



encountering
GOD

sharing the
GOSPEL

Introduction

“Christianity is a relationship” I remember this phrase because it was placarded on my parent’s refrigerator and it is true. It served as a regular reminder for me that my faith was centered on a person, Jesus. Jesus’ prayer in **John 17:3** includes these words ***“This is eternal life that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”*** We are saved from our sin and for an intimate relationship with the Father.

Later in that prayer Jesus prayed for His disciples, ***“As you sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.” (v. 18)*** . It is God’s purpose for us to know Him but also to send us out as His representatives so that others may know Him. Followers of Jesus will also join Him in His mission.

Christian faith, then, operates in two directions. It moves vertically in relationship with God and horizontally in relationships with other people. This is not just a clever image. It is God’s will for our Highland family. It is God’s will for you. The purpose of this practical, Bible based devotional is to help you grow in your understanding of both. Invest some time in reading it. Meditate on the passages given in each entry. Follow the practical suggestions for response. My prayer is that God will use this devotional to knit our hearts together as we seek to know Him and make Him known. In addition to this, I encourage you to join us as a church family to adopt a plan that will guide you to read the Bible through in a year.

My thanks to those who had a hand in putting this devotional together, from the writing to the to the formatting. Your work and/or words are a reflection of your love for God and His church. It is gratifying to work alongside you for the Kingdom.

David Denton



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Day 1

“Encountering God, Sharing the Gospel”

Key Verse: [2 Corinthians 5:11](#)

Have you ever experienced something so memorable that you wanted everyone to know about it? Paul had a dramatic encounter with God’s grace that changed him and compelled him to share the message of God’s grace with others. Consequently, fear (worship) and persuasion (witness) were two important themes in Paul’s ministry.

Even a casual reading of Scripture would demonstrate that when God revealed Himself it was for the sake of accomplishing His purposes in the world. Consider the following: Abraham encountered God in Haran. God promised to bless Abraham and through him to bless all the nations of the earth (**Genesis 12**). Moses encountered God in the burning bush. There, God commissioned Moses to lead His people from slavery for the sake of His glory (**Exodus 3**). Isaiah encountered God in a vision (**Isaiah 6**). When God asked, **“Who will go for us?”** Isaiah responded, **“Here am I. Send me.”** The disciples encountered Jesus during His earthly ministry. After His resurrection Jesus commissioned them to go into all the world and make disciples. (**Matthew 28**)

Worship and witness lie at the heart of our relationship with God. Pastor and author John Piper wrote, *“Missions exists because worship doesn’t.”* We worship as a response to God’s revelation and we witness in fulfillment of God’s purpose. Worship leads to witness. And where witness bears fruit it leads to worship.

Responding to God: Encountering God. Sharing the Gospel. These define what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Pause right now and tell God that you want to know Him and make Him known.

Day 2

“Longing for Home”

Key Verses: [2 Corinthians 5:1-5](#)

Encountering God and sharing the Gospel requires that we see life from an eternal perspective. As I write this our family waits for my father-in-law to live out his appointed days so that he can see Jesus. We have cried, sung, prayed, and read scripture together. These are expressions of Christian hope. Christian hope acknowledges the reality of life’s hardships while giving assurance of eternal life.

Paul paints two pictures to help his readers understand the nature of their eternal home. First, Paul describes it as a building from God. This body is compared to a tent. It is temporary, but believers anticipate a permanent dwelling, one not made with human hands. Secondly, our eternal home is described as a new set of clothes. Believers have the assurance of a resurrection body that will swallow up what is mortal. Until then we groan in anticipation of what is to come. In **verse 2** we groan because we long to be clothed with our eternal dwelling. In **verse 4** we groan because we do not want to be found unclothed (spirit without a body). The stresses of this earthly existence cause us to sigh. Our sighs, however, are not just from a desire to be free but in expectation of something greater.

Christian hope anticipates an eternal home. This not only helps us to cope with the challenges of life but causes us to be compassionate towards those who have no hope.

Responding to God: Take a moment and think about the temporary nature of this life. What “groans” have you uttered lately? Thank God for His Holy Spirit that gives us the assurance of our heavenly home. Ask him to help you see things from an eternal perspective.

Day 3

“Holy Motivation”

Key Verses: [2 Corinthians 5:6-10](#)

As Christians, the assurance of our heavenly home should not cause us to withdraw in the face of life’s challenges. Quite the opposite. We live by faith in the present, certain that what God has promised will come to pass. Paul described this obedient faith as **“good courage”** that comes from the following:

A holy ambition (v. 9). Whether at home with the Lord or absent from the Lord (in the body) Paul’s desire was singular: to please Him. There is no higher motivation than this for a believer. Followers of Jesus Christ no longer live for themselves but for **“Him who died and rose again on their behalf.”** (v. 15)

A holy fear. Paul also understood that God’s grace made him accountable for what he did with his time. There was an urgency in his ministry as he lived with the realization that he was entrusted with the Gospel. **“We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.”** We should not understand this judgment as one which determines eternal destiny but which determines eternal reward. Believers have been spared God’s judgment against sin and have been given the assurance of eternal life. We will give an account of what we have done with the time and opportunities that God has entrusted to us. Jesus said **“From everyone who has been given much, much will be required.”** **Luke 12:48.** We must be like the steward who was found faithful.

Responding to God: Some live to please others, but followers of Christ live for His pleasure. He will reward you for an obedient life lived with courage. How can the assurance of your eternal home and an eternal reward give you courage today to share the love of God with others?

Day 4

“Why We Share”

Key Verses: [2 Corinthians 5:11-15](#)

Ironically, Paul used the ideas of encountering God and sharing the Gospel (**v. 11**) as a defense against his critics. Paul reminded his critics of the thrust of His ministry (***“we persuade men”***) as well as the motivation for his ministry (***“fear of the Lord”*** and ***“the love of Christ.”***)

How can fear and love both be valid motives for sharing the gospel? Fear of God resembles something like awe or reverence. The fact that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ to be judged or rewarded should motivate us to live for His pleasure. Sharing Christ with others is a thrill and an adventure. More importantly, sharing the Gospel pleases God’s heart and brings Him glory. He will reward us for the opportunities we have used to share His good news with others.

Love is not primarily an emotion but a selfless concern for the well-being of others. It is awakened in us as we contemplate what Paul concluded: ***“one died for all therefore all died.”*** Who did Christ die for? All. He died for the self-righteous one. He died for the addict. He died for the church goer and the secularist. The more we contemplate Christ’s boundless love by dying in our place, the more our hearts will be compelled to share with those who have yet to discover the joy of living for ***“Him who died and rose again on their behalf.”***

Fear and love are not opposites. True worship (fear) produces Kingdom priorities. If we love God we will love what He loves, and God loves people.

Responding to God: Take a moment and worship our God of glory and grace. Pray right now and ask God to give you His perspective and heart for the world. Anticipate the opportunities that you will have to share the love of Christ with others.

Day 5

“A Way of Seeing”

Key Verses: [2 Corinthians 5:16-19](#)

My eye sight deteriorated gradually so I didn't notice a change until I began to squint to see the chalk board. I grew tired of the strain on my eyes. When I mentioned it to my parents they took me to the eye doctor and sure enough, I needed glasses. It was amazing how clearly I could see when my vision was corrected!

Paul underwent something of a change in sight as well. Something life changing happened to Paul that led him to view things from an eternal perspective. What brought about the change? He sums it up in **verse 18**, ***“Godreconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.”*** A journey that had begun with the intent of persecuting Christians led to a blinding experience with God's grace as Paul encountered Jesus. (You can read about it in **Acts 9**). Paul's sins were forgiven. He was made right with God and commissioned to bring that same message to others. That temporary loss of sight led to a new way of seeing the world.

We have been commissioned to share with others the reconciling work of God in Christ at home, in the office, and the classroom. Our faithfulness to that task will depend on how we view the world around us. God worked through Christ to make His enemies His friends. That includes you and me. The more we meditate on that priceless gift the clearer our vision will become.

Responding to God: Who do you know that needs to hear about the reconciling love of God? Take the time to pray for that individual right now and make yourself available to share.

Day 6

“Christ’s Representatives”

Key Verses: [2 Corinthians 5:20, 21](#)

Tony Leon, once India’s ambassador to Argentina, said *“An ambassador is someone who thinks twice before he says nothing.”* An ambassador represents the interest of His country on foreign soil. As a representative, he carries the message of his leader and is not at liberty to remain silent or to alter the substance of the message in favor of his own personal interests.

Christians are God’s representatives on earth and Christ has commissioned us to share His message with others. The essence of that message is found in **verse 21**. If **verse 19** describes the essence of the Gospel (reconciliation) then **verse 21** describes how that reconciliation occurred. God gave His Son as a substitutionary sacrifice for our sin. The cross is a place of a great exchange as the sinless Son of God shouldered our guilt and bore the brunt of His Father’s holy wrath against our sin so that we might be counted righteous. This is the heart of the Gospel and this is the message that we are commissioned to share.

So intensely did this message burn within the apostle Paul, so deep was his gratitude toward God that he was not beyond pleading as a means to persuading. ***“We beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”*** The urgency of the mission is evident in Paul’s words, and for good reason. There is no greater message to be shared than the message of God’s forgiveness in Christ.

Responding to God: You are an alien on foreign soil and you have received a commission from the King. Ask God for wisdom and strength as you represent Him today. Be ready to communicate His message.

Day 7

“Focus and Fervor”

Key Verse: [Luke 2:37](#)

Throughout history individuals who have accomplished great things have had a strong sense of purpose – a singular focus. In **Luke 2:36-38** we find the example of Anna who waited with great expectation, with consistent prayer and fasting, for the coming of the Messiah. Because of her great faith and focus, she recognized when God answered the longing of her heart.

This year we are asking God to work among us in an extraordinary way. We want to encounter Him, and we want Him to use us to reach our city and world for Christ. This will happen when we have fully-focused and expectant hearts. Fasting and prayer focus our lives on the purposes to which we have been called – to love God and to love others.

My father was one of the most singularly-focused people I have ever known. He loved God fully and lived to love people by sharing Christ at every turn. If you ever shared a meal with him at a restaurant, walked with him through a theme park, or traveled with him on an airplane, you saw this in action. He gave the gospel away with his words and by his actions everywhere he went and to anyone who would listen. This type of passion doesn't happen by accident – it occurs when we choose to allow our hearts to beat with God's. When we do, we, like Anna, will see God move in power among us, His people.

Responding to God: What has your focus? What is it that distracts you from loving God and sharing with others? For many of us, it is media (t.v., social media, etc.). Would you consider fasting from media, or whatever it is that grabs your attention, for the next five days? Would you spend that time praying for God to work among us? Expect God to answer.

Day 8

“Close Encounters of the Very First Kind”

Key Verses: [Genesis 1:26-28](#), [Genesis 2 & 3](#)

In Genesis 1:26-28, we read that God creates man in His own image, both male and female. In Genesis 2 and 3 we read about their relationship. Adam and Eve were the very first people to exist and all we know about them is their encounter with God.

We cannot remember our birth (thankfully) but Adam and Eve probably could. They came to life as adults and were oriented to their surroundings by God Himself. Their first encounter was with God. God spent an eternity encountering Himself (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and then asked these first humans to join in. What a privilege that was!

Can you imagine being able to walk through a garden with God every day and have no distractions? All they had was time, fulfilling work, and each other. Then the serpent came along and tempted them by saying that they were missing out on something. So they caved. They only had one rule – and they broke it. They were the first people to falsely believe that there could be more to this life than encountering God, and also the first to try and live like it. We all know they were not the last. That is us.

We have been challenged to pray and fast. This is just the first day. Maybe through doing this and going through this devotional together we can recover some of what Adam and Eve had first – knowledge that God is enough.

Responding to God: Take the next few minutes to pray and thank God for His presence with you today. Thank Him for creating you and for providing a way (Jesus) for you to walk with Him again.

Day 9

“Desert Ark Obedience”

Key Verses: [Genesis 5,6](#); [Romans 1:18-32](#)

A little over 1,000 years after Adam and Eve were created, Noah was born. He lived on the earth 500 years before he had children and his big encounter with God.

People were so wicked that God decided to start over. So he came to Noah and told him to build a giant boat in a desert. Noah spent 100 years building a boat nowhere near water and with no rain. Noah was 600 years old when the flood came and people realized that he had truly encountered God, but by then, it was too late for them.

This was probably not Noah’s first big act of obedience. “Desert ark” obedience was probably something he worked up to after 500 years of serving God in smaller ways. That could be why he was chosen. Whatever the reason, when Noah heard from God, he obeyed, even though it sounded ridiculous.

Everyone encounters God – eventually. ***Romans 1:18-32*** tells us that we have no excuse for denying God and He will judge those who reject Him to live their own way. What happened to the people in Noah’s day will continue to happen to people who choose the wicked ways of the world over following God. God will never flood the earth again, but we all will face judgment. If God were to come to us with some ridiculous sounding act of obedience, would we be willing to obey? Have we been obedient enough already to truly trust Him?

Responding to God: What is something you know God wants you to do but you have been avoiding? Today would be a good day to give obedience a try. We do not all make it to 500.

Day 10

“Unknowing Encounter”

Key Verses: [Exodus 2:1-10](#)

In the book of Exodus, we begin by reading about how the Israelites lost favor with their Egyptian rulers. When you think of someone encountering God, Moses is usually one of those biblical characters that first come to mind. Encountering God in the midst of a burning bush is definitely a memorable encounter! Today, I want to talk about a different encounter Moses had with God...long before he ever saw the burning bush.

Pharaoh commanded that all the male Israelites be put to death at birth. We don't know how many young boys lost their lives during this time, but we see God encountering several people whose obedience would change the world as they risked their own lives to defy pharaoh. The midwives encountered God and in that scripture it says they feared God and disobeyed pharaoh's commands to kill the young boys. Their response to God's command was the first step in preserving the life of young Moses. Moses' parents also encountered God. They were two Israelites from the house of Levi (the priestly tribe) who feared God more than pharaoh. They concealed Moses for the first three months of his life and continued God's plan to spare Moses. As Moses' mother put him in the Nile, we also see that God led pharaoh's daughter to have pity on him...enough to take him as her own and raise him as a son of Egypt.

Responding to God: There are times in our lives where we are oblivious to God's encounter with us. God encountered many people in Moses' life, and I say his life as an infant, to begin his steps to one day lead the Israelites out of slavery. Thank God today for those times where He worked in your life even though you were unaware. As you are now aware, be mindful of how he has sustained you and how He is working in your life today.

Day 11

“Woe is me!”

Key Verses: [Isaiah 6](#)

When we read God’s Word about individuals who have experienced God, they are often terrified because of their encounter with a perfect and holy God. Isaiah had this type of experience. His first response to encountering God was “woe is me, I am ruined, I am a man of unclean lips!” When we are exposed to God’s holiness, our only response can be that of Isaiah. It is easy to feel good about our own righteousness when we compare ourselves to others. God’s standard isn’t based on your neighbor or even your pastor. God is perfect and we are not!

God’s response to Isaiah in this passage is in verses six and seven. God cleanses Isaiah as he cries out to Him. ***“Your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.”*** We definitely see the similarities in this passage to our salvation experience. When we encounter God and realize our own sin, our only response can be to cry out to God in faith to forgive us of our sin as we put our faith and trust in Him.

Isaiah’s response to God’s forgiveness was obedience. When God said ***“who shall go for Us,”*** Isaiah said send me! He didn’t ask what the job was going to be or the message he was to share...it was simple and complete obedience.

Responding to God: So often we come to worship not expecting to hear from God. My challenge to you is to seek to experience God and as you do, let Him change you and look for where you need to say, “Here I am God, use me!”

Day 12

“Encountering the Word”

Key Verses: [2 Chronicles 34](#)

When Maged Atalla shared with our church this past October, he shared an incredible story as we ate together. Early in his radio ministry, he would read one chapter of the Bible every day as a part of his program. Some years later he was talking with believers from Yemen who would record his radio program every day. They would then listen to him read God’s word and they would write down every word of that chapter each day. Over the years, they were able to compile much the Bible from his radio broadcast. They lived in a country where God’s word was illegal. They had such a hunger for God’s Word, that they were willing to pay the cost to just be able to have it and read it. They truly hungered and thirsted for God!

Josiah was only eight years old when he became king in Jerusalem. When he was sixteen he began to seek God and when he was twenty he began to purge the land of all the altars to false gods. As he led the revitalization of the temple at the age of 26, they found something that had been missing from their lives as individuals and as a nation. They found God’s Word! It had been physically missing for years, an old book tucked away in a temple that somehow survived. Josiah was so convicted as a man, he tore his clothes. As king, he gathered the everyone together and he read aloud “the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the Lord.”

Responding to God: God wants to encounter you through His Word! My challenge to you today is to be like Josiah... take God’s Word and read it! We were challenged in the introduction of this devotional to read the Bible through together this year. How are you doing on that? Are you already behind? Today is the day. Get it out and read it!

Day 13

“For Such a Time as This”

Key Verse: [Esther 4:14](#)

Have you ever asked the question “Why me?” I’m sure the answer to this question is a resounding yes. Esther had every reason to ask that same question about her life. She was an orphan taken in by her cousin, lived in exile with her people, taken by the king, and was taken by King Ahasuerus as his queen. In spite of all of this, when you read the book of Esther you see God’s sovereignty and encounters with God very plainly.

When Esther’s cousin Mordecai comes to her and suggested that she could use her position to stop the destruction of her people, I’m sure that questions of “Why me?” must have been on her mind. Mordecai felt that there was not anyone with this type of access to the King and perhaps God made her queen for such a time as this.

Esther knew what she had to do. She also called on her people to fast and pray for three days before she went into the presence of her king unannounced...at the risk of her own life. The rest of the story is a happy ending. God uses Esther to save her people from destruction and is forever remembered by her people as God established the Feast of Purim in the life of the Israelites.

We see that God was in Esther’s life preparing her, encountering her in the good times and the bad. God used what must have been terrible moments in her life to bring about life for an entire nation.

Responding to God: God wants us to encounter Him in the good times and the bad. His promise is that He will take every moment and use it for your good and His Glory.

Day 14

“Woman At The Well”

Key Verses: [John 4:1-42](#)

One of the most well-known, and talked about encounters with Jesus in the Bible, is the story of the woman at the well. Jesus and His disciples were on their way from Judea to Galilee and chose to go through Samaria, instead of around, like most Jews of the day would've done. The Jews were not fond of the Samaritans. The Jews considered them less than human because they had intermarried with foreign settlers after the fall of Samaria. So, Jesus being a man, and talking to a Samaritan woman, was not a normal occurrence in this time.

Jesus proceeds to start a conversation with this woman and we can see that He is immediately concerned for her spiritual well-being. Jesus tells the woman, ***“If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water.”*** **John 4:10** We know that “living water” is a representation of eternal life.

Jesus then confronts the woman's sin because she is living with a man who is not her husband, and she had been married five times before! The woman is so blown away that Jesus knew all about her and her life that she ran into the village saying ***“Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah?”*** **John 4:29**

As a result of her encounter with Jesus, many came to trust and believe in Jesus as the Savior of the world! Who has come to know Jesus because of YOUR encounter with Him?

Responding to God: Let your encounter and your salvation fuel your desire to see others come to know Jesus as their Savior.

Day 15

“When the Last Goes First”

Key Verses: [Matthew 9:9-13](#)

If you read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation the very first book to tell you the story of Jesus is Matthew. It is written from a Jewish perspective to a Jewish audience. It begins by tracing the lineage of Jesus all the way back to Abraham. Just before the story of the calling of Matthew, in **Matthew 9**, is the story of Jesus healing the paralytic whose friends had lowered him through a roof to be healed. This was in a house full of Jewish teachers and scribes. It was in this setting where Jesus lets people know that He has the power to forgive sins. Jesus was letting them know He was the Messiah.

Right after this, Jesus told Matthew, a tax collector, to follow Him – be His disciple. Take a minute to read **Matthew 9:9-13**.

Matthew was viewed as a sinner by society. Tax collectors did not have a good reputation. Jesus was soon questioned by the Pharisees about **“eating with tax collectors and sinners.”** He told them that not only was He eating with them, but they were the entire reason He came. Matthew was an example of grace. Jesus had the power to forgive sins and then called sinners to follow Him. Matthew was one of the last people the “good” religious folks would have picked to be a close disciple of the Messiah. The very first book of the New Testament is named after him, a tax collector.

Responding to God: It does not matter what the world thinks of you. God has called you. Jesus has asked you to follow Him. Matthew was able to be with Jesus every day after being called. So are you. Spend some time with Him today and thank Him for His grace in your life.

Day 16

"Often Overlooked"

Key Verses: [Luke 19:1-10](#)

Open your Bible to **Luke 19:1-10**. It is a very famous story. Children's songs have been written about it. Go ahead and read it. I will wait.

It is a great story, right? Jesus comes into town and a small, corrupt man climbs into a tree to see Him. Jesus spots the man and invites Himself to stay in the man's home. This simple gesture was enough to change him. Zacchaeus immediately says he will give away half of what he owns to the poor and pay back four times the amount he had cheated anyone. It was beautiful.

Not everyone thought it was such a great story though. Once again, Jesus was criticized for hanging out with the wrong people. You see, according to the religious people, Zacchaeus was not worthy of anyone's attention or kindness. Look at the way he responded to the love shown by Jesus. He completely changed. Jesus even clarified that He came to ***"seek and save that which was lost" (v. 10)***. Zacchaeus was exactly the kind of man Jesus came to save.

The sad part is that there are a lot of people just like Zacchaeus that never know Jesus wants to save them. They do not know because we do not tell them. We do not think they are worthy. To us, they deserve what they are going to get, but they are exactly the kind of people we are supposed to tell. They need an encounter with God.

Responding to God: Take time to thank God that we do not get what we deserve. Thank Him for His mercy and grace and then commit to tell someone about it. They deserve it as much as we do.

Day 17

“Mary and Martha, Martha, Martha”

Key Verses: [Luke 10:38-42](#)

When I was a child I loved to watch the popular sitcom the *Brady Bunch*. The theme song, “Here’s the story.. of a man named Brady” makes me chuckle. I daydreamed of having a big family of my own one day, and God blessed me with a man named Brady to fulfill my unspoken desire. Maybe since the names sound so similar (Marcia & Martha) I am reminded of one episode in which the middle sister Jan cries out in frustration “Marcia, Marcia, Marcia!” Jan was exasperated.

With quite a contrast in tone, but in a similar way Jesus says in ***Luke 10:41, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part...”*** He was not irritated with Martha, but gently reminds Martha to set priorities. Many relate to Martha, she was just trying to be a good hostess. Jesus doesn’t say Martha’s way was wrong, just that Mary chose a better way. Both Mary and Martha loved Jesus, yet they each served Him differently.

We don’t all have an Alice (the Brady’s maid) or a Martha to handle all the daily necessities for us to sit at the feet of Jesus. We do all have the same number of hours in a day, therefore it would be wise to heed Jesus’ advice. There is a time and a place to work for the Lord as well as a proper time to just listen. Charles Spurgeon put it best, “You lose your strength as a worker if you forget your dependence as a believer.”

Responding to God: Are you so busy running around doing things for Jesus, yet have neglected spending time with Him? I challenge you to choose ***“the good part”*** and sit at the feet of Jesus. Carve out time to read His Word and find ways to worship Him with your life. ***“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” James 4:8a***

Day 18

“Time For A Change”

Key Verses: [Acts 9:1-19](#); [Romans 8:28](#)

Have you ever had an argument with someone where you just *knew* you were right, only to find out later that you were wrong? Were you embarrassed, or maybe even a little angry at yourself?

Now imagine believing something so strongly that you have people put to death over it. Now imagine being wrong about *that*.

Take a moment and read **Acts 9:1-19**. Saul was the ultimate Hebrew. He wanted to wipe out the Christians who he thought were committing heresy against God. Then God appeared to him. Saul had to be blinded to realize how spiritually blind he was. Then he became Paul. Much of what we read as scripture in the New Testament, God wrote through Paul. It is an amazing story of redemption. Saul only thought he knew God, but he had never truly encountered Him.

Many times we are okay with just going through the motions and not truly encountering God because we know that if we do, He might show us how wrong we are. If we really want to be in God’s presence, we must also want for Him to change us. The good part about that is He always changes us for the better. He may ask us to do something that makes us uncomfortable, but He promises that He causes all things to work together for our good (**Romans 8:28**). We can trust Him.

Responding to God: Spend some time in His presence today. Ask Him what needs to change in your life. Be open to actually allowing Him to make you better.

Day 19

“Not Your Average Jesus”

Key Verses: [Revelation 1:12-20](#)

You’ve seen him before. He has blue eyes and long brown hair. He speaks in gentle tones and has a softness about him. This may be the Hollywood version of Jesus that we are familiar with but this is not the image of Jesus that John saw.

John was in a difficult spot, having been exiled to the island of Patmos because of his ministry. In this context, God came to John in a dream and used him to communicate His truth to the seven churches of Asia Minor.

What John saw. John’s vision was of a resurrected and glorified Lord dressed in the robes of the High Priest. The purity of the Lord was clearly visible (white head and hair, eyes like fire) as well as His authority (feet of burnished bronze, voice like many waters). The resurrected Lord was present amongst His churches, symbolized by the seven golden lampstands. He held their leaders in His hands; symbolized by the stars.

What John did. The reaction to this overwhelming vision was typical of those in Scripture who encountered the holiness of God. John fell at his feet as though he were dead.

What John heard. God’s intention was to use John not to paralyze him. *“Do not be afraid.”* When John encountered Jesus in His authoritative glory he was ready to be His messenger.

John’s vision was unique and we need not assume that everyone whom God uses will have a similar experience. God’s messengers, however, possess a humility and courage produced by an awareness of Whom they serve.

Responding to God: Take a moment and read again the details of John’s vision. This is the Jesus you serve! Thank God for revealing Himself to you through His Word.

Day 20

“His Home is Where Your Heart Is”

Key Verses: [1 Corinthians 3:16](#); [1 Corinthians 6:19](#);
[Romans 8:11,15](#); [Galatians 2:20](#); [1 John 2:27](#)

Over the past few days, we have focused on people in the Bible who had unique encounters with God. They were all chosen to be used by God in specific ways. So have we. After reading about all of these people we might be tempted to think that encountering God has to involve some grand story, but that is not the case. In fact, we can encounter God in ordinary day to day life. We can actually *abide* in Christ.

Take a moment to read the verses listed above. The Holy Spirit dwells within us if we are children of God. We take Him wherever we go. The last verse in 1 John 2 tells us that we abide in Him and He abides in us. What an incredible gift!

There are many ways in which we can encounter God and share Him with others every day. (This devotion is one of them.) In the next few days, we will look at some specific ways we have been given to stay connected with Him and to be obedient. These are spiritual disciplines that we as Christians should be practicing. Some of them are very common and others are not talked about as much, but they are all Biblical, so we should pay attention to them.

Responding to God: Have you acknowledged God’s presence with you today? Have you thanked Him for never leaving you? He’s been with you the whole time you have been reading this. Stop for a moment and spend some time with Him. Pray. Sing. Do whatever you would like, but remember as you go about your day today that He is still with you.

Day 21

“God’s Word”

Key Verses: [2 Timothy 3:16-17](#)

I have some great news for you today! God has revealed Himself to us! It isn’t in some secret code, a hidden truth, or a treasure we hope to find. You probably have some version of it with you at this very moment as you read this devotion today. We have the Bible...probably many of them in our own household.

According to Lifeway Research, Americans have a positive view of the Bible and believe that scripture is filled with moral lessons for today. However, more than half of Americans have read little or none of the Bible. Less than 25% of those who have ever read a Bible have a plan for reading it each day. A third of Americans never read it on their own. Even among worship attendees, less than half read the Bible daily. The only time most Americans hear from the Bible is when someone else is reading it to them. Only 20% say they have read the Bible completely at least once. Statistically speaking, our beliefs about God’s Word and our actions don’t even remotely line up!

If you want to know God, you need to read His Word. Our primary encounters with God come through His Word and all other encounters with God need to be measured by His Word. The most basic and perhaps easiest of all the disciplines in the Christian life is reading scripture. We have been challenged as a church to read through scripture together this year. Download the app, get a read through the Bible in a year version, download an audio version of the Bible...just discipline yourself to take it in. It takes effort and discipline, but it will change your life!

Responding to God: If your growth in Godliness were measured by your Bible intake, where would you be? What is one thing you can do to improve your intake of God’s Word?

Day 22

“Pray!”

Key Verses: [John 10:11-15](#)

We are a two-animal family at our household. We have a cat and a dog. I need to tell you something about myself, I am an animal expert! At least with our animals. I can tell you when they are hungry, when they need to go outside, when they want to play and when they want to be left alone. I can even tell you what type of mood they are generally in by just looking at them. How can I do this you ask? It isn't a secret, it has come by spending years with these animals and learning how to communicate with them.

Jesus made it clear that His sheep can hear and know his voice. The real question for us is how do we do this? How do we come to hear the voice of the Living God? The answer is simple...by experience. We do this by reading His Word and through prayer. My animals know my voice through experience...and after all, we are often called sheep in scripture!

Like reading God's Word, the best way to learn how to pray is to do it. Ask other believers, read a book, figure out a plan and most importantly set aside time each day to pray to God. If you are new to this don't worry, you will figure it out and God will speak to you. According to scripture, Jesus expects us to pray, and we need to devote ourselves to pray and pray continually.

Responding to God: I believe that one of the main reasons so many Christians don't pray or have much of a prayer life is not that we don't want to, but that we don't plan to. What's your plan?

Day 23

“Fasting”

Key Verses: [Matthew 4:1-2](#), [Colossians 3:1-3a](#)

Think back to our church wide devotional in January 2018. On day one, we were challenged to consider doing a four-day media fast, as a means to reconnect with God. The spiritual discipline of fasting is so important in the life of the believer. Let's look at a couple of examples of fasting in the Bible. We read in **Acts 13:2-3**, ***“One day as these men were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Appoint Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I have called them.” So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way.”*** We see that in addition to prayer and worship, fasting is so important as it pertains to hearing from the Holy Spirit. We also see Jesus fasting in **Matthew 4:1-2**. Jesus was led by the Spirit to fast before being tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and nights, and relied on his heavenly Father to care for Him. If Jesus fasted, shouldn't we? Here is what happens when we fast.

Our attention is directed towards Him. **Colossians 3:2** says, ***“Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”*** Fasting allows us to do just that. Fasting is not an easy thing to do, and it often reveals where our faith truly lies. Fasting can help us answer the question, in whom, or in what, do I truly trust? When we surrender our comfort and desires during fasting, it leads to greater intimacy with our heavenly Father. Isn't that what we want?

Responding to God: I want to challenge you to include fasting as a spiritual discipline in your life. Fasting helps focus your attention so you can hear from who matters most.

Day 24

“Worship”

Key Verses: [Colossians 1:16](#), [Romans 12:1](#),
[Deuteronomy 6:4-5](#)

When we worship someone or something, we are attributing worth to that person or thing. We all worship something. Today I want to tell you that you were created to worship and praise God! Let that sink in. The end of **Colossians 1:16** says, ***“Everything was created through him and for him.”*** **Deuteronomy 6:5** says, ***“You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.”***

An encounter with God in the scriptures always led to a response. One of the most well-known encounters is Isaiah’s vision of God in **Isaiah 6**. He sees the glory of the LORD and seraphim praising God for His holiness! What is Isaiah’s response? Worship! Isaiah is confronted with his sinfulness when compared to the majesty and holiness of God! The same can be true for us when we meditate on God’s holiness, and His mercy for a sinful people! Our response to God’s revelation of Himself is worship.

Romans 12:1 says, ***“I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship Him.”*** We see from this passage that the true way to worship God is with our lives. How do we do that? We take seriously the responsibility of being ambassadors for Christ. We tell others who don’t know Jesus how they can know Him, and we worship because of what He has done in our own lives, and the lives of others!

Responding to God: Think about the character of God, His mercy, patience, kindness, and love, and worship Him!

Day 25

“Serving/Ministry”

Key Verses: [Mark 10:45](#); [Galatians 5:13](#);
[Matthew 20:26-27](#)

This one should really be a given. If we are going to be like Christ, we need to serve others. In **Mark 10:45** Jesus Himself tells us that He did not come to be served, but to serve. If we are going to claim to be followers of Jesus, we must serve others.

You are free to spend this day however you want, but the Bible tells us that we should use our freedom to serve others (**Galatians 5:13**). It is what we need to spend our time doing. The Bible tells us that the greatest among us are the servants, (**Matthew 20:26-27**) but most of us seem to be worried more about our own comfort than the needs of others.

I once heard a speaker say, “We all say we want to be servants, but how do we respond when somebody treats us like one?” That is an issue of the heart. If we have hearts of servants, we will want to serve and will not care how we are treated. I also heard another speaker say, “Just like a true fisherman loves fishing, not just catching fish, a true servant delights himself in the service, not in the reward.” It is worth it just to serve, even if we do not get to see the results. Those are up to God. He just wants our obedience.

Responding to God: Spend some time alone with God. Then try and think of some ways you can serve others today. It might be fulfilling a big need for someone, or just as simple as giving an encouraging word. It does not matter. The only thing that matters is that when you have the opportunity to serve someone, you do it.

Day 26

“Stewardship”

Key Verses: [Genesis 1:28, 2:15](#); [Proverbs 3:9](#);
[2 Corinthians 9:6-8](#)

When my grandmother passed away, my mother told me a story about her. When my mother was a teenager, she walked into the house and saw my grandmother putting food from the garden into jars and then into a box. When my mother asked what she was doing, my grandmother responded, “I’m tithing. This is a tenth of my labor.” My grandmother was not employed anywhere, but she worked that garden, and as a result, her pastor was well fed. She followed **Proverbs 3:9** (Go ahead. Read it.)

Whenever the subject of stewardship is mentioned in church, our first thought usually goes to money. Stewardship is much more than that. It is taking care of what we have been given and using it to produce for God’s glory. It is a discipline we must practice as a way of life. It is also one of the reasons we were created (**Genesis 1:28, 2:15**).

Read **2 Corinthians 9:6-8**. God wants us to give out of what has been given to us with a cheerful heart. He makes sure we have what we need for every good deed. That could be money, our time, our talents, or anything else we have been given. It all belongs to God. He has just given us the task of looking after it for Him. It is another way we are connected to God.

Responding to God: Think about all the blessings you have. Do you view them as the end, or as the means to serving God and others? Ask God how you can better use what you have for His glory today.

Day 27

“Evangelism”

Key Verses: [Matthew 28:16-20](#), [Acts 20:24](#)

I once heard a well-known pastor ask the question... *“Do you really believe what the Bible says about the eternal destination of unrepentant sinners? If so, how much do you have to hate the person next you to not share the good news of Jesus with them?”* If you’re anything like me, this statement probably hit you hard. What this pastor said has stuck with me for years!

Evangelism (sharing what we know about the good news of Jesus) is most likely not anything you haven’t heard about before. In fact, Jesus commands His followers in **Matthew 28:18, 19** *“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.”*

We also see Paul in **Acts 20:20-21, 24** saying *“I never shrank back from telling you what you needed to hear, either publicly or in your homes. I have had one message for Jews and Greeks alike-the necessity of repenting from sin and turning to God, and of having faith in our Lord Jesus.”* In **verse 24** Paul continues to say, *“My life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus- the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God.”* Do you agree with Paul, that being an ambassador for Christ is of the utmost importance? If so, evangelism is the biggest way that we are ambassadors for Christ. We were created to live for God’s glory after all, and that includes telling others about Him!

Responding to God: Ask God to give you His heart for the lost.

Day 28

“Unforgiveness”

Key Verse: [Colossians 3:13](#)

We have been challenged over the past eight days with the disciplines of the Christian life. If you are like me, you have probably experienced some conviction in your devotion time about where your actions and knowledge don't exactly line up. Today, and the next few devotions, we will think about those things that hinder us in our relationship with God. We can be in God's Word, pray, fast, worship, serve, give and evangelize but if our focus is not on God there will be little joy.

Today I want to challenge you concerning unforgiveness. James MacDonald defines forgiveness as the decision to release a person from the obligation that resulted when they injured you. Scripture commands us to be forgivers! It isn't an option in the Christian life. In fact, it isn't an option in life if you want to live an abundant life.

In Christ we have been forgiven of our sin debt that is impossible for us to pay on our own. The question that we have to answer is how can we who have been forgiven of so great a debt choose not to forgive others. God tells us to forgive because it is for our best. Unforgiveness is a cancer that spreads in our lives and the lives all around us. The good news is that with God's help, it can be conquered.

Responding to God: If your relationship with God feels distant or dry, there may be something in your life that is hindering the relationship. Your challenge today is to let God reveal to you those who you have not forgiven in your life. The challenge is to do something about it!

Day 29

“ _____-centric”

Key Verses: [Psalm 138-1-8](#)

Today's devotion begins with a fill-in-the-blank title. The word centric means in or at the center. So the question is what would be the answer in your life? There are a lot of good words that could go in the blank such as spouse, church, kids, family, health, sports, and job. In and of themselves, they are all good things. The only right answer to that question is God. We are to be God-centric in our lives... meaning to put him at the center and have all our other decisions revolve around our relationship with Him. When God isn't at the center, then really the only other answer to the question is self. When we are self-centric, we become the center of the universe which leads us away from the heart of what David wrote in ***Psalm 138***.

When we become the center of our own lives, I've found that gratitude fades when we begin to take for granted what God has done in our lives. When self becomes our center, we might even think He owes us blessings and gifts. It does not take long to develop an entitlement attitude. You can never be grateful for something you feel entitled to. When you feel what you have or should have is due to you, you will never be grateful to God. We see this in society and complain about it, but do we ever really see it in a spiritual sense in our own lives?

Responding to God: In today's reading David faced the wrath from his enemies. David experienced God's protection and provision both nationally and individually. Our dangers are not the same today, but they can be just as deadly in our spiritual lives if we let anything other than God have control in our lives.

Day 30

“Ingratitude”

Key Verses: [1 Thessalonians 5:18](#); [James 1:17](#);
[Luke 17:11-19](#); [Philippians 4:6](#)

One of the biggest hinderances to having a regular encounter with God is the feeling that we do not need one. We get in a routine and find that we are trying to fit God into it, rather than having Him control it. We just do not acknowledge that everything we have comes from Him (**James 1:17**). We feel like we did this on our own and so we can take care of it ourselves. We are like the nine lepers Jesus healed who did not come back to thank Him (**Luke 17:11-19**). We do not show Jesus any gratitude.

Quick, raise your hand if you have ever been upset with God because things did not work out the way you wanted them to. Your hand, as well as mine, should be high in the air. We like God to work on our terms instead of just being grateful that He is working on our behalf at all.

The Bible says in **1 Thessalonians 5:18** to give thanks in all situations. In **Philippians 4:6** we are to make requests to God with thanksgiving. There is a theme throughout the Bible and it is that God does not owe us anything – we owe Him, but He still gives graciously to us. It would do us good to remind ourselves of this. Every good thing in your life is a direct result of His grace. We should all do our best to let Him know how much we appreciate it.

Responding to God: Read **1 Thessalonians 5:18** and **Philippians 4:6** again. Make a commitment to live by those verses today.

Day 31

“Idolatry”

Key Verses: [Exodus 20:3](#); [Isaiah 42:8](#)

You know that holiday where people dress up like something they are not and hope people will give them something? I am speaking, of course, about Valentine’s Day. We truly go to great lengths to impress other people, but God wants the opposite from us. He wants us to be ourselves.

“Show me where you spend your time and your money, and I will show you what you worship.” That phrase has always scared me. When God gave us the ten commandments, the very first one was, ***“You shall have no other gods before Me.” Exodus 20:3*** God wants to be valued more than anything else in our life. But how often does God win when what He wants conflicts with what we want? Anything we put before God in our life is an idol, and God does not tolerate idols. Read ***Isaiah 42:8***. He is very clear about idolatry.

God does not want you to love anything more than Him because nothing else is worthy of it. He is the best thing for you. He does not want you to try and impress Him by being something you are not, but rather He wants to spend time with the real you. He should come first. He deserves it, and it is what is best for you and for everyone else.

“God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing. That is the key to history.” -C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity.

Responding to God: Make a list of things that have more of your attention than God does. They pray and give those to Him. Give Him your complete attention today.

Day 32

“What Keeps Us From Sharing?”

Key Verses: [Romans 1:16](#), [1 Peter 3:15](#), [Matthew 28:16-20](#)

We know that Jesus calls us to share the good news with those we come into contact with on a daily basis. This is not just something the pastors of our churches are supposed to do. The Great Commission is commanded of every believer!

Let's look at some reasons I believe that we are sometimes fearful of sharing the gospel with others. Maybe we want to share, but we don't exactly know what to say, or how to start the conversation. Let's look at what Paul says in **1 Corinthians 15:3-4**. ***“I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the scriptures said.”*** We can look at sharing the Gospel as passing on to others what we have received ourselves. Another reason we don't share is because sometimes the world views Christians as narrow-minded or foolish, which shouldn't surprise us in light of **1 Corinthians 1:18**. ***“The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God.”*** The last reason we don't share is that many people who call themselves Christians are spiritually apathetic. They just don't have a heart for the lost. In **Matthew 9:36** Jesus says, ***“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”*** We need to display the same urgency and compassion when it comes to sharing our faith.

Responding to God: Pray for courage to share!

Day 33

“The Gospel”

Key Verses: [John 3:16-17](#), [Romans 10:13](#)

What is the Gospel? In Greg Gilbert’s book, *“What Is the Gospel?”* he says *“The gospel of Jesus Christ stands at the very center of Christianity, and we Christians claim to be about the gospel above all else. It’s what we intend to found our lives upon and build our churches around. It’s what we speak to others about, and it’s what we pray they also will hear and believe.”* If we are called to share the gospel with others around us, it’s so important to know it! Let’s dive into a couple of passages of scripture.

John 3:16-17 says, ***“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.”*** Many Christians define the Gospel as the “Good News.” That is definitely true! We also see in ***Romans 10:13*** that ***“Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.”*** This is the message that we have been entrusted with to share with others! We see in ***Ephesians 3*** that it is God’s plan, that we as Christians, and His Church, make the Gospel known to all of the world! When is the last time you shared the Gospel with someone? We can’t control how they receive the good news, but we can control whether or not we share it with them.

Responding to God: Read ***1 Thessalonians 2:1-6***. Can you be trusted with the good news of Christ? If so, share it!

Day 34

“Baptism”

Key Verses: [Matthew 28:19](#), [Romans 6:3-4](#)

When Jesus speaks, we should listen! Jesus tells us in ***Matthew 28:19***, to ***“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”*** If we are to share the gospel of Jesus with others, baptism cannot be ignored! The word *baptism* comes from the Greek word *baptizo*, meaning to “plunge, dip, or immerse.” Baptism is such a beautiful picture of what is happening when we put our trust in Jesus for salvation.

Paul says in ***Romans 6:3-4***, ***“have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.”*** When we are immersed by water, it is a picture of us dying to ourselves and our sinful desires. When we come out of the water it is a picture of us being raised to new life in Christ, where we live for Him and His glory!

I love how Wayne Grudem says it in his book, *Systematic Theology*, *“Baptism, then, is not necessary for salvation. But it is necessary if we are to be obedient to Christ.”* Baptism is about obedience, and Jesus ordains the observance of it. It is symbolism of being unified with Him.

Responding to God: If you have made a commitment to follow Jesus, but have not been baptized yet, today is the day! Contact the church and tell us you are ready for baptism!

Day 35

“Teaching to Obey”

Key Verses: [Matthew 28:18-20](#), [1 Corinthians 11:1](#),
[James 1:22](#)

In **Matthew 28:20**, Jesus says, ***“Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*** This is the second half of the great commission. Biblical discipleship and growth are an important mark of a healthy and growing church! In his book, *Growing One Another: Discipleship in the Church*, Mark Denver states, *“Some today think that a person can be a “baby Christian” for a whole lifetime. Growth is treated as an optional extra for zealous disciples. But growth is a sign of life.”* As Christians, we should always be concerned with us, and others becoming more like Christ every day.

Discipleship within a church body can happen in many ways, but I will focus on what I believe are the most effective methods. We disciple others when we are in a small group together. Small groups meet together, pray together, and read God’s word together regularly. As we read Jesus’ words we remind one another of the importance of the words in front of us. After all, as Christians, we know God’s word is the best guide for our lives.

We also disciple one another when we live life together outside of the church walls. We can see this is how Jesus did most, if not all, of His discipling! Paul says in **1 Corinthians 11:1**, ***“And you should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ.”*** How do you imitate someone? You spend time around them, learning from them.

Responding to God: If you aren’t in a small group, join one! Disciple someone, or maybe, be willing to be discipled!

Day 36

“Clash of Worldviews”

Key Verses: [2 Corinthians 10:3-5](#)

Karen went to bed with the conversation on her mind. Karen had been praying for Michelle for quite some time but she was beginning to see that sharing her faith was not going to be as easy as she thought. She could not forget something that Michelle told her before their conversation came to an abrupt halt: *“That’s fine for you but I never bought into all that God stuff.”*

A worldview is what helps us make sense of the world around us. It includes such things as our beliefs about God, our guiding moral values, what we understand to be our purpose in life, and our attitudes towards material things. Our worldview fundamentally determines how we invest our time, energy, and resources. Christians hold to a Biblical worldview developed by evaluating all claims in light of God’s truth (take every thought captive). An evening in front of the TV will reveal a clash of worldviews as one is bombarded with a multitude of messages that promote the pursuit of pleasure, acquiring of wealth, and prioritizing of temporal matters.

Sharing Christ effectively with others requires that we grow in our faith, allowing God to shape and refine our worldview as we immerse ourselves in His word. But sharing with others also requires wisdom in dealing with those whose beliefs differ from our own. God can use us as we patiently point out the inconsistencies of non-biblical worldviews and show compassion for those whose worldviews have led them to despair. As we share the Gospel we point them to the only true source of hope.

Responding to God: How much of your attitudes toward work, money, and relationships are shaped by the Bible? Ask God to help you be discerning as you interact with those He brings across your path.

Day 37

“Apologetics: Defending Your Faith”

Key Verses: *1 Peter 3:15-16* “...always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. However, do this with gentleness and respect...” *2 Timothy 2:24-25* “...instructing his opponents with gentleness. Perhaps God will grant them repentance leading them to the knowledge of the truth.”

“How do you know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that God is real and that Jesus is the only way to be saved? What if you are wrong?” Goodness, how many times have I heard questions like this?! How would you respond? What do you say when “the Bible tells me so” doesn’t seem like enough? As we continue to grow in our relationship with Christ and to interact with the world as we fulfill the Great Commission, we will undoubtedly be asked to “give a reason for the hope” that is in us. As followers of Christ these questions provide an awesome opportunity for us to take part in God’s plan to bring salvation to the world and to restore humanity to Himself. The entire goal of Apologetics--the discipline of defending one’s faith--is to lovingly present a solid argument for Christianity so that others may be led to salvation and the **‘knowledge of the truth. (2 Tim 2:25)’** We serve a big and powerful God who is not phased by questions or doubts. Not only is He not phased, He answers one's doubts so completely that we can have absolute assurance that He is Truth. He not only gives us assurance through our experiences, but also through logic and reason.

Responding to God: Spend some time today considering and begin developing a defense for your faith. Prayerfully look for ways to share that hope with others today.

Day 38

“Your Story”

Key Verses: [1 Peter 3:15](#), [John 9](#)

When we talk about sharing the Gospel with others, we cannot downplay, or leave out our own story. Of course, we know that the message of Jesus is what has the power to save, but your story can be an encouragement to others as well! What do I mean by “your story?” Simply put, your story is how the Gospel of Jesus has changed and affected you in a way that you are never the same again. Your story does not have to be that of a drug addict, alcoholic, or murderer to be effective! Some people think that if their story isn’t one of a scary past, that it isn’t effective to share. This is simply not true!

Let’s look in **John 9** together. In this chapter, Jesus heals a man that had been blind since birth by spitting on the ground, making mud, and spreading it over the man’s eyes. The man’s vision was healed! He could see! And when the Pharisees asked the man what had happened, the man’s story was simple; ***“He put the mud over my eyes, and when I washed it away, I could see!”***

The Bible says in **2 Corinthians 5:17** ***“that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; and a new life has begun!”*** If you are in Christ, you are a new person! Not a new and improved version of yourself. You are altogether changed! Think about who you were before you knew Jesus, and now, afterwards. This is Your Story.

Responding to God: Write out your story in a way that it can be shared with someone in three minutes or less, then share it!

Day 39

“Evangelism Challenge”

Key Verses: [Romans 1:16](#), [1 Corinthians 2:1-2](#),
[Matthew 28:19-20](#)

Many of you know my good friend Scott Belmore. Over the years, he and I were able to eat out together many times. Something he did always stuck with me. Before we would ask God’s blessing on the food, he would ask the waiter or waitress if there was anything they wanted us to pray about for them. Sometimes they would say no, but many times it would open up opportunities for the Gospel! Scott was always making connections with people and many times it paved the way for the Gospel. He looked for opportunities to be used by God in this way.

We know the Great Commission tells us in **Matthew 28:19-20** to ***“go and make disciples of all nations...”*** This can also be said in this way, “as you are going, make disciples of all nations.” What’s the first step in making a disciple? Telling them about the good news of Jesus! As we are going through life, we need to slow down, and look for opportunities every day where the Gospel can take root in someone’s heart. **Romans 1:16** says, ***“For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes- the Jew first and also the Gentile.”*** The Gospel has power when it is proclaimed to someone else!

So, I challenge you to look for every opportunity in life to proclaim this Good News to someone who hasn’t heard it! Ask God to help you slow down, and ask Him to make you aware of the opportunities around you! Someone’s very soul is at stake.

Responding to God: Read **1 Corinthians 2:1-2**.
Be encouraged by Paul’s words.

Day 40

“Encountering God, Sharing the Gospel”

Key Verses: [2 Corinthians 5:11](#)

As you have hopefully figured out by this point in time, our theme for 2019 is Encountering God, Sharing the Gospel. In this 40th devotional thought as we start 2019, I want to give you a final challenge in these areas.

When it comes to Encountering God, I want to give you two challenges. One is personal, one is corporate. On a personal level, your challenge is to seek God and let Him encounter you personally. You have read about the spiritual disciplines, my challenge is to let the Lord speak to you as you discipline yourself to do them. This isn't a New Years resolution, it is a life changing decision that can impact your life in ways you can't even imagine. God wants to encounter you personally! It isn't a secret that you have to learn, it is there for you... take it! I also want to challenge you to Encounter God corporately through Highland Baptist Church in regular worship and small group attendance. Don't let church be something you do if you have nothing else going on. Make it a priority. Again, this is a decision you and your family have to make, but it is one that can change your life and the lives of your family members! Time invested with your church family is commanded and for your benefit!

The second challenge is to Share the Gospel. Start where you are. Learn to share what God has done for you. Take advantage of the classes that have already started on Wednesday evenings that can help equip you to share your faith. We are all called to share the Gospel. Without it, those around us are walking down the wide path in life that leads to destruction and eternity without the presence of God. I hope you choose to Encounter God and Share the Gospel this year!

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