatedly.

Here’s what we find in Acts 10: “All who believe in Jesus will be forgiven of their sins through Jesus’ name.”

In Romans 3 we find this: “We are made right in God’s sight when we trust in Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in this same way, no matter who we are or what we have done!”

I love that last part. It doesn’t matter who you are. It doesn’t matter what you’ve done, who you’ve done it with, how long you did it or where you did it, you can be saved. You can be forgiven. Everything is forgiven when you trust in Jesus Christ.

**DARE TO CHOOSE TO BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST TODAY.
THE BENEFITS WILL FAR EXCEED ANYTHING YOU CAN
POSSIBLY IMAGINE!**

DAY 16 **WHEN I DARE TO BELIEVE, GOD SHOWS ME HIS PURPOSE FOR MY LIFE**

"Everything, absolutely everything... got started in Christ and finds its purpose in him."

COLOSSIANS 1:16

If you don't know your purpose you end up drifting through life. You get bounced around. Life controls you rather than you controlling life.

In order to learn the purpose in your life talk to your Creator.

The world will tell you to look within to find your purpose. That's not going to work! Only the Creator can tell you what purpose you were created for. And you will never know the purpose of your life until you believe in Jesus Christ.

Today so many people are confused about their identity and their purpose. You may say, "I don't know who I am and I don't know what I'm supposed to be doing with my life."

It's because you're looking in the wrong places. We find in Ephesians 1:11: "It is in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for... [Who we are – *that's identity*. What we're living for – *that's our purpose*. It is in Christ we find that out] part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone."

**WHEN I CHOOSE TO BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST,
I LEARN THE PURPOSE OF MY LIFE, GOD'S PURPOSE.**

DAY 17 **WHEN I DARE TO BELIEVE, GOD GIVES ME STRENGTH**

"God gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless."

ISAIAH 40:29

One of the top problems people face today is weariness.

You may find yourself saying, "I'm just so tired all the time. I can't get it all done. I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired. I don't have enough energy to get everything done that I need to do."

The reason why you're tired all the time is you have a power shortage. And the reason you have a power shortage is because you're not plugged into God's power. You're trying to live your life on your power alone.

There's no way you can fulfill your purpose in life without being plugged into God's power. A toaster unplugged is worthless. A blender unplugged is worthless. A vacuum cleaner has no purpose – it's just a bunch of metal if it's not plugged into the power source.

And in Ephesians 1: 19-20a we find, "I pray that you will begin to understand how incredibly great his power is to help those who believe him. It is that same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead!"

This is not simply a positive mental attitude. This is not self-help psychology. This is not pull yourself up by your own bootstraps.

This is supernatural power. "I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that Christ gives me."

I get God's strength for daily living.

BELIEF UNLOCKS GOD'S POWER IN MY LIFE.

DAY 18 **WHEN I DARE TO BELIEVE, I AM HUMBLED BY HIS MIGHTY POWER**

Jesus said, "I am the one who raises the dead and gives them life again. Anyone who believes in me, even though he dies shall live again. He is given eternal life for believing in me and shall never perish."

JOHN 11:25-26

Jesus bringing himself back to life changed everything.

Jesus proved he is exactly who he claimed to be. Jesus repeatedly said, "I am God. I am God come in human form to die for your sins."

Jesus is who he claimed to be.

Jesus said, "Here's what I'm going to do to prove that I am what I say I am. I'm going to let my enemies kill me. And I'm going to be buried in a tomb for three days. Then I'm going to raise myself back to life."

And that's exactly what he did.

When he came back to life he didn't just show up and appear to a few believers. He stayed on earth for another forty days, walked around Jerusalem for forty more days. All kinds of people saw him. One time he had a party with five hundred people!

Can you imagine being the Roman centurions who nailed Jesus to the cross and the next week you're walking down the street in Jerusalem and there he is? He's back! That'd be kind of weird to see the guy you just killed walking down the streets.

That's why so many in Jerusalem instantly became believers.

**DARE TO BELIEVE IN HIS MIGHTY POWER!
HE CAME BACK TO LIFE TO GIVE LIFE.**

DAY 19 **WHEN I DARE TO BELIEVE, GOD GUARANTEES ME ETERNAL LIFE**

"God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

JOHN 3:16

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the most well documented events in history. It would stand up in any court of law. In fact it has many, many times throughout many centuries. It proved Jesus was who He said He was. He is the Son of God.

It also proves that Jesus keeps his promises. Jesus said I'm going to let them kill me and I'll come back to life.

Did he keep that promise? Yes. If he kept that one then I can trust the other promises in this book. The ones that talk to me about my life, because I know he keeps his promises.

This proves there is Life after death. If Jesus Christ hadn't been resurrected you have no hope of the future. You have no hope of eternity. You would have no knowledge of heaven or anything else because Jesus Christ was the one who proved there is life after death.

The most famous, most quoted, most used verse in the Bible talks about eternal life: John 3:16. "God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever BELIEVES in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

I could give you fifty benefits of believing in Christ.

**WHO ELSE CAN GIVE THAT TO YOU? NO ONE!
THE QUALIFICATION? I MUST BELIEVE!**

DAY 20 DARE TO TRUST IN JESUS

What does it mean to "believe in Jesus"?

T.R.U.S.T.

TURN EVERYTHING OVER TO JESUS

"If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is my LORD," and BELIEVE in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved!" **ROMANS 10:9**

RELAX IN HIS LOVE

"Nothing will ever be able to separate us from his love. Death can't, and life can't. The angels can't, and demons can't. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away. Whether we're high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord." **ROMANS 8:38-39**

USE MY LIFE TO SERVE GOD BY SERVING OTHERS

"Give yourselves completely to God--every part of you--for you've been saved from death and you want to be tools in the hands of God, to be used for his good purposes." **ROMANS 6:13**

SUFFER FOR DOING WHAT IS RIGHT

"For you have been given not only the privilege of TRUSTING in Christ but also the privilege of SUFFERING for him."
PHILIPPIANS 1:29

TRUST WHAT HE SAYS

"For the word of the Lord always holds true, and everything he does is worthy of our trust." **PSALM 33:4**

CRY OUT TO JESUS TODAY SAYING, "I WANT TO TRUST WHAT YOU'VE SAID, BOTH YOUR INSTRUCTIONS & YOUR PROMISES."

DAY 21 BELIEVE AND RECEIVE

*"To all who received him [Jesus Christ],
to those who believed in his name,
Jesus gave the right to become children of God."*

JOHN 1:12

I DARE YOU TO BELIEVE.

You may be going through days of confusion. You may say, "I don't have the slightest idea what I should be doing with my life, where I should be going. What's up or what's down."

I DARE YOU TO BELIEVE.

You may be going through days of grief and your heart is ripped wide open.

I DARE YOU TO BELIEVE.

Run to God not away from him and you will find the comfort that you can't get anywhere else.

How do I become a child of God?

How do I get in God's family?

How do I know for certain that I'm going to heaven when I die?

How do I make sure I'm on the in crowd not the out crowd?

I WANT TO BE A CHILD OF GOD.

John 1:12 offers two verbs, "Receive" and "Believe."

I BELIEVE HE IS GOD AND I RECEIVE HIM AS MY LORD.

WEEK 4: DARING TO IMAGINE

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS & DAILY DEVOTIONALS

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS

**"MAY GOD ENLIGHTEN THE EYES OF YOUR MIND
SO THAT YOU CAN SEE THE HOPE THAT HIS CALLING
HOLDS FOR YOU."**

EPHESIANS 1:18

1. **READ HEBREWS 11:1** :: Share with the group a difficult time in your life where your faith was essential in pulling you through it.
2. **READ 2 CORINTHIANS 4:18** :: What have you focused on that is fogging your vision from imagining God's possibilities for your life? By allowing the Holy Spirit to influence you, what could those everlasting possibilities be?
3. God told Abraham when he was old and Sarah was beyond child-bearing years that he would be the father of nations. What simple messages has God shared with you that could be the fuel to ignite your imagination for a bigger dream?
4. **READ EPHESIANS 3:20** :: What does it say about how God influences how you imagine or dream? What does "by his Spirit working deeply and gently within us" mean in this scripture? Share your experience of God working within you; what were the results of this?
5. **READ JAMES 1:5-7** :: What does this verse say about God sharing his wisdom and how our doubt can keep us from receiving it? Why is doubt the enemy of imagination – and even a dream killer? How has doubt had an impact on your dreams and on God's dream for you?
6. *Taking into consideration that the size of your God determines the size of your goals, READ MARK 9:22-24* and share circumstances in your life in which you could use the Father's words in this scripture as a prayer. Having admitted any doubt, pray with your group believing that the Lord will help you.

DAY 22 IMAGINATION, A GOOD GIFT

"For as a man thinks in his heart, so he is."

PROVERBS 23:7

It is God's way of saying I want you to understand that how I work in your life is through your thoughts. As a man thinks in his heart so is he.

One of the greatest gifts that God has given you is the gift of imagination. It is the ability to see things in your mind, to think and to create with mental pictures in your mind. God gave you this gift of imagination.

And the reason you have this gift is because God imagines. The Bible tells us that God imagined the entire universe and it was created. He thought it up before it became reality. The Bible says that God has imagined all of history. He's already seen it all happen even before it's happened because he thought it up. He imagined it in advance. The Bible calls that "God's foreknowledge".

You are most like your Creator when you are being creative. Does that make sense? You are most like your Creator – God – when you are being creative. And God gave you the ability to create with your imagination. When you use your imagination for good and for God, God smiles.

Everything starts with imagination. Nothing becomes reality unless somebody thinks it up. Without imagination you couldn't even make decisions.

**COULD IT BE THAT YOU HAVE YET TO EXPLORE
THE IMAGINATION THAT GOD HAS GIFTED YOU WITH?**

DAY 23 IMAGINATION, GOOD OR BAD?

*Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true,
whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure,
whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything
is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.*

PHILIPPIANS 4:8

Our imagination can be used both positively and negatively. God would choose for us to use our imagination for positive and encouraging things. Setting our minds on what is right, pure, lovely, and admirable.

Today as you consider using your imagination, ask God to reveal to you how you're using this gift from God, whether your imagination tends to lean towards the positive or negative.

For example, if you are using your imagination to worry, then it is a misuse of your imagination. When you worry about something, you imagine something in your mind and you start getting fearful about it and you go over and over it. God didn't give you your imagination to be able to picture something and get stressed out about it.

Our imagination can be used positively in such a way that we are in awe of God and His great power. Your imagination has the potential to become whatever you decide it to be.

If God created your imagination... He meant it for good not evil. Many Christians have been talked out of using their imaginations because it has been used in unhealthy ways outside Christian circles.

TODAY, USE YOUR IMAGINATION TO LEAN INTO THE POSITIVE THINGS THAT GOD WOULD HAVE YOU TO THINK ABOUT.

DAY 24 IMAGINATION SHAPES LIFE

*Be careful how you think:
your life is shaped by your thoughts.*

PROVERBS 4:23

My imagination shapes my life.

In other words, the way you think is going to affect the way you feel and the way you feel is going to affect the way you act. And if you want to change the way you act you need to change the way you think.

It is God's way of saying I want you to understand that how I work in your life is through your thoughts. As a man thinks in his heart so is he.

For instance, the person who says, "I can't do this," and the person who says, "I can do this," are both right. Because if you think you can't do something, then you can't. And if you think you can, you can. In the same way, the person who says, "I just can't imagine that ever happening to me." It probably won't.

The way to begin having the thoughts that God would want us to have about Him, about our brothers and sisters, about ourselves, and about life in general begins by getting into God's Word. Reading His Word, soaking His Word in, all the while asking the Holy Spirit reveal to us how His Word comes to life in our own lives, in our own thoughts, in our own imagination.

When we begin to discover what God's Word says about how to live our lives, the Holy Spirit transforms us from the inside out and that includes our thoughts. We find that we begin to think more about things that are pleasing to God and less about things that are not pleasing to God.

YOUR IMAGINATION IS WHAT YOU WILL USE TO BRING INTO CAPTIVITY EVERY THOUGHT TO THE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST.

DAY 25 IMAGINATION IS ESSENTIAL

"What is faith? It is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen. It is the evidence of things we cannot yet see."

HEBREWS 11:1

Imagination is essential to living by faith.

You cannot live by faith without using your imagination. Since you can't see God you've got to use imagination to practice your faith.

Faith is, a way of seeing. Whatever we hope for, when you believe it's going to happen – not that it might happen, *that's hope*. When you believe it will happen – *that's faith*.

Also, faith is the evidence of things we cannot yet see.

God gave you two ways of seeing. First you can see through your physical eyes. That's one way of seeing. And second you can see by the imagination in your mind. You can picture things in your mind, you dream them, or you can visualize them. That's another way of seeing.

When you can't see something physically you have to imagine it in your mind. Faith is when we hope for something, and we know it's going to happen. In order to hope for something you have to picture it in your mind.

This is a tool that God says you have to use in walking with Christ. Because you can't see God so when you can't see God right now you have to imagine.

EVEN WHEN WE ARE LEFT NOT UNDERSTANDING THINGS IN THIS LIFE, DARE TO USE YOUR IMAGINATION TO LIVE BY FAITH TODAY. TRUST AND FILL YOUR IMAGINATION WITH ALL OF GOD'S PROMISES FOR YOU.

DAY 26 IMAGINATION IS ENDLESS

"We set our eyes not on what we see but on what we cannot see. What we see will last only a short time, but what we cannot see will last forever."

2 CORINTHIANS 4:18

What does this verse mean? It means that material things are temporary but the immaterial is eternal.

Now read all of Hebrews 11 and discover about all of the heroes of the faith. Once you have read it, you realize that every one of them became heroes of faith because they used their imagination.

For instance, God says to Abraham "Abraham, you're ninety years old and you have no kids. But I'm going to change your name from Abram to Abraham which means father of a great nation."

For about a decade Abraham still has no kids!

What is God doing when he tells Abraham to go count stars? He is activating his imagination. He's saying I want you to visualize what I'm going to do in your life.

You can't see the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, but they're going to last for eternity. You can't see your own soul, but it's going to last for eternity. The Bible says you need to focus on the things that will last; these are things that you can't actually see with your eyes. You have to imagine them.

Only by expanding your imagination will you begin to see God's great plans for your life!

ALLOW GOD TO SHOW YOU WHAT HE HAS IMAGINED FOR YOU. HIS PLANS FAR OUTWEIGH ANYTHING YOU ARE CURRENTLY ALLOWING YOURSELF TO IMAGINE!

DAY 27 **IMAGINE NO DOUBT**

"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

MARK 9:24B

Doubt is the enemy of imagination.

Doubt and fear neutralize what God wants to do in your life. It takes courage to imagine. Why? You know why most people don't imagine? Because they're afraid of failure.

When you were a kid you had a great imagination. Children have a massive amount of imagination. But the older you get the more your imagination grows rusty. And you stop imagining what things could be and you just start living the way they are. And you get stuck in the status quo which is Latin for "the mess we're in." You don't imagine what it could be; you just think about what it is. You stop using that imagination muscle in your life.

Doubt is the enemy of imagination. That's why it takes courage. Courage is doing the thing you fear the most. If you're not afraid you don't need courage. You don't need courage. Courage only happens when you're scared to death. Courage is when you're scared to death and you say I'm going to do it anyway.

Take courage and use your imagination. When you do, you will find God will show up in your life in unbelievable ways.

**YOUR IMAGINATION IN YOUR LIFE IS EITHER GOING
TO BE GOVERNED BY FEAR OR IT'S GOING TO BE
GOVERNED BY FAITH. IT'S YOUR CHOICE.**

DAY 28 **THE HOLY SPIRIT FUELS IMAGINATION**

"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper who will be with you forever. That helper is the Spirit of Truth... you know him because he lives with you and will be in you!"

2 CORINTHIANS 4:18

God's Spirit and God's word fuel my imagination. These are the two sources that God provides to energize your dream so you don't run out of gas. First He gives you His own Spirit, the Holy Spirit. And second He gives you His Word and the promises of the Bible.

The power of the Holy Spirit working in you will give you the power that you don't have.

The other source for refueling is God's Word. Psalm 119 says this, "Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your law... Help me understand the meaning of your commandments, and I will meditate [imagine/think about/consider] on your wonderful miracles."

How do you do this?

Spend time with the Holy Spirit and the Bible. Get alone and listen to God and talk to God. That energizes you.

Say, "Lord, I'm going to be still so you'll be able to talk to me a whole lot better than any other way."

**THE KEY TO A STRONGER, HEALTHIER IMAGINATION
IS DAILY QUIET TIME.**

WEEK 5: DARING TO GIVE GOD MY BEST

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS & DAILY DEVOTIONALS

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS

**HONOR THE LORD WITH YOUR WEALTH, WITH THE
FIRSTFRUITS OF ALL YOUR CROPS; THEN YOUR BARN
WILL BE FILLED TO OVERFLOWING, AND YOUR VATS
WILL BRIM OVER WITH NEW WINE.**

PROVERBS 3:9-10

1. Proverbs 3:9-10 tells us to honor God by giving him the first and best part of everything. What does giving your best to God mean to you?
2. Many of us have comfortable lives in today's world while some are still persecuted and abused. What is important enough to you to die for?

**"LIVE A LIFE OF SACRIFICIAL LOVE JUST LIKE CHRIST
LOVED US AND GAVE HIMSELF AS AN OFFERING AND
SACRIFICE FOR US."**

EPHESIANS 5:2

3. Who would you sacrifice for? Why?

**"AS CHRIST'S SOLDIER, DO NOT LET YOURSELF BECOME
ENTANGLED IN THE AFFAIRS OF THIS LIFE, WASTING
TIME, FOR THEN YOU CAN'T PLEASE YOUR COMMANDING
OFFICER WHO ENLISTED YOU IN HIS ARMY."**

2 TIMOTHY 2:4

4. What distractions are you caught up in that you cannot live without? What can you let go of to spend more time giving God your best?
5. **READ 2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-13** :: How can you plant seeds of love, faith, and grace?

DAY 29 **GIVE MY BEST LIKE A SOLDIER**

"Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets tied up in civilian affairs - he wants to please his commanding officer. Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. And the handworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Think about these three illustrations, and the Lord will help you to understand how they apply to you."

2 TIMOTHY 2:3-7

The first of the three analogies we find in this verse is that of a soldier. You can learn a lot about faith and about being the best you can be in the military. Remember that old army ad, *Be all you can be in the Army?* How do I do that? What can we learn from effective soldiers that we can apply to our spiritual life?

Admiral Hyman Rickover was the father of America's Naval Nuclear Navy - the nuclear subs and the nuclear Navy. He was a genius. One cadet that sat down with the Admiral right before I left our two hour conversation, Admiral Rickover asked me a very poignant question. It was this: "When you were in school and in all your previous life up to this date did you always do your best?" This young man said, "No, I didn't do my best all the time." He said Admiral Rickover looked at him with piercing eyes and said, "Why not the best?"

This question began to be the turning point in the cadet's life. The man who was that young cadet later became the thirty ninth president of the United States. His name was Jimmy Carter!

ASK YOURSELF, "AM I TRULY GIVING GOD MY BEST?"

DAY 30 GIVE MY BEST LIKE AN ATHLETE

"Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets tied up in civilian affairs - he wants to please his commanding officer. Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. And the hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Think about these three illustrations, and the Lord will help you to understand how they apply to you."

2 TIMOTHY 2:3-7

We learn to be our best by having the mindset of an athlete. The athlete believes, "I must intend to win." Remind yourself, "If I am going to win in life, I am going to have to be intentional." Winning does not happen by accident. It's not going to happen without effort. It's not going to happen unless you have a goal. You will not become the best woman you could possibly be or the best man you could possibly be just casually. It only happens if you intend to be the best you can be.

**IF YOU INTEND TO HAVE A GREAT SOUL,
INTEND TO HAVE A GOAL.**

How deeply do you want to win the prize that God has for you in life? What prize?

**YOUR PRIZE = GREATER REWARD AND RESPONSIBILITY
IN ETERNITY.**

We find in 1 Timothy 6:12 *"Run YOUR BEST in the RACE OF FAITH, and win eternal life for yourself; for this is the life that God called you to when you professed your faith before many witnesses."*

DAY 31 GIVE MY BEST LIKE A FARMER

"Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets tied up in civilian affairs - he wants to please his commanding officer. Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. And the hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Think about these three illustrations, and the Lord will help you to understand how they apply to you."

2 TIMOTHY 2:3-7

Your life on earth is like planting a garden. While you're here on earth, you've got sixty, eighty, maybe ninety, and at the most a hundred years. While you're here you're planting a garden. The kinds of seeds that you plant while you're here on earth you're going to harvest in heaven. What you sow on earth you will reap in heaven. What you plant on earth will be the fruit that you get to enjoy for eternity in heaven.

God says, if you plant generously, if you plant a lot of seeds you're going to have a lot of fruit in heaven. You're going to have a lot to enjoy there.

God says, if you plant sparingly, you're a miser and you hold it back and you don't give it away, he says you're not going to have much up there. If you sow generously you're going to reap generously.

**STORE UP TREASURE FOR YOURSELF IN HEAVEN.
ARE YOU DOING THAT?**

DAY 32 MY BEST REQUIRES LOVE

*"The greatest love is shown
when a person lays down his life for his friends."*
JOHN 15:13

I must define what I'd die for.

Until you know what you're willing to die for you're not ready to live.
And you're not ready to love until you know who you'd die for.

If you've never clarified what's worth dying for you aren't fully alive.

Soldiers know there are some things worth dying for. Freedom is worth dying for. Family is worth dying for. Faith is worth dying for.

Jesus talks about this. About how love is best expressed in the willingness to die for somebody else. Jesus says the greatest measure of love is the willingness to sacrifice your life for somebody else.

Of course that's what Jesus did for us. The greatest expression of love is Jesus dying on the cross. You measure love not by what people tell you. You measure love by the willingness to sacrifice. The greater the sacrifice, the deeper the love.

CAN YOU DEFINE WHAT YOU'D DIE FOR?

DAY 33 MY BEST REQUIRES SACRIFICE

*"Live a life of sacrificial love just like Christ loved us
and gave himself as an offering and sacrifice for us."*
EPHESIANS 5:2

If you want to be like Jesus Christ, and that's the goal, you need to learn sacrificial love. Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice – his own life. And he offered himself as an offering for others.

Question: Do you want to be like Jesus? Who are you sacrificing your life for? Who are you putting up with hardships for besides yourself?

A lot of people put up with hardships in order to get ahead, in order to succeed for personal goals. Are you involving yourself in any things that are hard to do for the benefit of other people?

We have to live a life of sacrificial love.

I doubt that you will be asked to give your life for Jesus Christ. But would you be willing? Or are you just a casual Christian not a committed Christian.

**ARE YOU WILLING TO SACRIFICE YOUR OWN COMFORT
FOR THE GREATER GOOD OF OTHER PEOPLE?
THAT'S WHAT IT MEANS TO BE LIKE JESUS.**

DAY 34 MY BEST REQUIRES DISCIPLINE

"In a race everyone runs, but only one person wins the prize. So run your race to win. To win the contest you must deny yourselves many things that would keep you from doing your best."

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24

No athlete becomes a pro athlete without discipline and training. You don't become great by doing whatever you feel. You don't become great by living by your moods. You just can't make up your own rules. There are no short cuts to maturity. There are no short cuts to greatness.

We all know stories of what Olympian athletes give up in order to win a gold medal. They pretty much put their life on hold. They make enormous sacrifices to win gold, silver, or bronze.

God says nobody's going to remember those awards. It's not going to last. But he says it is a wise move to do that for something that's going to last forever in eternity and to make your life count.

What am I willing to do without in order to be the best?

Am I willing to do without popularity?

Am I willing to do without wealth?

Am I willing to do without comfort?

IN ORDER TO WIN I MUST DISCIPLINE MYSELF.

DAY 35 MY BEST REQUIRES FOCUS ON JESUS

"Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed - that joyful finish with God in heaven - he could put up with anything along the way: cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God."

HEBREWS 12:2

How was Jesus able to put up with all the beating, the suffering, the punishment, the torture? All the evil and mean things they did to him before he went to the cross and then they nailed him to a cross. How did he put up with all that suffering? We find in the Bible that he looked beyond the pain to the reward that he was going to receive, the benefit, the prize and the pay off.

You can handle enormous pain in your life and you can handle enormous discipline in your life if you realize there's a better purpose for it and there's going to be a payoff at the end. When you forget the pay off, when you forget the reward, when you forget the prize then you're going to give up. That's why Paul says run to win in your life and keep your eye on the prize.

Can you imagine yourself in heaven receiving the prize of God? As God says, "Well done!" Let the accommodation, promotion, and the rewards that God is going to give you motivate you!

IMAGINE HEAVEN & THE PRIZE GOD HAS IN STORE FOR YOU.

WEEK 6: DARING TO COMMIT

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS & DAILY DEVOTIONALS

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS

1. **READ ROMANS 12:4-5** :: What does the verse say about how we get our meaning both as members of the church and as individuals?
2. **READ EPHESIANS 2:16** :: Before Christ's death, Jews could kill Gentiles just for walking into the inner court of the temple. How did Jesus bring Jews and Gentiles together?
3. **READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:18-19** :: Discuss where reconciliation is urgently needed around the world today. How about in your own lives? What specific steps can you take now to promote the message of reconciliation in your life?
4. **READ EPHESIANS 4:16** :: What does it say about growth through relationship in Christ's Body? Discuss why relationship in community or discipleship is necessary to grow in character traits such as love, forgiveness, loyalty, and compassion.
5. **READ MARK 8:35** :: In your life, explain a time when you were living for yourself and not for the benefit of others. What steps can you take to embrace what the verse states? Discuss in your group the challenges you may encounter living this way.
6. **READ ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12** :: It is a risk to confuse prominence with significance. Talk about how working together helps minimize your personal prominence and pushes your efforts towards significance. Where can you apply this concept of team work to further your mission and purpose?

DAY 36 GIVE ALL OF ME

"Give yourselves completely to God - every part of you - for you have been brought back to life, and you want to be tools in the hands of God, used for his good purposes."

ROMANS 6:13

Your life is actually shaped by your commitments. We become whatever we are committed to. If you don't commit yourself to anything you become nothing in life.

Great people are just ordinary people who've made a great commitment to a cause greater than themselves.

People become great men or great women of God when they commit themselves to something greater than themselves. You need a cause bigger than you to live for. If the only thing you're living for is you that's not a big enough reason to get out of bed. We become whatever we're committed to.

The problem is a lot of people are afraid of making commitments. And we see that in our society today. We have a lot of people who don't want to commit to anything.

You cannot live a life without making some kind of commitments. You can't buy a house or a car without making a commitment. You can't have a job without making a commitment. You can't get married without making a commitment.

WHAT COMMITMENT ARE YOU DARING TO MAKE TODAY?

DAY 37 WAIT ON THE LORD

"Those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint."

ISAIAH 40:31

This whole idea of waiting goes against what we naturally and culturally do. When our natural inclination is to step on the gas, God is often telling us to hit the brakes. Waiting is often difficult because we equate it with inactivity. But waiting, which can also be translated as hoping, means to wait with expectation, to look for. The implication is that we are waiting and watching with expectation towards what God is going to do.

During these periods of waiting, God is often refueling and refining us for what He has in store. Everything around you needs to be refueled after much use. Your car has to stop for gas, your body needs to sleep, and your cell phone needs to be recharged. So, why can't this be the case with our spiritual life as well? What may seem like inactivity from our perspective is often purposeful preparation from God's perspective. Be encouraged that those who wait end up even stronger after the Lord renews them.

If you are in one of those seasons...

Are you allowing God to refuel you?

Are you tuning into His voice?

Are you recognizing His activity around you?

IN ORDER TO WIN I MUST DISCIPLINE MYSELF.

DAY 38 ALL OUT WORSHIP

"Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed - that joyful finish with God in heaven - he could put up with anything along the way: cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God."

HEBREWS 12:2

To strengthen my faith I must unite with others in worship. Worship is for God but it also brings benefits to you. It renews your faith and it restores your joy. When you come to worship like this and you get together with other people to worship, it renews your faith and it restores your joy.

You're not going to get your strength renewed watching golf on TV. That's just going to make you lazier and lazier. You get renewed, your strength gets recharged.

I think it ought to be fun to go to church. That may be shocking to you. But the Bible says I was glad. Not I was mad, not I was sad, not I was bored, not I was guilty, not I felt like I had to go out of duty.

Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with singing.

Worship takes commitment.

Worship energizes me, restores my strength and renews my joy.

HOW WILL YOU WORSHIP THE LORD TODAY?

DAY 39 CHRIST GIVES MEANING

"We are like the various parts of a human body. Each part gets its meaning from Christ's Body as a whole, not the other way around. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of his body. But as a chopped-off finger or cut-off toe we wouldn't amount to much, would we?"

ROMANS 12:4-5

I must connect with others for fellowship. We only learn who we are when we are in relationships with others. We only learn our true identity in community. You'll never learn who you really are by yourself.

My ear only functions, only fulfills its purpose by being connected to the body. If my ear was cut off and was lying on the ground what's the value of my ear? Nothing. It can't hear anything.

If my nose was cut off and lying on the ground, what would be the purpose of my cut off nose? Nothing, it has no purpose. It cannot smell anything by itself.

My eyes... if they're not in my eye sockets attached to my body, what is the purpose of my eyes? Nothing, they have no value. It has no purpose unless it's connected to the body.

The purpose that God made you for can only be discovered connected to the body, the body of Christ.

AM I COMMITTED TO THE BODY OF CHRIST?

DAY 40 COMMIT TO RECONCILE

"Now God had reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation... and the message of reconciliation."

2 CORINTHIANS 5:18-19

If anybody needs reconciliation right now it's us! We have so many divisions in our nation right now between gender, races, economic status. There's one place where everybody's welcome no matter where they are from and that is the church. We should be the place that's showing love and fellowship.

Until we're reconciled to Christ, we can't be reconciled with each other. He's saying all the right things. That's what's needed to be said.

Sin breaks our relationship with God; it severs relationships with others as well. Broken relationships are the epidemic of our day. Sin alienates family members, separates friends, divides churches, and destroys marriages. Sin creates mistrust, jealousy, hatred, and greed, all of which devastate relationships.

Only Christ has the remedy for the disastrous effect of sin on human relationships. As His ambassadors, we are to take the message of reconciliation to a broken, divided world.

We urge reconciliation first with God, and then with each other.

THE ONLY WAY THAT WE CAN WIN IS BY STANDING TOGETHER. YOU CAN'T DO IT ON YOUR OWN.

DAY 41 COMMIT TO BEING TOGETHER

*"Christ's Body is fitted together perfectly.
As each part does its own special work,
it helps the other parts grow..."*

EPHESIANS 4:16

There are some things you will never learn on your own. You only learn them in community. You only learn them from others. There are some things you can only learn in relationships.

This is why we emphasize life groups so strongly at the Vineyard. There's some stuff you can learn from a crowd. But there are some things you can't learn unless you're in relationship in a life group of some kind.

For instance, you can only learn forgiveness in relationships. You can't learn that on your own. You can only learn loyalty in relationships. You can't learn that on your own. You can only learn love in relationships. You can't learn that on your own. You can't learn it without people. You can't learn kindness without others. You can't learn faithfulness without others. You can't learn graciousness without others in your life. You can't learn unselfishness without others.

In fact the most important things you need to learn in life require that you be in relationship with other people.

ARE YOU CONNECTED WITH OTHER IN COMMUNITY?

DAY 42 COMMIT TO BE ON MISSION

*"Go and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father
and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them
to do everything I have commanded you.
And surely I will be with you..."*

MATTHEW 28:19-20A

To make an eternal difference I must join with others on mission. God has a life mission for your life and you can only do it in the context with others. God put you here to have a message to the world and a mission in the world. And you do that in context with others.

Before Jesus goes back to heaven he gives his last words. Last words of people are very important. And the last words of Jesus are called the Great Commission.

God has a purpose for all of history and God has a purpose for your life. Why would God give you a purpose for your life totally unconnected to his purpose for history? He wouldn't. That would be illogical. So somehow the purpose for your life is connected to his purpose for history.

What is God's purpose for history? You are connected to that purpose!

WILL YOU COMMIT TO "GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES?"

WEEK 7: DARING TO BE GENEROUS

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS & DAILY DEVOTIONALS

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS

IF YOU ARE UNTRUSTWORTHY WITH WORLDLY WEALTH, WHO WILL TRUST YOU WITH THE TRUE RICHES OF HEAVEN?

LUKE 16:11

1. Our natural condition is to be tempted by passion (what we desire), position (status), and possession (material wealth). The antidote is to develop a godly character through integrity, humility, and generosity. How do these godly qualities counteract our natural condition? Discuss with your Life Group the importance of developing a godly character.
2. In doing a search of the Bible, the word “believe” is found 272 times, “pray” 371 times, “love” 714 times, and “give” 2162 times. What does it mean to give or to be generous? Why is giving so important? In what ways, besides money, can we give to others?

YOUR GIVING PROVES THE REALITY OF YOUR FAITH...

2 CORINTHIANS 9:13

3. We benefit when we are generous and when we receive the generosity of others. Share with your group a time when you were blessed by giving or by receiving a gift.
4. **READ 1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19** :: How do you define materialism? Why is generosity the “cure” for materialism?
5. Why does the state of our heart matter when we give of ourselves to others and how is the blessing returned to us?

DAY 43 **GIVE ALL OF ME FOR ALL OF HIM**

“As a result of your ministry, they will give glory to God. For your generosity to them and to all believers will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ.”

2 CORINTHIANS 9:13

Decision making is a faith-building activity that requires two things:

1. You must decide to invest your time, money, reputation, and energy. You lay it all on the line; you take the plunge. You say, “God, you’ve told me to do this and I’m going to be faithful to do it!”
2. You have to let go of security. You cannot move forward in faith and hold onto the past at the same time. In other words, if you want to walk on water, you have to get out of the boat.

“BUT WHEN YOU PRAY, YOU MUST BELIEVE AND NOT DOUBT AT ALL. WHOEVER DOUBTS IS LIKE A WAVE IN THE SEA THAT IS DRIVEN AND BLOWN ABOUT BY THE WIND. IF YOU ARE LIKE THAT, UNABLE TO MAKE UP YOUR MIND AND UNDECIDED IN ALL YOU DO, YOU MUST NOT THINK THAT YOU WILL RECEIVE ANYTHING FROM THE LORD.”

JAMES 1:6-8

Decide today to dare to dream! Decide today to dare to give of your generous gifts!

That’s how we honor Him, by giving Him all that we have, and all that we are!

**ARE YOU WILLING FOR “ALL” OF YOU
TO BE “ALL IN” FOR GOD TODAY?**

DAY 44 BLESSINGS GALORE

"Generous people will be blessed..."
PROVERBS 22:9

Generosity brings God's blessing. If you want God's blessing on your life, you must learn to not be a hoarder; you must learn to not be stingy. You must learn to be open-handed with what God has given you! That means helping other people with everything you've got. The more you give away your time, your talent, and your treasure, the more God will give you. Giving brings God's blessing.

Read the verse again, Proverbs 22:9 *"Generous people will be blessed..."*

Also,

Deuteronomy 15:10 *"Give generously... then because of this God will bless you in all your work... [You want God to bless all your work?].... and in everything you put your hand to."*

If you want God to bless everything you put your hand to, then, give generously.

One of the hardest things to realize a dream is in giving open-handedly all that you have to God.

ARE YOU WILLING TO INVITE THE HOLY SPIRIT INTO YOUR LIFE TO CHANGE YOUR HEART FROM A CLOSED-GRIP LEVEL OF GENEROSITY TO AN OPEN-HANDED GIVING OF YOURSELF?

DAY 45 HAPPY GIVING = HAPPY LIFE

Jesus said,
"There is more happiness in giving than in receiving."
ACTS 20:35

Generosity increases happiness. The only people who aren't aware of this fact are people who aren't generous.

Would you admit that when you were a child at Christmas it wasn't all about what you bought everybody else. When you were a child it was probably more about what you got. And as a child, perhaps all your joy came from the presents you got not from the presents you gave to other people.

But that was a long time ago. Perhaps we can chalk it up to being immature and self-centered. Now, at Christmas it's not about the presents you get. Your joy comes from watching other people unwrap the gifts that you've given to them.

Why? Because you grew up and stopped being self centered! It stopped being about you. That's called maturity.

Unfortunately, some people never grow up. And at eighty years old it's still all about them and they've never learned the joy of generosity. – What am I getting out of this? Generosity increases my happiness!

WILL YOU DARE TO CHOOSE TO GROW IN GENEROSITY AND LIVE A LIFE OF HAPPY GIVING?

DAY 46 CHRIST GIVES MEANING

"You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion... your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God."
2 CORINTHIANS 9:11

What an amazing promise! God makes you rich in every way so you can be generous on every occasion, which will result in thanksgiving to God. You give because you're grateful, and your gift makes others grateful too.

God doesn't bless you so you can be greedy. He blesses you so you can be generous.

HE GIVES TO YOU SO THAT HE CAN GIVE THROUGH YOU.

When you give, God gives back to you so that you can give more away, and He can give more back to you! This giving and receiving goes on and on. God doesn't give you things so you can pile them up. He wants you to be a river, not a reservoir. When you let go of what's in your hand, your hand is now ready to receive greater blessings from God.

When you choose to give, you are allowing God to use you as a source of blessing to someone else! This is an outward expression of love to God and to people.

**FACT: YOU CAN GIVE WITHOUT LOVING,
BUT YOU CAN'T LOVE WITHOUT GIVING.**

DAY 47 PLANT AND REAP JOY

"Those who plant in tears will harvest with shouts of joy. They weep as they go to plant their seed, but they sing as they return with the harvest."
PSALM 126: 5-6

The time to start being generous is now! People everyday say, "I'm going to..." They're going to serve more when they retire. They're going to give more when they get a raise. Whatever it is they're going to do more of, they're going to do it "one of these days."

But "one of these days" becomes none of these days. There are 7 days in a week, but "Someday" isn't one of them.

Don't wait for things to get better; start planting seeds now. Why? Because the sooner you plant, the sooner you will enjoy the harvest.

But the harvest will not come according to your timetable. The results will come but they may come slowly and as part of a process.

In the meantime, forget about last year's crop failure. Instead focus on the long-term harvest in your life.

Maybe you've lost a loved one. Maybe you've lost your health. Maybe you've lost your job. Maybe you've lost your dream. Mourning is ok; moaning is not.

Instead of moaning, plant a seed, because nothing grows until a seed is planted.

Whatever you need more of, you need to give away. Don't wait for "one of these days."

TODAY IS THE DAY TO PLANT THE SEED.

DAY 48 COMMIT TO BEING TOGETHER

"Use your money to do good... always being ready to share with others whatever God has given you. By doing this you will be storing up real treasure for yourselves in heaven...it is the only safe investment for eternity! And they will be living a fruitful Christian life down here as well."

1 TIMOTHY 6:18-19

You will be rewarded in heaven for sharing with others. We find in 1 Timothy 6:18-19, "Use your money to do good..."

Money is a tool. It is neither good nor bad but neutral. You can use it for good or you can use it for bad. There's nothing evil about money.

The Bible does not say money is the root of all evil. It says the love of money is the root of all evil. You're to love people and use money. Not reversed. So he says use your money to do good. You can't take it with you but you can send it on ahead.

Store up treasure in heaven now by investing in people. What He means is that you should use the money God gives you to bring people to Christ! Imagine being greeted in heaven by someone who says, "I'm here because you gave the time, the money, and the effort to help me hear the gospel. If it weren't for you, I might not be here."

DAY 49 COMMIT TO BE ON MISSION

"I tell you, use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends. In this way, your generosity stores up a reward for you in heaven."

LUKE 16:9

What does it mean to use my worldly resources to benefit others and make friends?

It means to take some of your money and use it to build bridges of friendship to bring people to Jesus Christ! These same people are then going to be saved and they're going to go to heaven with you.

Are you going to have any friends in heaven that say, "Thank you. I'm here because of you! You dared to dream big! Your generosity bought a Bible; built a church; you did other things... and through that I came to know the Lord. I'm here because of you. I'm your friend forever."

Generosity will be rewarded in heaven.

The Bible urges us to seize the moment and act now. To live a life with unfulfilled dreams is a tragedy. Ships aren't made for the harbor. They're made to set sail.

God is waiting for you to sail your ship out of the harbor so just do it!

IS ANYBODY GOING TO BE IN HEAVEN BECAUSE OF YOU?

DARE TO BE GENEROUS, DARE TO DREAM BIG!

