

THE
SIMPLE
TRUTH
BIBLE

ONENESS

WITH GOD

SIN &

SEPARATION

CONSEQUENCES

& CRYING OUT

GOD HEARS

& RESTORES



THE SIMPLE TRUTH BIBLE
The Best Minute of Your Day

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CONTENTS

We're sure you've noticed, this is a pretty big book. And rather than add a normal table of contents that shows you just how big the book is, we're going to change things up a little. All of the devotionals in this book are numbered...all 366 of them. Rather than list out each passage of Scripture covered in the book, we've decided to provide you with a few articles that will help you get the most out of each devotional. Below, you'll find where each article is located in this book. We encourage you to read these.

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INTRODUCTION

We've also included an index of all the verses used in this devotional. We've organized it based on each of the four themes of God's story. You can read more about these themes on p. 1.

Index of Verses by Theme 384

This book was put together by a bunch of our friends in the trenches of youth ministry. Men and women, youth pastors, volunteers, designers, business professionals, students, and more contributed to this book. They love Jesus and care enough about you to share a little of their life experience—and a lot about God's truths found in the Bible. Here's a bit about each person involved in bringing you closer to Jesus through this book.

Contributors..... 388

Congratulations! You are holding in your hands a book that can change your life. OK, the book won't change your life, but the God who loves you will use this book to help you become who he created you to be. And that's a pretty big deal.

This book is a little different from other Bibles you may have read. It's written so you can spend a few minutes each day and have a legit experience with God. Here's how we've organized each devotion:

- A Bible passage with a short explanation to read and a thought to ponder
- "Talking With God" — a guide to help you pray
- "A Little Extra" — if you have more than a few minutes to spend, there's an extra activity to help you digest the truth of the passage
- "The Big Picture" — an icon that indicates which stage of the Bible's story the passage reflects

We've also sprinkled some articles throughout the book that may be helpful in your faith journey. Topics include making the Bible smaller, prayer, journaling, sharing your God-story, and a few others. It's a good idea to read "Making the Bible Smaller" (see p. 1) before you dive into the devotions, but you can jump right in if you prefer. As long as you're spending time seeking God, there really isn't a wrong way to do it!

Bottom line, the folks who have written devotions for this book love Jesus and love students, and all of them want you to fall more deeply in love with Jesus. Following Jesus is the best thing you can ever do. It's an adventure that fills the deepest needs of your life. And it's worth it. You'll never regret chasing after Jesus.

And that's the simple truth.

MAKING THE BIBLE SMALLER

THE BIBLE IS PROBABLY THE BIGGEST BOOK YOU'LL EVER READ.

It's so big, you might think you'll never make sense of it. So let's look at a way to break it down into smaller chunks that can help you understand it a little better.

The Bible tells stories in four stages, and you can see them in the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 1–3:

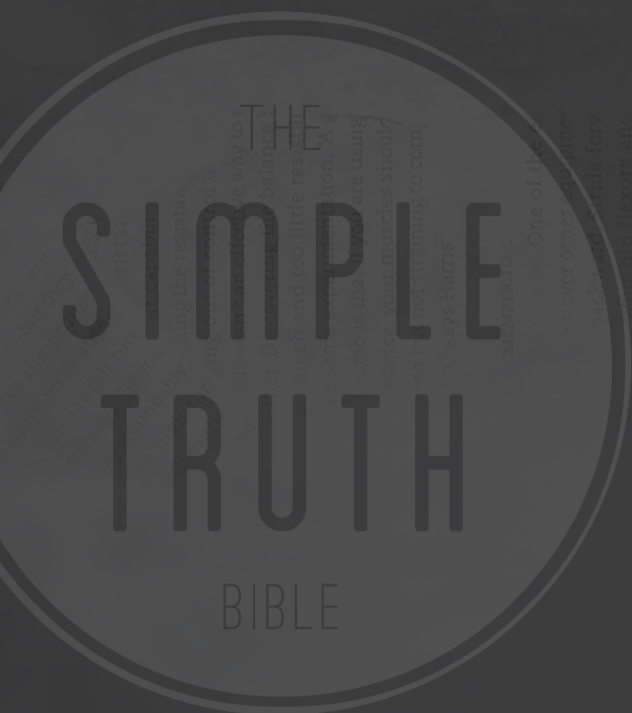
1. **Oneness with God.** Adam and Eve were in perfect relationship with God, each other, and the rest of creation. They were living the good life in the Garden of Eden.
2. **Sin and separation.** Adam and Eve chose to sin, trusting their way instead of God's way. Sin made them feel shame and pushed them away from God.
3. **Consequences and crying out.** The price of Adam and Eve's sin included having to work the ground to get food (Adam), feeling pain during childbirth (Eve), and getting kicked out of the Garden of Eden (both).
4. **God hears and restores oneness.** God loved Adam and Eve, and even though they chose to reject him, God provided for them and fixed their broken relationships.

The story of the Bible is every person's story. These four stages are repeated over and over throughout the Bible. You can see the stages in the lives of King David, the nation of Israel, the disciples, Paul, and, if we're honest, in our own lives. If we learn to look for these stages as we read the Bible, it will begin to make more sense and feel smaller.

We've added a section in each devotion called "The Big Picture," which includes a small icon that represents one of the four stages. Look for the icon, and think about how you see the specific stage in the passage for the day. If you journal (see pp. 90-91), include the stage icon when you reference a Bible verse.

After you've read for a while, you may notice that the four stages aren't equally represented. There are a lot more passages about stage four—God hears and restores. Guess what the central theme of the entire Bible is? Yep, God loves us, hears our cries, and always takes the initiative to restore us.

SO KEEP READING, AND WATCH THE BIBLE GET SMALLER.



"But forget all that—it is nothing compared to what I am going to do. For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland." Isaiah 43:18-19

"Forget all that." What was God talking about here? The Israelites had been recounting all the garbage going on in their lives—and there had been a lot of it. Life was not going well for them. But that's NOT what God was telling them to forget. God was telling them to forget about all the amazingness he had already done: conquering kings, splitting seas, rescuing them over and over again. God was saying, "Yeah, remember all that? Forget it. It's NOTHING in comparison to what I'm doing next!" Translated into our pop culture, it's as if God was saying, "I've wowed the judges on this reality competition show; I'm a shoe-in to win this whole thing. But I'm gonna kick it up a notch for my next performance!"

TALKING WITH GOD

Think about some of the amazingness God has done in your life so far. Thank God for that. Get specific. Then spend a few minutes expressing your gratefulness for the amazingness that's about to come.



VERSE 1: Isaiah 43:18-19

A LITTLE EXTRA

Sometimes journals feel like homework, but they can help us remember what God has done and consider what he might do in the future. Create a photo journal using social media—or just a folder of images on your phone or computer. When God does something cool or amazing, snap a photo of it. Title your album "God Moments" or something else that resonates with you. On days when you are lamenting what's happening in your life, open that journal. Take a look at all God has already done—big and small—and then realize that it pales in comparison to what's next.



VERSE 2: Acts 1:8

A LITTLE EXTRA

Think of three friends who need to hear about Jesus. Brainstorm ways you can talk about Jesus in your next conversation with them. Start praying for them, and begin the conversations today!

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8

These are the last words Jesus spoke to his disciples, which is a good indication that what he says here is a big deal! These words contain both a promise and a plan.

Jesus promises that as his follower, you have the very Spirit of God living inside you, and the power of the Holy Spirit goes with you through every twist and turn in your day. This means that you are never alone. God is with you **always**. So whether your life is stacked and packed with fun, or you feel like you're drowning in really tough, painful stuff, God's Spirit lives inside you, empowering you to live each day for his glory.

But this verse also contains an amazing plan: Jesus' plan for spreading the good news of his gospel message. And this plan involves YOU! *"You will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere."* What an incredible privilege **and** responsibility you have when it comes to sharing Jesus' life-giving message of grace with everyone around you.

TALKING WITH GOD

Notice that Jesus' plan here involves you actively *"telling people"* about him. Who in your life needs to know more about Jesus? Have a conversation with God right now about who you could share your faith with today. Then go do it.

Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity. 1 Timothy 4:12

There's only one way to prevent people from thinking less of you because of your age, according to this verse. It's not by debating, arguing, or demanding respect. It's merely by your example. Regardless of their age, people will think more of you when your life exemplifies the way a Christ-follower ought to live.

People look at five areas of your life: how you speak (your language, vocabulary); how you live day to day (your responsibility, work ethic); how you show love and respect for others (parents, siblings, teachers, employers, friends); how you follow (or don't follow) Jesus Christ; and the state of your heart (your dating guidelines, friendship choices, extracurricular choices). When you think about this verse, remember that the way you live reveals what you believe.

TALKING WITH GOD

Spend some time talking with God about the kind of example you are setting. Listen for what God reveals—**REALLY** listen. Don't just assume you're setting a good example because you are mostly a good person compared with the teenagers around you. Invite God to speak truth into your life, even about the little areas of your example that you might not think much of (such as how you respond to your parents or the quality of your homework).



VERSE 3: 1 Timothy 4:12

A LITTLE EXTRA

Make a grid or a digital spreadsheet with four columns and five rows. In the first column, list each example on its own row (speech, life, love, faith, purity). In the next column, list ways you have set a solid example. In the third column, write down ways in which your example falls short. In the final column, write a quick action point for growing in that specific area.



VERSE 4: *Matthew 11:28-30*

A LITTLE EXTRA

Go find something heavy. Try to lift it by yourself. If you can pick it up, go find something heavier; if you can't, go find a friend to help. Why is it easier for two to lift something? Why would Jesus invite you to share life with him? Take the risk to trust Jesus enough to let him into all areas of your life.

Do you ever feel like you're not enough? One of the most significant changes in culture is how much busier teenagers are now compared to 20 years ago. Academics, sports, clubs, volunteering, friendships, family—these things have many students going crazy! And when you try to work church into that list, it often adds guilt and shame instead of offering relief.

Do you want to slow down and rest? Read Jesus' words in today's passage:

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."
Matthew 11:28-30

A yoke is a big wooden tool that ties two animals together so they can share the workload. Now read Jesus' words again—out loud. You are invited to share life with Jesus. He wants to help you carry your workload and teach you how to live differently. Interested?

TALKING WITH GOD

Pray this kind of prayer: *Jesus, your words are refreshing. I want to have rest. I want to share all of my life with you; teach me how. Help me grow in my trust in you, so I can live and reveal your kingdom in all areas of my life.*



VERSE 5: *Isaiah 41:10*

A LITTLE EXTRA

Write each promise in this passage on its own sheet of paper, adhesive note, or note card. Decorate your room, car, locker, or bathroom with these promises. Meditate on them and memorize them, and trust God to protect you when you are afraid.

"Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand." *Isaiah 41:10*

Think about a time you were really, REALLY scared. It might have been something as simple as a roller coaster you didn't want to ride—or something as serious as the illness of a family member.

What scares us? Usually it's the helpless feeling we have—whether it's being at the mercy of the roller coaster about to plunge over the top of the hill, or knowing that we can do nothing to bring healing to someone we love.

God answers all our feelings of helplessness in this verse. Read the promises in this Scripture again:

- I am with you (you are not alone)
- Don't be discouraged (someone bigger is at work here: God)
- I will strengthen you (in your weakness, God is strong—see 2 Corinthians 12:10)
- I WILL help you (it's not a maybe; it's a promise)
- I will hold you up (you don't have to stand in your own power and strength)
- ...with my victorious right hand (victory, success is assured)

TALKING WITH GOD

Pray this passage by naming yourself and inserting your fears into the verses. Picture God talking directly to you about whatever is causing fear in your life right now.



VERSE 6: John 10:10

A LITTLE EXTRA

There's also a warning in this verse. Who is this thief that wants to rob you of a rich, satisfying life? Satan, the evil one, who spreads deception, destruction, and death.

Make a list of any parts of your life where you are buying the evil one's lies about where to find true, lasting fulfillment. Ask God to help you turn away from those lies and trust him more so you can more fully experience the rich, satisfying life God designed you to live.

"The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life." John 10:10

So what does a rich and satisfying life look like? The accumulation of more and more self-indulgent toys? Having a hot girlfriend or boyfriend? The freedom to do whatever you want? That's the message our culture wants to sell you. But don't be fooled.

According to the Bible, a rich and satisfying life is one that is centered on God. When you trust God, many incredible, life-changing gifts flood into your life. Here are just a few:

- The gift of eternal life with God in heaven (1 John 5:13)
- The right to become God's child, with 24/7 access to the Heavenly Father (Romans 8:38-39)
- Power and strength to get through anything (Isaiah 40:29-31; Acts 1:8)
- The assurance that God will never leave you alone (Hebrews 13:5)
- A future and a hope that is good (Jeremiah 29:11)

Pretty cool, huh? An authentic, intimate relationship with the God of the universe gives you deep, soul-satisfying peace and joy and leaves the temporary thrills of money, sex, and power in the dust.

TALKING WITH GOD

Zero in on one of God's gifts listed above and thank him for it right now.

"For it is my Father's will that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life. I will raise them up at the last day." John 6:40

Have you ever been rejected? Totally not fun. We all need and desire to be loved, respected, and valued. Most times, rejection happens because people want us to be something or someone we're not. The cool thing about God is that he doesn't place unrealistic expectations on us. All God wants us to do is simply come to him. And when we come to God, he promises to never reject us. No matter who you are or what you've done, when you place your trust in Christ, God welcomes you with open arms and promises to never let you go. In him, you have everything you need. So even when friends reject you, let you down, or don't accept you, remember that God loves you no matter what, and God desires for you to spend eternity with him.

TALKING WITH GOD

You may be in a place where you're looking for love, validation, and acceptance. Take a few moments today and talk to God about how you feel. Ask God to help you sense his love for you. Ask God to teach you how to not focus on trying to please the audience of many (friends, classmates, teammates, society), but to focus on the audience of one: God.



VERSE 7: John 6:40

A LITTLE EXTRA

God has a plan and purpose for your life. You'll fulfill that plan and purpose best when you stay connected to him. God will lead, guide, and direct your path. Read John 15:5—a reminder of what happens when we stay connected to the Father. Talk to a spiritual leader in your life about things you can do to stay connected with God.



VERSE 8: *Matthew 3:16-17*

A LITTLE EXTRA

Sometimes we believe what we hear. Many of us hear lots of negative words and fewer positive words. Find time today to look in a mirror and say to yourself, “*I am God’s dearly loved son/daughter. God loves me, is proud of me, and is pleased with me.*”

After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.”

Matthew 3:16-17

Has anyone ever expressed pride in you—maybe a coach, a teacher, a mentor, a youth leader, a parent, family member, or a really close friend? Doesn’t it feel really cool to hear someone say words of affirmation, encouragement, and support? God wants to let you know how much he feels that way, too!

This passage is primarily about Jesus getting baptized, but it is also about God delighting in his Son’s faithfulness and obedience. God says three distinct things that all of us desire to hear from our loved ones and people who care about us. First, God affirms his relationship with Jesus: “*This is my dearly loved Son.*” Second, God affirms his love for Jesus: “*loved Son.*” Third, God affirms the joy Jesus brings to him: “*who brings me great joy!*” Jesus received this affirmation from his Father before beginning his ministry and facing Satan’s temptations in the wilderness. Bottom line: God knows what we need to hear and when we need to hear it. We simply have to place ourselves in a position to hear God clearly.

TALKING WITH GOD

Reread today’s passage. Thank God that he loves you, is proud of you, and is pleased with you. Now allow yourself to believe those words.

But thank God! He has made us his captives and continues to lead us along in Christ’s triumphal procession. Now he uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere, like a sweet perfume.

2 Corinthians 2:14

Have you ever smelled a sweet perfume or a favorite food that almost pulled you in? Saying that Christ-followers were like “*sweet perfume*” was an attempt to quickly explain what it was like to be around them.

There is something very different about followers of Christ that is hard for people to explain. When we begin this faith adventure, God comes and lives inside of us. Imagine being in the middle of a mall, or your school, or some place with lots of people gathered. If some of those people are Christ-followers and have God’s Spirit living inside of them, should you be able to tell? Should it be obvious to everyone?

There IS a difference when God lives in you. Other people can’t explain it, but they are drawn to the hope, the love, the peace, the gentleness, the patience—the sweet perfume. That is a perfect way to explain how God uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere.

TALKING WITH GOD

Offer this prayer today: *God, I want to be a sweet perfume that tells people about you everywhere I go. Help me live the kind of life that reveals your kingdom to others. Help me use every opportunity to spread the knowledge of Christ.*



VERSE 9: *2 Corinthians 2:14*

A LITTLE EXTRA

Jesus explained in some word pictures what it is like to have God inside of you. You can read these descriptions of his followers in his Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew 5:13-16.



VERSE 10: *Isaiah 53:3-4*

A LITTLE EXTRA

Write “In My Place: Isaiah 53” on your bathroom mirror. (Make sure you use washable marker or something that will wash off—or you’ll need someone to stand in your place with your mom!) Each day when you look in the mirror and see those words, remember to thank God for the sacrifice he made.

He was despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care. Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! Isaiah 53:3-4

Have you ever been blamed for something you didn’t do? How did that feel? Did anyone commiserate (look it up) with you—tell you how terrible the situation was? Was anyone frustrated on your behalf at the injustice you were enduring? Did anyone take the accusations to heart, believing you really DID do what you were accused of doing? Did people assume you brought it all on yourself?

That’s how it was for Jesus—except that he chose to carry those accusations. It’s as if Jesus went to the backbiters and said, “Hey, I *want* you to make up these stories about me,” knowing that it would take all the bite out of their stories about us.

Have you ever had someone take the blame for you? You have now.

TALKING WITH GOD

As you pray, think about the completeness of how Jesus took your place: the accusations, the lies, the scandal, the loss of friendships, the ridicule of well-respected people, and finally the cross. Thank him, humbly and honestly, for standing in your place.

Andrew went to find his brother, Simon, and told him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means “Christ”). John 1:41

Some Christians don’t come from church-going, pew-sitting, hymn-singing families. Some come from families full of beer-drinking, tobacco-chewing, bodybuilding brawlers that even the mafia considers crazy—seriously. When the mafia thinks your family is crazy, you know you’re dealing with some serious dysfunction.

But even in the roughest communities, God can change lives. Even the wildest, craziest families can experience new life through Jesus. Even the people least likely to sit in a church pew can find themselves there one day.

People who come from this kind of background usually can’t keep their mouth shut about Jesus. This salvation message is such good news, they can’t keep it to himself. They tell their brothers, sisters, parents, friends, neighbors, classmates—everyone they know!

If you, too, have met Jesus, then you have a story to tell about your encounter with him as your Savior. Maybe it was dramatic; maybe it was simple. It doesn’t matter! Spread the good news!

TALKING WITH GOD

Think back to a time when you had a deep, meaningful time with Jesus. Maybe it was during a worship service, at a retreat, or on a mission trip. What happened? What was the trigger? How did you feel? What did you learn about God? Spend some time right now thanking God for your personal relationship with him. Then go talk to a friend or family member who isn’t a Christ-follower.



VERSE 11: *John 1:41*

A LITTLE EXTRA

Check out the website gospeljourney.com. Consider sending the link to someone who isn’t a Christ-follower and asking that person to watch the video. Make sure you ask them later what they thought of it.



VERSE 12: Luke 10:36-37

A LITTLE EXTRA

Make a list of three people that you typically “pass by” on your campus. Find a Christ-following friend and commit to noticing the people on your list this week—and maybe even serving them in some way. Learn how to stop, slow down, and be more aware.

“Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?” Jesus asked. The man replied, “The one who showed him mercy.” Then Jesus said, “Yes, now go and do the same.” Luke 10:36-37

Many people know the story of the Good Samaritan, but some people miss the importance of the details. Two very religious people walked right by the man who had been attacked. The one who stopped was probably the last person Jesus’ audience expected to stop and offer help. It’s important to recognize that Jesus told the parable in response to a question from an expert at religious law who was trying to find a loophole for loving people—and not loving other people.

Experts in the law are sometimes not very merciful, because their lives are guided by rules. Rules aren’t always bad, but in typical fashion, Jesus turned the whole conversation upside-down. Whatever the expert in religious law was trying to get away with, Jesus wasn’t having any of it! Jesus made it perfectly clear that sometimes rule-followers can miss great opportunities to do ministry—including the two guys who passed by the victim and the guy who asked the question in the first place.

TALKING WITH GOD

Ask God to show you some people in your life that you “pass by.” Pray for the boldness to reach out and the wisdom to know how to best meet their needs.

“But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.” John 14:26

Has there ever been a time in your life when you needed someone to look out for you? Or maybe you needed help or comfort, and no one was there for you? That can be a very lonely feeling. In today’s verse, Jesus promises an advocate—God’s Holy Spirit—who would comfort us, help us, and remind us of everything God promised us. This Advocate also would reassure us that we’re never alone—someone to help us, protect us, and care for us.

The Greek meaning of *advocate* is an ancient term used in warfare. Greek warriors went onto the battlefield in pairs, standing back-to-back, covering each other’s blind side. The Holy Spirit isn’t just our companion; he is our battle partner as we navigate the struggles of life. God sent his Holy Spirit to lead us, guide us, and always have our back.

TALKING WITH GOD

As you spend time in prayer today, be still and listen to your Advocate and Counselor. Ask the Holy Spirit to focus your spirit so you will be able to hear the Father’s voice. And remember that as a follower of Jesus, you’re never alone.



VERSE 13: John 14:26

A LITTLE EXTRA

In school you have a guidance counselor to help you make decisions about your personal and educational needs, while providing information about colleges and other life choices. Go say “thank you” to your school guidance counselor today, and every time you pass his or her office, remember that God’s Spirit is your greatest counselor. And with the Holy Spirit, you never need a hall pass!



VERSE 14: 1 Timothy 6:12

A LITTLE EXTRA

With your parents' permission, grab a friend who's a Christ-follower and watch the sports movie *Miracle*. In this movie, a team that had every reason to quit continued to fight and came away victorious. As you watch the movie, notice the people who tried to fill the team with doubt. Talk with your friend about the parallels between the movie and the adventure of following Jesus.

Fight the good fight for the true faith. Hold tightly to the eternal life to which God has called you, which you have confessed so well before many witnesses. 1 Timothy 6:12

What are you willing to fight for? What does "fighting a good fight" mean to you? In life, the more passionate you are about something, the harder you're willing to fight for it, and the more committed you are to it. We all fight for things—but is what you're fighting for worth it?

Imagine for a moment what your life would be like if you were passionate about Jesus—or even more passionate than you are today. No matter how hard things got, there would be a determination and motivation to live a life pleasing to God.

When it comes to living a Jesus-centered life, it's a daily fight. However, the fight isn't with God; it's within us. The phrase "*hold tightly*" means holding on to the truth that God has given eternal life and forgiveness for all who trust Jesus. When we allow the Holy Spirit to lead us and live within us, we never lose the fight!

TALKING WITH GOD

Tell God about the things that worry you. Turn them over to God. Resist the urge to try to handle things on your own. Commit to letting God fight your battles with you.

You should clothe yourselves instead with the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God. 1 Peter 3:4

What does it mean to focus on inner beauty? If that's what God wants us to do, why do we focus so much on our outward appearances?

We sometimes think other people's opinions are more important than God's opinions. We're wrong. Most people judge us on our outward appearance instead of who we are on the inside—the beauty that comes from within. But God doesn't. God loves us for who we are, inside and out. God cares about us, more than we can fully realize. He loved us even before we were born.

So why try to impress other people with outside appearances? Focus on God. Focus more on being beautiful on the inside than on outward appearances.

TALKING WITH GOD

Pray this kind of prayer: *Jesus, thank you for caring about me. But I need your help. Please help me focus on being beautiful on the inside. Help me trust you, and help me care about your opinion, which matters more than other people's opinions. I love you, Jesus—and thank you for loving me.*



VERSE 15: 1 Peter 3:4

A LITTLE EXTRA

Get a blank sheet of paper and write GOD in the middle of it, because God is our center focus. Then, draw a heart around it, because we love him. Next, cut off everything around the heart, because we want to focus on the inside more than the outside. Put that heart somewhere as a reminder of what's most important. And whenever you look at yourself in the mirror, don't just look at your hair or your clothes or your appearance; look into your own eyes and remember that God's opinion is more important than anyone else's. Always remember that.



VERSE 16: Revelation 1:8

A LITTLE EXTRA

Do an online search for “names of God.” You’ll find “Alpha and Omega” on that list, plus lots of other names. Ask God to reveal himself to you and to remind you of who he is as you continue on your faith journey.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega—the beginning and the end,” says the Lord God. “I am the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come—the Almighty One.” Revelation 1:8

Imagine receiving this letter from God...

Let me introduce myself! I am the Lord your God. I am everything you will ever need and then some. I am the One who’s been in existence from the beginning (the Alpha) of your life until the end (the Omega) of your life. With me, there is no need to worry about one single thing. I am the One who will do just what I said I was going to do. I am God, the Father of the universe, the ruler of your past, present, and future. Without me you have nothing that is eternal, nothing that can change your life, nothing with any true substance, and nothing that can save you from the penalty of sin. Do not fear anything, because I am the Lord your God—the EVERLASTING and the ALMIGHTY. All power is in my hands. So whatever you need today, just ask me and trust me.

TALKING WITH GOD

In Revelation 1:8, God uses alpha and omega—the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet—to express just how much bandwidth he has. Today, make or renew your commitment to give God your entire life. Honor the One who is the beginning and the end of all existence, wisdom, and power.



VERSE 17: Mark 2:17

A LITTLE EXTRA

Make a confidential list of specific sins, attitudes, and patterns for which you need God’s healing. Write a sentence or two for each about how that sin, attitude, or pattern developed, and end each with a written request that God would forgive and provide freedom.

Think of a time when you went to the doctor because you didn’t feel well. And there’s that space before you and your parents decide to make the appointment, when you’re trying to decide if you need help or not. Maybe you’d had a stomachache for days. Or maybe it was a weird, itchy rash that was mysteriously spreading. Or a deep cough that kept you awake all night long, making you a zombie throughout your waking hours.

At some point, you or your parents had to reach a decision point: *Whatever this is, it’s beyond our ability to treat it.* You had to get help from an expert healer.

When Jesus heard this, he told them, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners.” Mark 2:17

Jesus is the sin-healer, the one who wants to restore you to amazing wholeness. But that healing implies that, well, you’re sick. Are you ready to acknowledge that you’re a sinner in need of the forgiveness and healing that only Jesus can provide?

TALKING WITH GOD

Take a moment to express to God your need for spiritual healing. This takes some courage, because we often spend so much effort convincing ourselves and everyone else that we’re “fine.” Admit that you can’t fix yourself and you need an expert. Tell God that you know he’s the only expert able to provide the healing you need from your sin.



VERSE 18: *Mark 8:36*

A LITTLE EXTRA

Get a piece of paper and make two lists. Create one list of things that can hurt your soul. Then create a list of things that can nurture your soul. Which list will you choose? Share the lists with a friend or adult you trust, and ask them to hold you accountable.

"And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?" Mark 8:36

What do you want out of this life? Money? Fame? Relationships? Popularity? True Love? Success? Relationship with Jesus?

What are you willing to sacrifice to get what you want? Money? Fame? Relationships? Popularity? True Love? Success? Relationship with Jesus?

Is there anything this world has to offer that's worth giving up your own soul? Our culture would say there are many things worth pursuing at all costs, but God disagrees.

Be wise. This world will promise you anything in exchange for everything and leave you with nothing. The amazing thing about a relationship with Jesus is that while we may think we're asked to give up everything, we receive everything that matters, everything that makes a difference in the long run. Hold on to your soul, and seek God's perspective on what is worth pursuing and what can be abandoned because it will pass away.

TALKING WITH GOD

Pray this kind of prayer today: *Lord, make your wants my wants. I want your desires to be my desires. I want your plans to be my plans. The things of this world can look so good and so appealing. Sometimes it's tough for me to trust that your way is the best. Protect my soul, Lord. I can't do this without you.*



VERSE 19: *Galatians 1:10*

A LITTLE EXTRA

Maybe you have friends who are agnostics, atheists, deists, or followers of specific religions. Go to dare2share.org/worldviews for some insights on how to share your faith with people from a wide range of worldviews. Invite a group of friends with different beliefs to look it over, too, and talk about how you each agree and disagree with what you find.

Obviously, I'm not trying to win the approval of people, but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ's servant. Galatians 1:10

You've likely been there. We all have. That awkward moment when you say something about Jesus and suddenly you are very uncool. Whether those you're talking to just roll their eyes before shrugging and changing the subject, or they rudely shut you down cold, either way, you know the feeling. Awkward.

Well, you can shout from the rooftops that AWKWARD IS AWESOME when it comes to being an all-out, fully committed Jesus-follower. And here's why: *Because pleasing God is truly, totally, and eternally far more important than pleasing people!*

Jesus has told us over and over in Scripture that it's our job to tell others about his message of grace and forgiveness. (Check out Romans 10:14, John 20:21, Matthew 28:19-20, and Acts 1:8, to name just a few places.) So get your courage up and talk to your friends about this good news. Embrace the awkward. Jump in with both feet, in love and by the power of the Spirit!

And remember, the benefits to others when you tell them about Jesus are HUGE—starting here and now with a restored relationship with God and lasting for all eternity in heaven.

TALKING WITH GOD

Pray about who you should connect with today about the gospel. Text or call them right away and tell them you want to set up a time to talk to them about God.



VERSE 20: Hebrews 12:7, 11

A LITTLE EXTRA

Hang out at a gym or a sports team practice for 10 minutes. Watch the different athletes as they train and discipline their bodies. How can you translate that to your spiritual walk? Think about commitments of time, increasing the weight of what you do, or even having a workout buddy for accountability. God disciplines those he loves—and you are deeply loved.

As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father?...No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way. Hebrews 12:7, 11

The difference between discipline and punishment is that discipline is designed to help us get better, while punishment is a penalty designed to keep us from doing worse. This passage says nothing of punishment—God exacting a penalty on us because we made a mistake or didn't get it right. It says God disciplines us—he helps us get better. Discipline is uncomfortable and sometimes downright painful. Ask any athlete who has trained for a major event. Discipline hurts, takes work, and requires an all-in mentality. And in the end, it reaps an amazing reward. Embrace that kind of training—that divine discipline from God—so your life can look like the one God has planned for you (see Jeremiah 29:11).

TALKING WITH GOD

Have you ever watched an athlete train hard? Sometimes, in an effort to discipline themselves to run further, lift more, or do better, they'll groan, grunt, scream, cry, yell—they aren't usually meek about discipline. As you approach God today regarding his divine discipline, don't be meek. Cry out about it, if you must—let out the frustration of discipline not being enjoyable at the time. And then feel the rush of relief as the tension of discipline releases.

"So be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the Lord your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you." Deuteronomy 31:6

The Israelites—God's chosen people in the Old Testament—had been wandering around in the desert for quite some time after being slaves for generations. They had no GPS and no access to fast-food restaurants. Now the driver of the tour bus, Moses, was near the end of the life and told the people, "Head that way. Bye! Have fun stormin' the castle!"

God had done some amazing things in their midst, but the next step was still a terrifying one. And God gave them a hard truth that most of us try to make soft: God was sending them into more problems, more trouble, more people who didn't like them, more places they weren't sure they'd fit in, more hard stuff.

God didn't say "Don't be afraid—everything's gonna be fine!" The hard promise in this passage was that maybe things wouldn't be fine. Maybe it would be hard. Maybe it would be sad. Maybe there would be trouble. The courage God commanded here didn't come from the situation. Courage came from the truth that the Israelites weren't alone. God had waded into the tough spots before. So even though things get rough and you feel forgotten, you can trust that God won't fail or abandon you when times are tough.

TALKING WITH GOD

Even after that stout promise from God, the Israelites kept messing up. Finding courage and strength of faith in God is a daily struggle. So spend some time today asking God to give you a deep trust in him—a strong and courageous faith—and then ask God for that again tomorrow, and the day after that, and the next day, and every day for the rest of your life.



VERSE 21: Deuteronomy 31:6

A LITTLE EXTRA

Find some images that are brave, courageous, strong reminders for you. Set them as your screen saver—and add Deuteronomy 31:6 as a reminder that God is going before you, wherever you find yourself traveling.