

growing intimacy_

DAILY DEVOTIONS



Week 4 - Day 1 - Intimacy Was Important for Jesus

Being an everyday disciple of Jesus is not just about knuckling down and doing what He says. It also involves intimacy with and dependence on Jesus. True disciples have a growing relationship with Jesus in which they enjoy His love, rest in His grace, and appreciate His closeness and care. Through this deepening friendship, disciples learn to trust and depend on Jesus, and His life flows through them. Disciples are far more than followers of Jesus; they are also friends and lovers.

Please note that this Plan offers more than a daily reflection on Scripture. It is designed to forge everyday disciples who are aware of God's presence and hear God's voice throughout the day. Please try to build the lunchtime meditations and evening reflections into your routine, as well as the morning devotions. Before each session, pause to be aware of God's love and presence.

MORNING

Scripture: Luke 5:15-16; Luke 6:12

^{5:15}Yet the news about him [Jesus] spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. ¹⁶But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

^{6:12}One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.

Devotion

This was a busy time in Jesus' ministry. His reputation as a teacher and healer was growing and the crowds were flocking to Him. Jesus must have been both excited and exhausted by the opportunities. He had so much to offer, and His time was so short. There was so much truth to teach and so many people to heal.

Yet Jesus kept disappearing. He consistently deserted His hungry fans and headed off alone into deserts and up mountains. You see Jesus prized His intimacy with His Father and would not sacrifice this for anything. His authority and power flowed from this relationship. His healing and teaching ministry was dependent on it. Jesus wanted time with His Dad to renew His heart and refresh His spirit. He knew the real power of His life and ministry flowed from His Dad and He desperately needed to stay close to Him. Jesus couldn't do this in the hurly and burly of ministry. Lonely places were essential.

If God's Son needed to allocate precious time in a crowded schedule to be alone with His Father, then clearly, we will need to do the same. I'm not sure how you will manage this with all the demands on your time. just know that Jesus showed us that intimacy with the Father is vital and that He intentionally carved out spiritual retreats in isolated places and whole nights of prayer. For Jesus, this prayerful intimacy was not an optional extra whenever He could find the time. Cultivating His intimate relationship with His Father lay at the heart of His life and ministry. He depended on it and so do we. What is a small step you can make towards isolated, intimate time with God? Maybe you can carve out an hour somewhere.

Prayer

As read about Your example, Jesus, frankly feel inadequate. It's not so much my laziness (although that is a factor), but often put doing good things before my intimacy with You. really do want to kindle a deep and close relationship with You, so please encourage me and help me to carve out the space that will allow this to happen. Help me to find my lonely deserts and high mountains.

Today's Bible Focus

"Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

1. Meditate for a short time on today's Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
2. Look and see what is happening around you from God's perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
3. Pray for any not-yet Christians God has placed on your heart.

EVENING

1. *Remember:* Repeat today's Bible Focus.
2. *Reflect:* Reflect on the day and thank God for what He has said and done.
3. *Repent:* Check where you have neglected or disobeyed God during the day and ask for forgiveness and freedom.
4. *Release:* Name any concerns or fears on your mind and release them to Jesus.

Week 4 - Day 2 - The Danger of Disconnection

MORNING

Scripture: James 4:2-4, 8.

²You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. ³When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. ⁴You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God...

⁸Come near to God and he will come near to you.

Devotion

James is describing a very sad state of affairs in the church, however, doubt that the Christians were actually killing each other (4:2). Most likely, James uses the term in the same way that Jesus did when he equated anger with murder (Matt. 5:21-22). The church members were at each other's throats – fighting and quarrelling over their priorities and desires. The church was a selfish mess.

But then this is what inevitably happens when God is left at a distance. Once we try to live for God without closeness to Him and dependence on Him, we end up pursuing our own agendas and adopting the agendas of the world around us. We lose touch with God's heart and passions and power, and instead have to fight hard for what we want, sometimes even arrogantly presuming we are fighting for God. James doesn't see this Christian infighting as just a normal product of living in a broken world but as enmity against God (4:4). When we lose our closeness to God, we end up fighting against Him, as well as each other.

James describes the solution in 4:8, "Come near to God and He will come near to you." Prayerful intimacy with God protects us from joining forces with the world. Prayerful intimacy with God brings God near. Prayerful intimacy with God corrects our motives. Prayerful intimacy with God aligns our hearts with His. Prayerful intimacy with God radically changes the way we think and live. People who live close to God are more humble, peaceful, joyful, and hopeful. You can pick them. God's heart really does rub off on us as we come close.

Prayer

It's easy for me to believe that my agenda is Your agenda, Lord. It's easy for me to think that I'm fighting for You when really I'm fighting for myself and my ideas and desires. Please come close to me as humbly draw close to You. Forgive me, humble me, soften me, purify me, and align my heart with Yours. need Your presence filling my life. want to be near You.

Today's Bible Focus

"Come near to God and He will come near to you."

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Week 4 - Day 3 - Knowing God's Love

MORNING

Scripture: Ephesians 3:17b-19

¹⁷ And pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Devotion

Nothing in Christianity is clearer than the love of God. God has created us in love. He has chosen us in love. He has saved us in love. He recreates us in love. He will live forever with us in love. We just can't get away from the extraordinary love of God. "God is love" was the first verse learned as a child in Sunday School. And yet in this Scripture, Paul was praying that the Ephesians would grasp and really know the love of God. What? Surely they already knew God's love.

Paul understood that moving the Ephesian disciples' appreciation and acceptance of God's love from their heads (understanding that God loved them) to their hearts (really believing that God loved them) was a difficult and often unnatural journey. He needed to ask God for this to happen. A deep knowledge of God's love is challenging and uncommon because we experience so little of this depth of unconditional love in our lives. It seems impossible that our holy God will continue to love us whatever we do. But it's true. Oh, the immensity and depth of God's love.

Part of our journey as everyday disciples is to fall in love with Jesus and experience how wide and long and high and deep His love is for us. Our appreciation of God's love grows through our increasing intimacy with Jesus as we rest and depend on Him. Deeply absorbing and enjoying God's love will probably require lots of prayers like the prayer Paul prayed here. But as our relationship with Jesus deepens, so our appreciation of His love will expand until we are "filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (3:19).

Prayer

pray that being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Today's Bible Focus

"May grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ."

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Week 4 - Day 4 - Constantly Praying

MORNING

Scripture: Ephesians 6:18

¹⁸And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

Devotion

When Paul writes "with this in mind," he is referring to the huge spiritual struggle that every disciple of Jesus faces (see 6:10-17). He has just been advising the Ephesians on how to defend themselves against the devil's schemes. Like the Ephesians, we need to be constantly alert to all that Satan is throwing at us (and every other disciple of Jesus), and the best way to stay sharp is to be constantly praying.

This certainly means praying for personal protection from Satan. One of our constant prayers is, "Lead me not into temptation but deliver me from evil." But our prayer goes much further than protection. We are to pray "on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests for all of the Lord's people" (6:18). There are lots of things happening in and around us, and our hearts and prayers go out to all those who are struggling under pressure or rejoicing in God's blessings. We talk to God about it all.

One of the reasons why some Christians see few answers to their prayers is because they only ask for God's help when they face a huge problem that they can't find a solution for. That's not the way God wants it with His disciples. He longs to be included in everything. He wants to work in the big and little challenges. He loves being involved in all our lives. He wants an intimate relationship based on constant communication. He calls us to always keep on praying for all the Lord's people on all occasions with all kinds of prayer (6:18). God wants to share your life. So don't hold back. Talk to God about all you are doing and facing. He loves being in the center of everything. He loves intimacy.

Prayer

Lord, I'm aware of the spiritual pressure that am under. Please strengthen me and protect me from temptation. also want to talk to you about my Christian brothers and sisters who are worrying or wavering or weakening or wandering away from You. Please guide my prayers through Your Spirit and hear all my small talk. thank You that we are doing this life together. Keep me spiritually sharp.

Today's Bible Focus

"Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests."

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Week 4 - Day 5 - The Extra Help We Need

MORNING

Scripture: Romans 8:26-27

²⁶In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

Devotion

Some of us find intimacy with God natural, but most of us don't. Maybe it's because we are programmed to do things ourselves rather than rely on God. Maybe it's because we have never been able to trust people enough to let them close. Maybe it's because we feel that we don't measure up to God's expectations and don't deserve to be close to Him. Whatever the reason, God understands our struggle and has given us His Spirit to assist us.

One way God's Spirit helps us is by praying on our behalf. So even when you don't pray because you're overwhelmed, or you have nothing left to say, or you just haven't made prayer a priority, the Spirit within you is still praying on your behalf. And He nails it every time. He knows what you need and He knows what God wants, so He keeps on crying out for you when you can't or don't pray.

This is not an excuse for you to shirk prayer by saying, "Well God's Spirit prays better than do, so why bother? I'll let Him do the work." God loves and responds to your prayers no matter how feeble or ordinary they are. But it does show how far God will go to build intimacy with you. He loves to hear and answer your cries even when His Spirit in you is doing the heavy lifting. He wants to be close to you. He wants to help. He wants to answer. He wants to be needed. And He will do everything He can to keep the channels of communication open.

Prayer

Thanks for praying for me Holy Spirit even when I'm saying nothing to You. don't deserve Your help, but am deeply appreciative of it. want to join You more in Your praise and prayer. want to groan with You when needed. want my prayers to align more and more with God's will as Your prayers do. Together we are building a strong prayer team.

Today's Bible Focus

"The Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans."

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Week 4 - Day 6 - Intimacy is Not All Roses

MORNING

Scripture: Hebrews 12:10-11

¹⁰They [our fathers] disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Devotion

I'm presently helping train a young puppy, Willow. She loves everyone and is very enthusiastic about life. Her excitement and affection are mostly charming and contagious. But she has so much to learn about controlling her instincts and living safely and well. Willow doesn't really appreciate my training role, especially when try to discipline her, so we're getting there very slowly. If only she could see that it is ultimately for her own good. But then, guess she's a puppy.

This Scripture talks about the key discipline role of both earthly fathers and our heavenly Father in the growth of their children. Earthly fathers don't always get it right, but God is spot on in His discipline of His disciples. He knows exactly what we need to become children that look like their Dad. Because He loves us so much, God is correcting and forging us. Every struggle he allows us to go through has a God-ordained objective. The greater our intimacy with God, the more He will seek to forge us.

The problem is that God's discipline means some short-term pain for us, and like Willow, we find this unpleasant. It's easy to think that if God really loved us, He would make life enjoyable and easy for us. Such an idea, of course, is nonsense. God is preparing us for an eternity with Him where we will share In His holiness (12:10). Because He loves you so much, He is intent on shaping your heart and forging your character. Whatever pain you are enduring now, be sure that God loves you deeply and is carefully and fondly working the best for you, his precious child.

Prayer

love it when I'm really close to You and everything is working out well in my life. know that my long-term future will be like this permanently. But in the short term, help me to trust Your love through the struggles and seemingly unanswered prayers. Keep producing a harvest of righteousness and peace in me no matter what it may cost me. Prune and discipline me. May my pain draw me closer to You and make me more like You.

Today's Bible Focus

“God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in His holiness.”

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