

DAY 1

JESUS CAME TO SERVE

Matthew 20:28 (NLT)

“For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give My life as a ransom for many.”

When Jesus Christ stood up, wrapped a towel around His waist and washed His disciples’ dirty feet, He forever defined the character of a true servant. Here’s the Son of God, Creator of the universe, breaking through human history and becoming a man. Jesus’ expression of servanthood is a reminder that authentic Christianity starts with you. It’s found not in being served but in serving others. As you begin this forty-day journey and invest your one and only life, know that Jesus Christ is calling you to dedicate your life to serving others.

Jesus left the comfort of heaven and endured the depravity of earth just so He could sacrificially give His life away to redeem your sins. You will only discover the deeper purpose of your life when you embrace that fundamental truth. The apostle Paul beautifully captures this when he writes, “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:5-8, NIV).

What a powerful description of Christ’s attitude and nature! Over the next forty days, may the image of Jesus Christ washing the feet of His friends speak to you about how you are living your one life. Examine the patterns and motives behind your daily actions as you reflect on the eternal impact you are making on the lives you encounter. Take some additional time today to pause and reflect on the incredible fact that God, through Jesus Christ, came to earth to serve.



WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO ME?

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YOU ARE CALLED TO SERVE

Ephesians 6:7-8a

Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does,

Most Americans are familiar with the popular U.S. Army recruiting poster displaying a picture of Uncle Sam. This World War I poster depicts an elderly gentleman wearing a tall top hat and pointing his finger right in your face with a bold caption that reads, “I WANT YOU!”

While this longstanding image conveys a call to serve your country, there’s an even higher calling on your life—to serve Christ and others in His name. Serving the Lord isn’t a responsibility reserved for just a few people; it’s for each and every disciple of Christ. As Jesus began His public ministry, He encountered two young men named Peter and Andrew. Jesus called to them and said, “Come follow Me.” In other words, He looked at these two young men and said, “I WANT YOU! I think you have what it takes to be My disciples.” And immediately they left their fishing nets and followed Him. The reality is no one really chooses God, instead God chooses you! As Jesus said to His disciples on the night He was betrayed, “You didn’t choose Me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit that will last I command you to love each other” (John 15:16-17, NLT). When it comes to serving the Lord, you really don’t have a choice. Responding to the call to serve is not voluntary for all true disciples, it is mandatory.

As a follower of Christ, will you answer His call to inspire, influence and impact your world by serving Him and others? As you step into your destiny and discover where you can best serve, your life will begin to fulfill the purposes of God. God is looking for a few good men and women. HE WANTS YOU!



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A LIFE THAT IS WORTHY

Colossians 1:10 (NIV)

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work,

One of the greatest challenges you face as a believer is learning to see yourself through the eyes of God. Regardless of where you've been or what you've done, you need to understand the image God has of you. The opening chapter of Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus provides a beautiful description of how God views you. You are blessed, chosen, adopted, accepted, redeemed, forgiven and filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1).

That's how God sees you! And it is also a reminder of all God has done for you. But what is your response? Are you living up to the calling God has placed on your life? Paul continues his letter to the Ephesians by saying, "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (Ephesians 4:1, NIV). In other words, it's as though God is saying, "I have just told you about all I have done for you, now let Me tell you what you can do for Me."

If a person's worthiness before God was based upon his or her own merits, no one would be an eligible candidate for God's blessings because worthiness is found only by daily accepting God's call to live your life in a manner that is pleasing to Him. God isn't demanding perfection, but He is calling you to a higher level of service and sacrifice.

God wants to raise the bar of expectation for your life today. He is calling you to impact the lives of others. Through His strength and power, you can live a life that is worthy. Are you willing and ready to respond?



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MAKE YOUR ONE LIFE COUNT

Nehemiah 2:4-5 (NIV)

Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it.”

In September of 1776, a young American patriot named Nathan Hale was captured by the British as a spy behind enemy lines and sentenced to death by execution. The loss of this one life in a time of war may have gone unnoticed were it not for his final words. As Hale stood proudly awaiting his death, he spoke these famous words, “I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country.” Those words infused the American troops with greater courage and helped unite their efforts to defeat the enemy.

So can one life really make a difference? Absolutely! There are countless stories throughout history of people, like Nathan Hale, who made a profound difference because they were willing to do whatever it took to make their one life count.

The Bible tells the story of Nehemiah, a man who dedicated his life to making a difference. As cupbearer to the king of Persia, Nehemiah held a position of great influence and power, but he never forgot the people living in his native land. When he received word about the terrible conditions in Jerusalem, he wept and mourned for days. Because their walls had been destroyed, Nehemiah knew the people who lived in Jerusalem were defenseless against enemies. This news did not have a direct impact on Nehemiah, but he was a man of prayer whose heart was deeply moved with compassion for a city he had never been to and a people he had never met. God took notice of this one life and determined to use Nehemiah to help restore a broken nation.



This story is a reminder that God is looking for people who are willing to take a risk and get involved in the lives of others. As you examine your life today, when was the last time you were deeply moved by a tragic event or a disturbing situation? The Lord is searching for people of compassion willing to impact the lives of others. Are you in touch with the needs of those around you, and are you sensitive to the voice of God calling you to make a difference? Make your one life count today!

WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO ME?

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A DEFINING MOMENT

Nehemiah 2:17-18b (NIV)

Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.” ...

They replied, “Let us start rebuilding.” So they began this good work.

The pages of history reveal there are always defining moments which shape a nation or launch a movement. One example in recent American history is the “I Have a Dream” speech given by civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. His words helped inspire a nation of young Americans to participate in a cause bigger than any one individual. It took just one voice of inspiration to mobilize people to commit to a cause which changed an *entire* nation.

Nehemiah was also a voice of inspiration to a city of broken people surrounded by broken walls. After careful investigation of the ruins in Jerusalem, this former cupbearer stood before the people and passionately described the situation existing within the city. He recounted the story of how he was called by God and sent by the king of Persia to lead this great work. Then came the moment of truth, a defining moment in the history of this great city: Would the people of Jerusalem follow Nehemiah’s call to rebuild the walls of their city? Would they risk their lives for a cause so much greater than themselves?

In your life there are similar moments in time when a series of events can define your life and set you on a new course. God is challenging you to prayerfully consider how you can make a difference with your one and only life. As in the days of Nehemiah, you are faced with a moment in history that will define you. If you’re willing to fully participate, it will transform your life forever!



WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO ME?

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A DIVINE MISSION

Nehemiah 2:18a (NIV)

I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me.

Some people are passionate about their favorite sports team while others are passionate about hunting, fishing, music and a thousand other things. God created you to be a passionate person who knows how to really enjoy life; however, He's more concerned about your passion for serving Him. As Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor [passion], serving the Lord" (Romans 12:11, NIV).

Nehemiah was a passionate man, and his passion for God is evident in the prayer he offered to the Lord when confronted with the news that the walls of Jerusalem laid in ruin. For over four months he poured out his heart to God. He fasted and prayed until God showed him how his life would be used to impact that city.

Rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem was not merely a human pursuit. It was a divine mission carried out by a devoted man who heard from God and attempted to follow His plan. As Nehemiah stood before the people of Jerusalem, he told them that God's hand was divinely guiding the reconstruction project. God had already supplied all the resources necessary to begin this great work. Now it was simply up to the people to give of themselves and honor God with their time and abilities.

What are you passionate about today? God is calling you to accept a divine mission centered on building walls of ministry and reclaiming broken lives through His power. He is calling you to invest your one life in a passionate pursuit to reach hurting people and apply the healing love of God to their painful wounds.



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A DETERMINED MOVEMENT

Nehemiah 4:14 (NLT)

Then as I looked over the situation, I called together the leaders and the people and said to them, “Don’t be afraid of the enemy! Remember the Lord, who is great and glorious, and fight for your friends, your families, and your homes!”

From the dawn of time, every genuine move of God has faced strong opposition from the forces of evil and darkness. The enemies of the Lord will always exhaust all their options in an effort to resist the expansion of God’s kingdom on earth. It is vital for every believer to recognize this spiritual truth and not back down. The battle of good versus evil is real, and you must be willing to fight for what you believe.

When Nehemiah and the people began to restore Jerusalem by rebuilding the city walls, they, too, faced opposition; first in the form of ridicule, then criticism. As real progress became evident, the insults turned into threats of violence and destruction.

It’s important to recognize that Nehemiah’s plan for rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem called for everyone to make a contribution. It required a real team effort to complete the project quickly. However, before the walls were completely restored, the enemies of the Lord struck fear in the hearts of the people with hollow threats of destruction. Faced with this opposition, Nehemiah stood before the people and encouraged them to remember that God was on their side and they needed to fight—for their friends, their families and their homes! His speech ignited a passion in the people, and the Lord’s work moved forward (Nehemiah 4:14). After only 52 days of hard labor, the walls, which had lain in ruin for decades, were completely rebuilt and God’s glory was restored.



God wants to do a work in your life today, but don't be surprised when you face opposition from the enemy. Satan will try to steal the victory which God has placed within your grasp. Renew your commitment to stand firm in the face of opposition, and don't give the enemy a foothold in your life. Always be prepared to confront any opposition as you serve the Lord.

WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO ME?

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DO YOU LOVE GOD?

Mark 12:30-31 (NIV)

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

Shortly after His resurrection, Jesus gathered His disciples for a meal. When they finished eating, He invited Peter to take a walk with Him. This was the first time they had been alone since Peter denied knowing Him—not just once, but three times! To make things worse, just before Jesus was arrested and killed, Peter boastfully claimed he would never desert Jesus, even if it meant he would die with Him (Matthew 26:33-35). Now he had to look Jesus in the eye. Can you imagine how Peter must have felt?

As they walked, Jesus asked Peter a fundamental and profound question that cut to the very core of Peter’s life: “Do you love Me?” The question was asked three times. Each time Peter assured the Lord that his love was genuinely true, and Jesus responded by telling Peter to feed His sheep (John 21). At that moment Peter found himself at a crossroads. Three years earlier Jesus had called Peter to follow Him and be a “fisher of men” (Matthew 4:19). But was Peter still committed to serve? Was he still willing to die for Jesus? Had anything changed, or was Peter still determined to follow the calling of a true disciple?

Jesus’ interaction with Peter teaches us that authentic, God-inspired love is the most basic qualification to serve God. Just as Peter was called to serve out of love, Jesus shows us that true ministry only takes place where love is genuine and real.

How deep is your love and devotion for Jesus? Are you willing to sacrifice your all for Him? God desires to work in your life and reach others with His love through you. Today, look for opportunities to share God’s love with others in personal ways.



WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO ME?

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CAN YOU TRUST GOD?

Psalm 9:10 (NIV)

Those who know Your name will trust in You, for You, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek You.

Every winter, Lake Winnebago, Wisconsin's largest land-locked lake, freezes over completely. The ice gets so thick people can drive their cars across it and delivery planes can even land on it! However, every spring somebody pushes the envelope a little too far. As warmer temperatures arrive, someone misjudges the thickness of the ice and their car, along with all the passengers, sinks into the icy waters of the lake.

There's a valuable lesson to learn from that illustration. When you mistakenly place your trust in something you think is secure, you end up living on thin ice. The prophet Jeremiah offers wise counsel from the Lord on this issue of trust. In Jeremiah 17 God says, "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord ... But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him ..." (Jeremiah 17:5-8, NIV).

You need to daily evaluate the condition of your life and examine where you place your trust. You must trust that God is going to work in your life as well as the lives of those you are serving. When you place your trust and confidence in the Lord, you can live each day in the assurance of His promises. Remember the Bible tells you to, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6). He will never fail you!



WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO ME?

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CAN GOD TRUST YOU?

1 Peter 4:10 (NLT)

God has given gifts to each of you from His great variety of spiritual gifts. Manage them well so that God's generosity can flow through you.

Are you trustworthy? Can you be trusted with a confidential matter or an important project that has to be completed on time? It's often extremely difficult to know who you can really trust. As a Christian you may even struggle with placing your confidence and trust in God. The issue of trust is often looked at from the perspective of the individual: Can you trust God?

But perhaps another question should also be considered: Can God trust you? You need to evaluate whether or not God can trust you with the gifts, talents and abilities He's invested into your life. Can He trust you with His purpose for your life and His eternal plan of redemption for the world?

Jesus addressed this issue of trust in His story about a man who went on a long trip. Before leaving, he called his three servants together. To one he gave five talents of money, another was given two talents and to the third servant he gave one. At the story's conclusion, the servants who were faithful and trustworthy were blessed and actually given more as a reward for their diligent work (Matthew 25). These talents represent basically anything God entrusts to you. It can be your resources, your personal abilities or simply opportunities to serve. Whatever it may be, God is calling you to wisely steward your gifts and abilities as you serve others.

Today, take stock of the many talents God is investing in your life. How wisely are you using those gifts, talents and abilities to help change the lives of others?



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HEARING THE VOICE OF GOD

Hebrews 4:7b

“Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.”

Have you ever experienced a time when you felt incredible pressure to make a decision with potentially huge ramifications but couldn't decide what to do? And when you turned to God desperately seeking answers, was He frustratingly silent? It often appears that God waits until right before a decision has to be made and then gives you His answer. Even though they are difficult to go through, He knows that pressure-filled situations will build your faith and help you develop an even greater dependency on Him.

We are aware of our desperate need to hear God's voice when facing doubt, confusion and stress. At times we get irritated with God because we don't understand that He desires to give us more than just advice. He wants to be our companion and helper. We are desperate to know what to do, but God is desperate for us to know Him. God loves you more intensely than you will ever comprehend. He wants you to draw closer to Him, because an intimate relationship with Him is both your deepest need and your most fulfilling destiny.

Hearing God isn't a luxury; it's a necessity. We may want a quick five-minute consultation, but God wants us on a life-long journey of ever-increasing intimacy with Him. The best news is that as a child of God you have the capacity to hear His voice every day. It is neither a mystical nor a miraculous phenomenon. The Bible clearly demonstrates that hearing God's voice is both natural and normal. God speaks in countless ways, primarily through His Word but also through godly friends, subtle impressions and normal activities of life.

Don't let busyness or fatigue keep you from listening to God's voice. Take time away from the chaos of life to communicate with your Creator. Read God's word, then sit and meditate on His promises, and write down your thoughts.



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LEADING OF THE SPIRIT

Romans 8:14 (NIV)

...because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

In the book of Acts, Luke tells the story about Philip and the Ethiopian. An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip one day and told him to travel down a desolate road leading into the desert. Obeying the Lord, Philip set off on his journey. He eventually encountered a high official from the Ethiopian government riding in a chariot and reading Scripture from the book of Isaiah. The Holy Spirit told Philip to climb into the quickly-moving chariot. So Philip ran alongside the chariot and asked the man if he understood what he was reading. The Ethiopian didn't understand and invited Philip into the chariot to explain the Scriptures to him. Philip shared the good news about Jesus, the Ethiopian believed Philip's message and he asked to be baptized (Acts 8:26-40).

The Holy Spirit led Philip into the middle of the desert just to share the gospel with one man. Like Philip, when you choose to allow the Holy Spirit to lead you each day, get ready for an exciting adventure. Through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, God is calling you to believe things you cannot see, to become someone you are not and to accomplish feats that are clearly beyond your abilities. When you allow Him to work in your life, your desires will shift from the ordinary to the supernatural. You will dream bigger dreams and gain divine creativity about your business, your family and your world. When you delight in God and allow the Holy Spirit to lead you each day, you will live a life that has real meaning and purpose.

Ask the Lord to take control of every meeting, every assignment and every challenge you will face today. Trust that God will lead you by His Spirit, and then take a few minutes each week to reflect back on how God has guided your decisions and influenced your actions.



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USING YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS TO SERVE OTHERS

1 Peter 4:10 (NLT)

God has given gifts to each of you from His great variety of spiritual gifts. Manage them well so that God's generosity can flow through you.

For thousands of years people believed the planets and stars of the solar system revolved around the earth. Today we no longer believe the earth is the center of the universe; however, some people act as though they are the center of the universe. Unfortunately, the reality is that American culture has produced multiple generations of people who view the church as a commodity they can consume and not a place where they should give of themselves. Such self-centered, self-absorbed thinking hinders you from experiencing the fullness of God and the joy found in making a difference in the life of another person.

Life's greatest challenge is living your one life as Jesus lived His. He left the splendor of heaven and became fully human. He served others. He loved others. He gave His life away. And He challenges you to do the same. As a believer you are commissioned by God and have a divine mandate to love others as completely and with the same intensity as you love Him. Your mission field is people—your neighbors, co-workers, family and friends. To assist you in your mission, you have spiritual gifts—special abilities given by God to every believer—that provide the power you need to encourage, strengthen, teach, comfort, bless and love others.

Set aside time this week to serve someone. As you give your time, talents and resources, you will discover the joy of serving. Use your gifts to impact others with God's grace and love.



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STAYING CONNECTED TO GOD'S POWER

Isaiah 40:29-31a

He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength ...

In the late 1800s, British historian Lord Acton observed that a person's sense of morality lessens as his or her power increases. In light of his observation, he penned the famous phrase, "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." While this may be true when individuals pursue human power for personal gain, a distinction needs to be made when followers of Christ pursue God's power to live a godly life. The time you dedicate to seeking God will greatly impact the level of power you will experience in living for Him.

The way you spend your time reveals two things about your life. First, how you spend your time exposes whether or not you are truly born again. Not spending time pursuing or maintaining a relationship with someone is an indication that you either don't know them or don't want to know them. The same can be said for your desire to know God. Second, it reveals your level of dependence upon the Holy Spirit. When you don't spend time praying and seeking the Lord, you are trusting in your own power and not in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Before Pentecost, 120 of God's people gathered in a room and expectantly waited for 10 days. When the Holy Spirit arrived, the room was shaken to its foundation, and the world was forever changed. You will never experience God's power until you have given Him your time. He will not barter His power for your things or your money. God wants you. Why? Because when He gets you, you get Him!



WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO ME?

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THE TENDERNESS OF BROKENNESS

Psalm 51:16-17 (NIV)

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

One day Jesus was talking to a group of self-righteous people who looked down on others. Wanting to teach them a lesson about brokenness, He told a story about two men from drastically different backgrounds who came to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up, prayed about himself and thanked God for his own goodness while ridiculing the sinfulness of the tax collector. He offered no remorse for his sins, but reminded God of all his righteous deeds. In contrast, the tax collector humbly stood at the back of the Temple, bowed his head, beat his breast and cried out a prayer of repentance, begging for the mercy of God to save him (Luke 18:9-14).

This simple story is full of profound truths about the heart of a true disciple. It's a reminder that God looks at an individual's character and not at one's status or external appearance. Like the tax collector, God desires for people to have a clear picture of their sinfulness and a deep longing to be restored into right relationship with Him. Only from a foundation of brokenness and forgiveness can God develop the character of a true disciple.

Serving God requires ruthless introspection. The Bible is clear that brokenness must occur before you can be used by God. As King David wrote after his adulterous affair with Bathsheba, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise" (Psalm 51:16-17, NIV). Although it may appear like weakness, your brokenness simply provides God with the perfect opportunity to do an amazing work in you. As you allow God to cut away the self-righteous areas of your life, your character will be reshaped in His image!



WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO ME?

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PUTTING OTHERS FIRST

John 15:13 (NIV)

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

In the 1950s, five young missionaries felt a deep calling to share the gospel with the Auca Indians, a violent tribe in the rain forests of Ecuador. Each man was prepared to put his life on the line for the opportunity to convey God's love. In January 1956, these five men made contact with the Aucas who brutally attacked and killed them. Even though the missionaries had weapons, they didn't retaliate, but instead spoke words of love and friendship with their dying breath. Because of their courage and willingness to place the lives of the Aucas before their own, their sacrifice was not made in vain. Others were later inspired to carry on their mission, and ultimately, the tribe accepted the life-changing message of Jesus Christ.

The missionaries had a deep understanding of Christ's compassion and sacrifice. Jim Elliot, one of the men killed that day, once wrote in his journal, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." Those five men understood that if you desire to serve God, you must be willing to look beyond yourself and put others first. A true disciple is characterized by a passionate commitment to move beyond selfishness and selflessly serve others. You may never have to choose between life and death for the sake of others, yet each day you must decide whether or not you're willing to sacrifice for someone else's benefit without concern for what you might receive in return.

God is searching for people willing to put their lives on the line. Are you genuinely interested in meeting the needs of others before your own? Ask the Lord to give you a heart of compassion and show you how to put others first.



WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO ME?

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NURTURING A HEART OF HUMBLENESS

Philippians 2:3-4 (NIV)

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

One of the most notable figures of the twentieth century is former heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali. Beyond his enormous boxing talents, Ali is perhaps best known for his outspoken nature and self-proclaimed greatness. In fact he even once said, “When you’re as great as I am, it’s hard to be humble.” This kind of self-exalting attitude is an insult to God. The Bible clearly teaches that God resists the proud, but willingly gives His grace to everyone whose character is shaped by humility (James 4:6).

Everything within God opposes an attitude of arrogance and pride. Jesus Christ also confronted this same issue when He said, “But the greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted” (Matthew 23:11-12, NASB). That statement is a radical departure from typical cultural expressions of greatness, both in Jesus’ day and in ours, and places an emphasis on nurturing a heart of humility.

An authentic life of humility only comes from understanding who God truly is and celebrating your smallness in light of His greatness. It’s a defining mark of a genuine servant of God. You can never legitimately claim true greatness for yourself. Greatness is revealed in humbling yourself and living the unselfish life of a servant willing to care for the needs of others. Today, confront any signs of selfishness and pride that may be in your heart. Allow God to shape your character by transforming your heart from selfish living to selfless giving!



WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO ME?

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ENCOURAGING OTHERS

Hebrews 10:24 (NLT)

Think of ways to encourage one another to outbursts of love and good deeds.

Have you ever felt left out? Were you ever the last one chosen for a game at school? Maybe you didn't make the final cut for a high school play, sports team or cheerleading squad. Perhaps you didn't get the well-deserved promotion at work. The fact is throughout your life you will experience times of discouragement, confusion and disappointment. It's part of the trials of life.

Think of how Saul (also called Paul) must have felt shortly after his dramatic conversion when he tried to join the other disciples in Jerusalem only to be rejected. Saul was a man who had experienced a genuine change and total spiritual transformation, yet the Christians in Jerusalem weren't convinced that he truly was a new man. It is possible that Saul would never have been accepted by the church leaders were it not for the courageous efforts of Barnabas (whose name literally means "son of encouragement"). The Bible states that "Barnabas took him [Saul] and brought him to the apostles" (Acts 9:27a). Saul needed someone to look beyond his reputation and see the heart of a changed man. Barnabas' support was a tremendous encouragement to Saul as he fervently pursued God's plan for his life.

Everyone needs supportive friends like Barnabas who believe in them when they are worn down by the demands of life. That's why you are called by God to be sensitive to those around you who need encouragement. God wants people to take the time and effort to build up others. Will you be that kind of person? Look for opportunities to speak an encouraging word or perform an act of kindness that really makes a difference in someone's life!



WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO ME?

[illegible]

COUNTING THE COST

Luke 14:26-28a (NLT)

If you want to be My follower you must love Me more than your own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, more than your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be My disciple. And you cannot be My disciple if you do not carry your own cross and follow Me. But don't begin until you count the cost.

Have you ever encountered overzealous parents at a children's sporting event? You know the ones who obnoxiously cheer and can't believe their child would ever commit a foul or make a mistake? They are constantly pushing their kids to be successful, achieve great things and take what they can get from life.

It's natural for parents to want the best for their children. Perhaps that's why most people can relate to the ambitious mother who approached Jesus one day with an unusual request. She wanted her two sons, James and John, to have the best seats in heaven right next to Jesus. He decided to respond to the bold request of this insistent parent with a question for the sons, "Can you drink the cup [of suffering] I am going to drink?" (Matthew 20:22, NIV). In other words, have you first counted the cost? It's a good question for every follower of Christ to consider.

There is nothing wrong with ambition and a desire to achieve great things in life as long as those desires are being shaped by God. Before His ascension, Jesus called all His disciples together and painted the real picture of success and greatness (Matthew 28). In contrast to the ways of the world, He said the definition of true greatness is found in your willingness to gladly serve others—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve.

Following Jesus Christ will be costly. He demands all of you—that means everything! Have you counted the cost today? The price is steep, but the rewards are eternal!



WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO ME?

[illegible]

DON'T GIVE UP

Galatians 6:9-10 (NLT)

So don't get tired of doing what is good. Don't get discouraged and give up, for we will reap a harvest of blessing at the appropriate time. Whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone, especially to our Christian brothers and sisters.

On January 3, 1993, the Buffalo Bills pulled off one of the greatest comebacks in the history of professional football. Unfortunately, thousands of fans who attended the game missed it. The Bills were down 35-3 in the third quarter, and the stadium began to empty as disappointed fans made their way to the parking lot. The Houston Oilers had what appeared to be an insurmountable lead, and the home team fans were distraught. They gave up. Those who left the stadium that day missed a rare opportunity to witness history in the making. The Buffalo Bills mounted an astonishing comeback and won the game in overtime 41-38.

The Gospel of Luke tells a story about two followers of Jesus Christ who also gave up too soon. They, along with the other eleven disciples, witnessed His death, and heard the report that Jesus had risen from the dead. Yet these two men didn't break into celebration or dance in the streets. Instead, they chose to pack up their belongings and head to a town called Emmaus. Their hopes and dreams were shattered. They gave up. In fact, when a "stranger" joined them on their journey and questioned them about their sadness, the men simply replied, "We had hoped that Jesus was the one who would redeem Israel." The two men's disappointment was so intense, they didn't realize the "stranger" they were walking and talking with was actually Jesus. They were right in the middle of experiencing the greatest miracle in all of history, and they didn't even know it!



When all your efforts to do good and follow Christ don't bring the kind of results you had hoped for, what do you do? Do you get discouraged? Do you feel like giving up? The Bible encourages you to not grow weary in doing good. If you persevere, you'll receive God's blessing both here on earth and for all eternity. So don't walk out on God; don't give up! Instead, stick to the commitment you made to always serve the Lord and be a part of making history!

WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO ME?

[illegible]

WAITING ON GOD

Isaiah 40:31

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

Patience is a virtue, but it's seldom thought about and even more rarely displayed in a society driven by microwaves, fast food and instant results. People often find it difficult to wait for anything. Time is money, and the clock is constantly ticking. For Christians, taking time to wait on God and seek the outpouring of His Spirit is not idle time, rather it is time well spent.

After delivering His final words of encouragement to His friends before ascending to heaven, Jesus gave this closing instruction: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift My Father promised, which you have heard Me speak about" (Acts 1:4, NIV). In other words, Jesus told them not to strike out on their own. He didn't want them to try and live the life He had called them to or do His work with their own strength and abilities. He wanted them to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And wait they did. For ten days they committed to isolate themselves together in the Upper Room to pray and wait. Respected Christian author Andrew Murray captures the scene beautifully and then raises a simple but profound question: "Jesus had died upon the earth and had conquered sin. He had been raised from the dead, lifted up to the Father's throne and glorified. He had received the Holy Spirit from the Father, so that He could give Him to the believers, and yet, despite all of this, there were 10 days of waiting in heaven. Why?"



When it comes to understanding God's timing, you may never know the answer to the question why. But rest assured, the discipline of waiting on God to move is always time well invested. And the good news is He promises to pour out His Spirit upon all who wait on Him. So here's the real question: Are you willing to wait for God to move?

WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO ME?

[illegible]

PARTNERING WITH GOD TO CHANGE THE WORLD

Ephesians 3:20 (MSG)

God can do anything—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams.

In his classic play *Macbeth*, William Shakespeare penned the following observation about life: “Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” This echoes the sentiment expressed by Solomon in the book of *Ecclesiastes* years ago when he said, “As I looked at everything I had worked so hard to accomplish, it was all so meaningless. It was like chasing the wind. There was nothing really worthwhile anywhere” (*Ecclesiastes* 2:11, NLT). The sense of futility within both these statements rings true if you’re living life apart from God.

There is no purpose to life without God. Jesus said, “apart from Me, you can do nothing” (*John* 15:5). On our own, our accomplishments don’t amount to anything. However when you live your life in full submission to God, you can’t even begin to imagine what God is going to accomplish in and through you. God desires to change the world by empowering ordinary people—members of His body—to bring the message of salvation to the world around them.

Bill Hybels, Pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, asks this: “What would it feel like to lay your head on your pillow at night and say, ‘You know what I did today? I teamed up with God to change the world?’ ... God is inviting you to join Him on the incredible mission of changing the world!” God is calling you to take your one life and use it to transform the lives of those around you as well as the lives of people all around the world. Commit yourself to this kind of partnership with God, and discover His ability to change the world through you!



Being a participant in God's plan to change the world is far more exciting than being a spectator. Don't merely watch other people change the world; join them! If you're not currently serving in a place of ministry, make the decision today to get involved and start serving.

WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO ME?

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LEARNING TO TRULY LOVE OTHERS

1 John 4:7-8 (NKJV)

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

Elvis Presley and Willie Nelson both recorded the very popular song, “You Were Always on My Mind.” The message of this song may lead you to think about what is always on your mind. Is it your career? Do you think about your possessions? Now consider this question, “What is always on Jesus’ mind?” If you take a look through the Gospels, the answer is obvious: People are always on Jesus’ mind.

People were at the heart of everything Jesus did while on earth. He cared for them, loved them and reached out to them. Even while hanging on a cross, people were on Jesus’ mind. There has never been a person more preoccupied with people than Jesus. He understood that every person He met was either going to spend eternity with Him or apart from Him. Jesus knew that the only thing which lasts forever is people.

Since your goal is to be like Jesus, you too need to live your life with others constantly on your mind. The reality is that it’s impossible to love God without loving others. The Bible says the only way the world can know you are His disciple is by your love for others (John 13:35). Every action you take and every word you speak needs to be carefully weighed in light of its impact on the lives of others. Understand that this lifestyle of love doesn’t come easily nor is it established overnight. It requires a conscious decision each and every day. When you’re struggling to love someone who is not especially lovable, remember how much God loves you in spite of all your faults. Ask God to help you see people through His eyes and to love as He loves.



WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO ME?

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LEARNING HOW TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Jeremiah 29:11

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

You may have never heard of Edward Kimble. He was a Sunday School teacher who one day felt compelled to share his faith with a young shoe salesman. That salesman, Dwight L. Moody, accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord and went on to become one of the greatest evangelists of his generation. Years later a man named Frederick B. Meyer heard D.L. Moody preach and was so moved he began his own evangelistic ministry. Eventually Wilbur Chapman, a college student, heard Frederick Meyer preach, and he, too, accepted Christ. Wilbur Chapman then impacted the life of professional baseball player Billy Sunday who later became a powerful evangelist.

In 1924, Billy Sunday spoke at a crusade in Charlotte, North Carolina, and hundreds of people came to Christ. Some of the businessmen who attended the meeting were so excited, they arranged for another evangelist, Mordecai Hamm, to come speak. The crusade went well, although not as many people were saved. However, on one of the last nights, a young man named Billy Graham came down the aisle to receive Christ. That is the same Billy Graham who has preached to more people than anyone else in history—over 210 million people in more than 185 countries and territories!

There is no way to measure the effect your words and actions have on the lives of others. The movie *Gladiator* contains a great quote which deftly captures this spiritual truth, “What we do in life echoes in eternity.” Edward Kimble was merely one person, but his actions literally impacted the world! Christianity itself began with the life of



one Man nearly 2,000 years ago. Jesus' life impacted the lives of His 12 disciples. Those men in turn impacted the lives of over 3,000 people on the Day of Pentecost. The 3,000 quickly grew to 5,000, and the rest is history! You may think your life will never have that kind of impact. But realize before they were mighty apostles of God, those men were just like us—normal, ordinary people. They captured the attention of the world because they answered the call of one Man and chose to give up their one life for the chance to change the world.

WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO ME?

[illegible]

LEARNING HOW TO GIVE YOUR BEST

Luke 6:38 (NIV)

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

At his Inaugural Address on January 20, 1961, President John F. Kennedy spoke these famous words, “Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.” These powerful words challenge us to step away from a mindset of mediocrity and step into a lifestyle of excellence. It’s a call to action that strikes at the core of our conscience. We all know we could do better, but somehow we fail to motivate ourselves to give our all and do our best.

We live in a culture that teaches us we need to do “just enough” to get by and nothing more. Self-preservation is seen as the far more practical course to follow than self-sacrifice. This way of thinking, however, runs contrary to Scripture. The Bible tells the story of a woman who spent the equivalent of a year’s wages to purchase a jar of the most precious perfume money could buy. Remarkably, this woman didn’t buy the perfume for her own personal use; instead she took the jar, broke it, and poured the perfume on Jesus. The others in the room viewed this act of devotion as a complete and utter waste. They couldn’t see any purpose behind such an extravagant gift. To the astonishment of everyone in the room, Jesus praised the woman and even proclaimed that her act would forever be remembered in history.

The amazing thing is God has done the same thing for you. He gave you His best—His one and only Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus, in turn, gave His one and only life. Your challenge today is to follow the words in Ephesians 5:2 (NLT), “Live a life filled with love for others, following the example of Christ, who loved you and gave Himself



as a sacrifice to take away your sins. And God was pleased, because that sacrifice was like sweet perfume to Him.” Jesus willingly poured out His life for you. He gave you His best. Are you prepared to give Him your best? Are you willing to pour out your life for Him?

WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO ME?

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LEARNING TO GIVE GOD THE GLORY

1 Corinthians 10:31b (NIV)

.. whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

When you look at football records, Shaun Alexander stands in a league all his own. He is arguably the best running back in professional football today. He is the only player in the history of the National Football League (NFL) to score 15 or more touchdowns in four straight seasons. Just as remarkable, he's the only player who's ever scored five touchdowns in one half. When asked about his achievements, Shaun answered, "I am a Christian that loves the Lord that just happens to play football ... I'm a godly man first. I chase after God. I play football for the sole reason to give God glory" (The 700 Club). That statement characterizes the life of a man who understands exactly who he is, knows who God is and completely accepts his role in God's eternal and enduring story.

God created you for His glory. You are a walking, talking, living, breathing advertisement for God. He allows and wants you to be part of His plan to work in the lives of people around the world. When you partner with Him, your life has true meaning. As you learn to develop and use the gifts God has given you, you'll experience countless situations where people give you praise and acclamation. Those kinds of situations create a perfect opportunity for you to deflect people's praise away from yourself and back to God. Follow the example set by Jesus who said, "If I glorify Myself, My glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the One who glorifies Me" (John 8:54, NIV). Jesus understood that the purpose of His life on earth was completely wrapped up in glorifying the Father.

The Bible offers this bit of wisdom about living your life: "Be careful how you live among your unbelieving neighbors. Even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will believe and give honor to God when He comes to judge the world" (1 Peter 2:12, NLT).



As your one life impacts the lives of your family, friends, co-workers, neighbors and even strangers, pray that your actions bring glory to God. Live in such a way that your life is constantly compelling others to turn their hearts and lives to God. Then one day you'll experience the incredible joy of hearing your heavenly Father say to you, "Well done, my good and faithful servant." Today, ask God for a way to partner with Him, and then give all the glory to Him!

WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO ME?

[illegible]

DAY 27

BUILDING A STRONG RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

John 5:19

Then Jesus answered and said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.”

Just do it! Those three short words represent the signature slogan for athletic shoe and apparel company Nike®. This straightforward appeal to get busy, take risks and enjoy life by being active is actually a positive message when applied to the world of sports and leisure. However, when it comes to serving God, “Just do it!” simply doesn’t cut it.

God is infinitely more interested in who you’re becoming and how you’re growing in your relationship with Him than He is in what you’re doing for Him. Serving God involves far more than just busyness and activity; it involves maturing spiritually in every area of your life. Unfortunately, some people think they can somehow substitute a weak, malnourished relationship with God for an extensive, and often impressive, list of all the things they’ve done in His name. The fact is, merely doing various acts for God can never replace building a strong relationship with God.

Relationship is a common theme that runs throughout all 66 books of the Bible. In some way, every book is either about God’s relationship with you, your relationship with God or God’s relationship to others through you. Only through these relationships will you discover life’s greatest joys and understand your sole purpose for living.

Throughout your life you’ll encounter many things that prevent you from serving. Your key to overcoming these obstacles lies in building and nurturing a strong relationship with God.



Even in the midst of serving, ministering and building relationships, Jesus always found time to spend with His Father. Follow Jesus' example today. Don't let the busyness of serving distract you from spending time with God.

WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO ME?

[illegible]

WHY SHOULD YOU GIVE?

John 3:16 (NIV)

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Every dimension of God's character reveals His giving nature. God the Father freely gave Jesus, His one and only Son. Jesus, in turn, gave up His life so that you could have eternal life with the Father. After ascending to heaven, Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to empower you and lead you into all truth.

David Livingstone, the famous Scottish missionary and explorer of Africa, wrote, "I will place no value on anything I have or possess except in relation to the kingdom of Christ. If anything I have will advance that kingdom, it shall be given or kept whichever will best promote the glory of Him to whom I owe all my hopes, both for time and eternity." Like Livingstone, God wants you to experience your own giving adventure. While there is no physical road map to giving, God does provide clear direction in over 2,300 verses in the Bible for managing, multiplying and giving His resources.

So, why should you give? Because that's what God does. And He is offering you the opportunity to invest in His work, both where you live and around the world. Today, ask the Holy Spirit to teach you how to steward your time, money, talent and influence so you can further the kingdom of God through your own adventure in giving.



WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO ME?

[illegible]

HOW SHOULD YOU GIVE?

2 Corinthians 9:7 (NIV)

Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Giving is a matter of your heart and encompasses much more than just money. In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he challenged believers to give from their hearts by making it clear that God is more concerned about the attitude of the giver than He is with the amount given. It's not an issue of how much you give, but how you give. It all comes back to your heart and your motivation.

Philanthropist and industrialist John D. Rockefeller once said, "I never would have been able to tithe the first million dollars I ever made if I had not tithed my first salary, which was \$1.50 per week." God was able to trust Rockefeller with vast resources, whether he made pennies or millions of dollars, because he had a giving heart and was faithful to give. God is looking for people He can trust to be faithful with His resources. Jesus said those who prove faithful in little things can be trusted with much (Luke 6:10).

Many people today have been lured into giving with the promise of becoming wealthy, often without regard to the responsibilities that go along with financial blessings. Millionaire Peter Daniels says, "Wealth has a responsibility towards those of this world who are disadvantaged mentally, physically, spiritually or geographically by circumstances beyond their control. The principles of responsibility in respect to wealth must apply to us all, whether we have little or much."

The Bible challenges every believer to give faithfully, generously, regularly, deliberately, voluntarily, sacrificially, cheerfully, quietly, extravagantly and even hilariously. When these heart attitudes permeate our lifestyle, we break the back of greed and selfishness and begin to soar into new



realms of kingdom advancement. Examine your heart today and ask yourself the following questions: “Do I give financial resources freely and joyfully?” “Do I tithe faithfully?” Think about these questions as you develop your heart for giving.

WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO ME?

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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU GIVE?

2 Corinthians 9:8

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

Have you ever viewed giving as spiritual warfare? Did you know a believer with a giving heart is one of the most dangerous threats to the enemy? We are in a battle for the hearts of men, women and children. The enemy has so ensnared people today that the pursuit of money has become the focus of our society as well as the primary motivator and determining factor in personal and family decision making.

The Apostle Paul shares that when believers give with a cheerful heart it actually releases a blessing of grace and abundance back into the life of the giver. The purpose behind God's generous provision is to expand the "good work" of the selfless believer. Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive. He is able to give back to you "good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over" (Luke 6:38).

When you become a giver, you break away from a greed-based kingdom founded on buying and selling and align yourself with God's kingdom which is established on the principles of giving and receiving. The book of Malachi reveals that giving is the action which releases God to pour out more blessings than you can comprehend. Malachi goes on to share that when you give God will prosper your businesses and rebuke your enemies. God wants you to experience the pleasures of giving because He desires to bless every area of your life—health, relationships, work, family, emotions and thoughts.



WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO ME?

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SEEING REALITY THROUGH THE EYES OF ETERNITY

Matthew 13:44 (NIV)

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.”

Imagine you’re walking across a lush, empty field. Captivated by the sights, sounds and scents of nature, you’re unaware of what lies ahead. Suddenly, you trip! Rising to your feet again, you turn to see the cause. There, at your feet, is a small mound of fresh earth. Curious, you kneel down and begin digging only to uncover a treasure chest filled with gold, silver and precious stones!

For thousands of years people have been fascinated by the thought of buried treasure. It’s been the subject of plays, movies and books too numerous to count—works of fantasy that delight the imagination. Even Jesus once told a story about buried treasure. However, couched in the midst of His story are truths both real and life-changing. Jesus described a man who accidentally finds a treasure buried in a field. Delighted by his discovery, the man makes a wise decision. He goes and sells all his worldly goods in order to purchase the field and claim his treasure. This story reveals that God’s kingdom is the only thing in this world worth the investment of your entire life! Everything else pales in comparison.

It is difficult to resist the allure of temporal, self-centered desires and ambitions. Even as a believer you have to daily confront the struggles of a sinful nature and living in a fallen world. God is calling you to focus your one and only life on what truly matters—His kingdom.



Are you caught up in pursuing worldly goals and dreams, or are you truly investing yourself in God's kingdom? God wants you to let go of any goals and ambitions that conflict with His plans for your life. Wisely follow the example of the man in the parable, and do whatever you must to lay hold of that which you can never lose.

WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO ME?

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SHARING YOUR ONE LIFE WITH OTHERS

Acts 13:36 (NIV)

For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep ...

David was an ordinary man who lived a truly extraordinary life. His name is mentioned more often in the New Testament than any other Old Testament character, and he's the only person to ever be called a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). David's entire life beautifully illustrates the truth that God doesn't always choose the brilliant, beautiful or successful to advance His kingdom. More often than not, He plucks nobodies out of obscurity and turns them into world- changers.

From his early days as a shepherd, musician and poet to his latter days as warrior and king, David's whole life is an open book. His heroism in slaying a giant, his weakness in yielding to temptation with Bathsheba, his failure to lead his family—the good, the bad and the ugly—it's all there for everyone to see. But regardless of his shortcomings, one thing is certain: God placed David on earth for a purpose, and David constantly seized every possible moment to passionately fulfill that destiny. The result is the impact of his life is still felt to this day.

In the movie *Dead Poets Society*, Robin Williams plays John Keating, a charismatic English professor with a passion for life. Keating's personal mission is to inspire his students to live their lives to the fullest. One day he drags his boys out of the classroom and sets them before an old trophy case. As they gaze at pictures of faces long forgotten, he says: "Did they wait until it was too late to make from their lives even one iota of what they were capable? Because, you see gentlemen, these boys are now fertilizing daffodils. But if you listen real close, you can hear them whisper their legacy to you. ... *Carpe diem!* Seize the day, boys. Make your lives extraordinary."



God is calling you to live an extraordinary life. The time to do that is not next year, next month or even next week. The time is now. Share your heart, your gifts and your resources with others today. Don't limit yourself. Make a difference. You only have one life. Carpe diem—seize the day!

WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO ME?

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