



Mr & Mrs

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365
Daily Devotions
for Busy Couples

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P U B L I S H I N G

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Mr. & Mrs.

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*“Love each other
deeply, as much
as I have
loved you.”*

JOHN 15:12 TPT



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Introduction

With your lives moving in fast forward and no known chance of slowing down, finding time to devote to your marriage can seem nearly impossible. Quality time is incredibly important for maintaining a healthy marriage in this quick-paced society where you run (sometimes literally) from errands to appointments to activities and back again.

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One of the best ways to strengthen your relationship is to spend time together with God—especially when you are busy.

This daily devotional offers inspiring reflections on relationships, encouraging Scriptures, and thought-provoking questions to help you intentionally engage with God and each other. When you prioritize spending a few moments to grow together in your relationship with God, you will quickly learn that it is the best way to begin or end your day.

January

Be completely humble and gentle;
be patient, bearing with one another in
love. Make every effort to keep the unity
of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

EPHESIANS 4:2-3 NIV

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Resolutions

I will give heed to the blameless way.

When will you come to me?

I will walk within my house in the integrity of my heart.

I will set no worthless thing before my eyes;

I hate the work of those who fall away;

It shall not fasten its grip on me.

PSALM 101:2-3 NASB

When we are at work or out with friends, our tendency is to be on our best behavior. When we are at home, in our own private space with the people who love us most, our walls come down and our worst comes out. Our family, specifically our spouses, are normally on the receiving end of our nastiest moments. Do not duplicate.

Since our family is a gift to us from God, our obedience to him begins with how we treat them. Our commitment to love God is best shown within the confines of our own home. Understandably, this is a daunting task, which is why the psalmist asks the Lord when he will come to him. We require God's help to walk blamelessly, and the Lord is happy to give us everything we need when we ask.

**What will you resolve to do to act
with integrity in your home?**

JANUARY 2

True Wealth

*Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him;
fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way,
over the man who carries out evil devices!*

PSALM 37:7 ESV

All around us are those who appear more prosperous. They do not face the struggles we do, and sometimes it seems wealth comes to them so much easier. There are those who are divisive, crooked, and selfish; they care only about their own betterment and not the wellbeing of others. Those people should not distract us or distort our view of how things really are.

Blessings cannot be weighed in dollars. Peace in the Lord can be the condition of our hearts regardless of our bank accounts or the chaos surrounding us. Taking time to be still before the Lord, exercising patience and trust in him, will calm our minds and cast away our worries. It is important that we find the time to refocus on God, and fight for our spouses to also have this time. Distractions are everywhere, so we must be purposeful in our pursuit of true and godly wealth.

**How can you help your spouse find time
to be alone with the Lord?**

JANUARY 3

Being Quiet

*Be angry, and do not sin;
ponder in your own hearts on your beds,
and be silent.*

PSALM 4:4 ESV

Feeling angry is not a sin, but we are responsible for our actions. Even when wrongs have been done against us, we have the option to do what is right. Approaching a difficult situation with an angry heart in the heat of the moment can lead to regrettable outcomes. However, taking time to think through the matter in a private place can bring clarity, so it is easier to address the offenses in a calm and collected state.

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Knowing when to be silent and when to speak demonstrates wisdom and self-control. When we become angry at our spouses, it is important to not speak in wrath or try to break each other down. Instead, take the time necessary to calm down and refocus. Then it is easier to stay on point and hear the other person's perspective.

**When something makes you angry,
how can you give it to God
and refrain from sinning?**

JANUARY 4

For Me

*You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created and have their being.*

REVELATION 4:11 NIV

Everything begins and ends with God. The existence of nature and animals is to worship him. The point of our lives is to worship him. Even the purpose of our marriages is to worship him. He is worthy of glory, honor, and power because nothing good exists outside of him! It is only by him that we exist, so it should only be for him that we exist as well.

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If matrimony truly is a picture of how God loves his people, then we should approach it with that same sort of situational reference. Trying to derive our "fair share" out of a marriage or using the other person's shortcomings as justification for our own wrongdoings does not demonstrate a commitment to God. Marriage requires sacrifice, humility, and forgiveness in the same way Christ demonstrated for us when he accepted our payment for sin on the cross.

**How can you glorify and honor God
in your marriage?**

Kindness Overflow

*Show respect for all people:
Love the brothers and sisters of God's family,
respect God, honor the king.*

1 PETER 2:17 NCV

When our spouses disappoint us, we are called to show them respect. When other Christians are acting shamefully, we are to love them even still. God will sometimes do things or allow things that we do not understand, but we should respond in obedience. Our words about those in authority over us should be honorable and reflective of how Jesus would respond.

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We cannot control other people, but we can control our responses. We do not have to agree with our spouse, friends, or those in leadership over us, but we do have to act in a way that is befitting of a child of God. Showing kindness has more power to soften hearts and bring about change than any disrespectful rebuttal or confrontation made in anger. Our desire should be for godly change and growth, not simply to stake our claim and make our opinion heard.

**How can you continue to love and respect
your spouse when you disagree
or are disappointed?**

JANUARY 6

Learn from Wisdom

*"Stand up in the presence of the aged,
show respect for the elderly and revere your God."*

I am the LORD.

LEVITICUS 19:32 NIV

A lot can be learned from those who have walked before us. Asking for wisdom and insight from others who have been married longer can offer great benefits to our marriages. So often we feel like we must rely on our own strength and hide our problems when we should be turning to the Lord for strength and help.

God has surrounded us with others who have testimonies of their own. It would be to our advantage to find those who are older and wiser, and who have spent years walking with God throughout their marriage. Respecting those who have age and experience on their side and revering God and his Word go hand in hand with growing in wisdom ourselves. Our marriages will be better off if we open our ears and hearts to listen and learn.

**Do you know anyone who has
had a long and godly marriage?
Ask them what advice they would offer.**

JANUARY 7

Honoring Parents

*"Honor your father and your mother,
so that you may live long in the land
the LORD your God is giving you."*

EXODUS 20:12 NIV

We did not choose our parents and we did not directly choose our in-laws. However, that does not deviate from the commandment that God laid down that we are expected to honor them. Words have power, and the words we choose to use can influence others around us.

Although we may decide to live differently than the way our parents chose to live, there is a respectful way to go about implementing changes and alternative standards. God does not want us to defame or shame our parents in the way we speak or live. It was God who placed them over us to parent and raise us. However they ended up doing so, we honor them because we honor God.

**Are the words you choose to use when
discussing your parents or your spouse's
parents honoring?**

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JANUARY 8

All About Me

*Each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself,
and the wife must respect her husband.*

EPHESIANS 5:33 NIV

Love and respect are basic desires of every human. It is easy to fall into the trap of withholding one or the other from our spouses as a way of controlling them or trying to force change. God's love for us, however, is unending. Although there may be consequences for wrongdoings, he does not withhold his love from us.

In marriage, we have been told to love and respect our spouses. We love them because of the incredible love we have been shown, and we respect them because they are made in the image of God. One of the most practical ways we can demonstrate love and respect to God is by giving it to our spouse. It is not our duty to decide if they are worthy of it; we are in a marriage covenant with them and, for better or worse, we must love and respect each other.

What makes your spouse feel loved?

What makes them feel respected?

JANUARY 9

Work Ethic

*In all the work you are doing, work the best you can.
Work as if you were doing it for the Lord, not for people.*

COLOSSIANS 3:23 NCV

Regardless of whether we are at home, at work, grocery shopping, or helping a friend, the expectation remains the same. Whatever we are doing, we should work as if we are working directly for the Lord—because we are. Every time we wash the dishes, head to the office, cook a meal, or volunteer our time, it is the Lord we are serving. Others may benefit from our devotion, but it always comes down to us and God.

When we remember our calling in the midst of the tedious, mundane, and even thankless tasks, it can offer us a motivation stronger than any other. Serving God is what we were made to do. It is not always glamorous or enjoyable, but it is honorable and remembered.

**When is it difficult for you
to find joy in your work?**

JANUARY 10

Bearing Fruit

We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.

COLOSSIANS 1:9-10 NIV

God never leaves us with problems or trials too vast for us to navigate. He is the opposite of confusion. His love brings clarity, insight, and direction. If we ever need wisdom, he gives it to us freely when we are truly seeking him. He gives us his Holy Spirit to comfort and to guide us.

Living a life worthy of the Lord means making choices that reflect our gratitude for his grace and forgiveness. It means acting lovingly toward each other whether that love is deserved or not because God loves us abundantly and we certainly do not deserve his love. This way of living does not dictate that we tolerate wrong behavior but that our approach always be in love, remembering that we ourselves have also been forgiven much.

**Why is bearing good fruit a sign
of someone who is truly following God?**

Clear Guide

*The LORD has told you what is good,
and this is what he requires of you:
to do what is right, to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with your God.*

MICAH 6:8 NLT

Although the Lord has freely given us forgiveness, he does not expect us to use his gift as a reason to act shamefully. Those who wish to follow God are called to live as he did. The Bible offers us a very clear guide as to how we are to conduct ourselves. Then, to demonstrate a godly lifestyle for us even clearer, God came to the world as Jesus Christ and lived a perfect life. Those whom Jesus was closest to and lived day to day beside were convinced of his Lordship by his wise words and his complementary lifestyle.

Just as the Lord Jesus taught us by his own life, we are to do what is right regardless of the outcome or of what the people around us are doing. We are to love mercy even when our minds scream for justice and we have been injured or insulted. We must leave justice in the hands of God and desire mercy. Casting aside pride, we ought to walk humbly with God. When we are near him and in reverent awe of his majesty, it is much easier to realize our own humble state.

How can you and your spouse encourage each other to follow these three mandates?

A Trustworthy Heart

*This is how we know that we belong to the truth
and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence.*

1 JOHN 3:19 NIV

John shows us here that our hearts are not trustworthy—only God is. If our hearts condemn us, he reminds us that God is bigger than our feelings. He is the one who knows all and he created a way for us to come to him. If we come, he will receive us. When we feel guilty, we must give those feelings to him, accept the truth of his forgiveness, and receive the rest and peace that his loving presence offers.

As a follow-up, John explains that our response to God's unfailing grace should be to believe in Jesus Christ, love one another, and keep his commands. His grace and forgiveness are freely given, but our response to his love reveals if we have truly accepted him as our Lord or not.

**Do your feelings ever mislead you
from the truth of the gospel?
How can you purposefully remember
that God is faithful even when
your own heart is deceitful?**

JANUARY 13

Marriage Foundation

*Let all that I am wait quietly before God,
for my hope is in him.*

PSALM 62:5 NLT

We cannot build our homes, jobs, or marriages on shifting sands. Our hope is only secure in the Father and in his promises. People will disappoint, status is not fulfilling, and our earthly homes are only temporary. All that will remain is what is rooted in Christ. Then when everything around us is uncertain, when injustice is rampant and evil is prevailing, and when those closest to us have let us down, our hope remains intact. Quietly, not in a concerned or questioning way, we wait for the Lord because we know what he says is true.

There is nothing in this world that has the power to steal our peace and our joy. No attempt of the enemy can derail our hope or lead us into doubt. For thousands of years the Lord has never failed to do exactly what he has said he will do, so we can turn to him for assurance and completely trust the truth in his Word.

What is your marriage founded upon?

Our Fortress

*Truly my soul finds rest in God;
my salvation comes from him.*

*Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.*

PSALM 62:1-2 NIV

All around us, in media and in life, there are examples of people trying to find fulfillment in others. Although we are created to need one another, ultimate love and sustenance comes only from our relationship with God. Another human is unable to offer what our souls crave most because our souls were made to desire God. When he is not at the center of our lives, we become off-balanced and uneasy.

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Our search to find fulfillment elsewhere will only lead us further off course until we admit the need for our Creator. In him, we find our rest and our internal calm. In him, we are grounded, centered, and focused. Nothing that comes against us can shake us because he is our immovable rock and the holder of our hearts. Salvation and safety can only be found in him.

What place does God have in your life?

What place does your spouse have?

JANUARY 15

Love Covers

*Above all, love each other deeply,
because love covers over a multitude of sins.*

1 PETER 4:8 NIV

Love looks past the shortcomings of another and sees the person God created. Even though we have all failed many times, the God still loves us. In this same manner, he has instructed us to love each other deeply. This comes from the Greek word *ektenés* which is used to describe the strenuous activity of an athlete's muscles when sprinting.

Love is not easy, nor is it simply a feeling. Love is a commitment to choose each other amid the sins, failures, and disappointments. Marriage requires even more grace since the actions of our spouses directly affect us. Our love must be ardent and determined, not dependent on our feelings or the actions of our spouses. We must commit to love our spouses in the good times and the bad.

How can you show your spouse you love them when you do not feel very loving?

Perfect Example

*Husbands, love your wives,
just as Christ loved the church
and gave himself up for her.*

EPHESIANS 5:25 NIV

The sort of love expected of husbands toward their wives is far greater than mere sentiment. If it were required, he should love her even to the point of death! Christ's sacrifice was so great that the imagery depicted in this verse should not be overlooked or undervalued. This is an active, sacrificial love that considers the needs of a wife over even his own.

Just as the wife is called to submit to her husband, the husband is similarly called to submit his own desires to the care and love of his wife. Christ gave us the perfect example of love, and now it is our responsibility and honor to replicate that example to each other, to the rest of our families, and to anyone else the Lord places in our paths.

**How can you apply your understanding
of salvation to your marriage?**

Truly Amazing

There are three things that amaze me—no, four things that I don't understand: how an eagle glides through the sky, how a snake slithers on a rock, how a ship navigates the ocean, how a man loves a woman.

PROVERBS 30:18-19 NLT

Of everything we experience, true love between a husband and wife is one of the strongest and most amazing experiences of all. We marvel at the power and elegance of an eagle gliding silently through the sky, its keen eyes searching far and wide. We are fascinated by creatures who must regulate themselves, carefully gauging their own bodies to know what is needed for optimal health. We are in awe of mighty ships that traverse even mightier oceans, with difficulties and peril on every horizon. How much more should we give thanks to our Creator for the wonderful and amazing gift of love between ourselves and our marriage mate?

Proper love for our spouses is even stronger than love of our own life. Like a powerful ship on a stormy sea, we must build each other up, work together as a team, and closely follow the commands of our loving Father. We need to keep constant watch over our marriages, making sure that things are kept in balance. And like the majestic eagle, if we keep our love pure and keenly look for ways to improve our marriages in Godly ways, we will soar above the problems that come our way.

What signs does your spouse give you that they need comfort and reassurance?

More Important

Love is patient and kind.

Love is not jealous,

it does not brag,

and it is not proud.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4 NCV

As sentimental as this passage is, Paul's message to the church in Corinth was in direct response to their self-centered way of living. It was a critique and a calling to a higher standard than they had previously been living. More than just a marriage mantra, it is a warning to resist pride and refuse to brag. When our purpose is self-promotion, love gives way to arrogance.

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When we esteem others as more important than ourselves—which is a direct contradiction to the way the world tells us to live—then love can truly lead us. We can exercise patience for others and surrender our plans to God. We can be kind and do good for others even when there is no recognition or reward in it for ourselves. Love will even triumph over envy because we will rejoice that others receive blessings!

**In what ways does pride manifest
the opposite of love?**

Less of Me

*"I can do nothing on my own. I judge as God tells me.
Therefore, my judgment is just, because I carry out the will
of the one who sent me, not my own will."*

JOHN 5:30 NLT

Jesus had already claimed within this passage that he was identical to God in the things he did, in his love, in his authority over both life and death, in his judgment, and in his honor. He was leading the disciples to a full understanding that he was, in all things, God himself. He had come on a mission; he was not following his own human desires and tendencies but was committed to fulfilling the will of God.

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His mandate superseded any temptations or distractions the world threw in his path. Even though people persecuted him, sought to kill him, and finally did crucify him, Jesus was unrelenting in his quest to preach the will of the Father and live it out in every one of his choices and judgments. Do we desire to be like him?

**When we lay aside our own wills for the will
of our Father, what changes in our hearts?
How does that carry over into a change in
our behavior?**

JANUARY 20

Racing Partner

Since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.

HEBREWS 12:1 NLT

Racing with a partner can inspire us to push further than we would on our own. Having someone cheering us on is a great encouragement and motivator! Running alone is difficult, and sometimes a simple word of assurance can give us the courage we need to keep going in this hectic, overwhelming world.

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As we strive to shake off the needless weights the world throws on us, we can lean on each other for help and strength. God gave us other people so we could run this race together. We ought to share both our helping hands as well as our burdens, continuing to race together.

**What are some practical ways
you can cheer your race partner on?**

No Callouses

"This people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them."

MATTHEW 13:15 NIV

Sometimes when we are self-absorbed, our hearts become closed off. If we have been hurt, our human instinct is not to love but to protect ourselves by distancing or shielding. When this process has begun, it becomes more and more difficult to recognize the needs of others and to hear what they are telling us. Our understanding of truth is also affected since our perception is limited behind the walls we are creating.

Bias and personal interest can taint our judgments. As Christians, we can trust our well-being to the capable hands of our Lord and King, then continue to love others just as he loved us. We can know for certain that the Lord will sustain us, and we do not need to callous our hearts against others who seek to harm us.

How can you keep your heart sensitive toward the Lord and your spouse?

JANUARY 22

Loving Rebuke

*Do not rebuke mockers or they will hate you;
rebuke the wise and they will love you.*

PROVERBS 9:8 NIV

The good news of God is refreshing; it brings peace and joy. The wise person digs into his Word and gladly accepts wisdom even if this means making difficult life changes. However, this message is not welcomed by everyone. Many treat the counsel of the Scriptures with disdain and ridicule. Today, individuals who are wise in their own eyes put evil in place of goodness and goodness in place of evil. They hate rebuke and correction.

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While we do not hold back the Kingdom message from anyone, is it wise to become involved in long debates with those who simply want to argue? Instead, be wise and show by example that following God's commands brings true satisfaction. May we never resent Scriptural counsel or discipline, but let these guides mold our lives and experience the righteousness of our heavenly Father.

Why does a wise person love rebuke?

JANUARY 23

Peace through Laws

*Great peace have those who love your law;
nothing can make them stumble.*

PSALM 119:165 NRSV

When we receive God's forgiveness for our sins and declare that he is Lord of our life, we stop living for ourselves and we follow his leadership. This is accompanied by a set of rules and guidelines that God, in his lovingkindness, established so we could live a worthwhile life to the fullest measure! Begrudging compliance will not please either God or us. When we learn his laws, seek to truly understand why he instated them, and realize the good that comes from adherence, we end up loving them and experiencing unexplainable peace.

True to its depiction of the love of God, marriage operates in the same fashion. When we commit our lives to one person, many freedoms we previously experienced are traded in for the adventure of marital love and companionship. Suddenly, we answer to someone else and must lay our own wishes down. What matters now is a strong partnership rather than two individual sets of interests.

**What binding elements of marriage
have you learned to love?**

JANUARY 24

Servant's Heart

*He sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them,
"If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."*

MARK 9:35 ESV

When Jesus taught his disciples what a true leader was, he used the Greek word *diakonos* which here is translated "servant." This word, from which we get the word *deacon*, means someone who attends to the needs and desires of another. Jesus demonstrated this style of leadership throughout his life and instructed his followers to do likewise.

In our lives, and especially in our marriages, we are to follow the example of Christ and become a servant of all. Like our Lord chose to do for the sake of those he loves, we have the privilege of laying aside our rights and our freedoms to help others. Issues within marriage hardly ever cut fair, so a more advantageous approach would be to love and serve our spouses whenever and however we can.

In what ways is God's kingdom a paradox to how we understand worldly establishments?

JANUARY 25

Sharing

*If you help the poor,
you are lending to the LORD—
and he will repay you!*

PROVERBS 19:17 NLT

This psalmist captures a sliver of God's altruistic personality in this verse. The motion of lending to the Lord draws out the essence of God and the desire he has for his people. His very nature is caring, empathetic, and generous which is how he wants his children to also be. Making us aware of who he is teaches us how we ought to be. Those who are poor are so close to the heart of God that by giving to them it is as if we give straight to God.

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Later in the New Testament, Christ clarified how he expects believers to love their neighbors as if they were loving themselves. He also told the story of the Good Samaritan which demonstrated the kind of care and compassion Christians are supposed to show anyone who is in need. Ultimately, the Creator is glorified when we actively love his creation. Not only is helping the poor a form of worship to God, it is directly tied into our God-given purpose—and he also repays those who give! God is faithful; he rewards those who diligently seek him. When we serve others, we become more like our Father and that is an unfathomable reward.

What can you do this week to help the poor?

Extending a Hand

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

ISAIAH 58:6-7 NIV

The best way to show God how much we love him is by loving his children. Fasting and other religious acts are beneficial for us in understanding God and drawing close to him, but what he truly wants is for us to love one another. Sometimes far greater than abstaining from food is sharing food with those who are hungry.

What purpose does living humbly have if we are not also reaching out in love to help others?

Every good thing we have been given is from the Lord. We have the option to either use these gifts for our own pleasure or invest them into the kingdom of God. Simply acting religiously does not alter the condition of our hearts. Rather than relying on recitation of religious rhetoric, we ought to put the love that we have been shown to use and feed the poor. God is far more pleased with the one who does than the one who says.

Who is God asking you to share with?

JANUARY 27

Sharing Eternity

"Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same."

LUKE 3:11 NIV

Here we see the fine teaching of Jesus himself. What good things Jehovah has given us! We have life, a measure of health, and he gave us a beautiful earth as our home. When we reflect on our blessings, and the Bible's promises for a bright future, should we not feel compelled to be generous with our spiritual brothers and sisters? In fact, our heavenly Father expects us to show kindness and generosity. Our attitude in this matter directly affects our relationship with him.

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Within the family of God, the Bible shows that the husband and wife are considered one flesh. If God expects us to show kindness, generosity, and affection for those who are related to us in the faith, how much more so does he expect a husband and wife to honor each other and give each other the emotional, material, and physical support they need? Thinking about the good things that Jehovah has given us should move us to give freely.

**Is your spouse, family, friend, or neighbor
lacking something that you have
the ability to fill?**

Careful Words

If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever.

1 PETER 4:11 NIV

Everything we have has been entrusted to us by God. Our wealth and possessions as well as our opportunities and abilities. When we open our mouths to speak, it should be to honor God and not ourselves. All credit and praise are due to him. When others thank us for our help, we ought to remember to thank God.

Similarly, our marriages are a gift from God, and we should approach them with this sort of reverence. We cannot take our spouses for granted or act as though we somehow deserve the blessings that come through marriage. Our spouses are God's children and he entrusted them to us. The words that we say and the deeds that we do for them should demonstrate our gratefulness to God for his gift and the respect we have for the position he has placed us in. Words carry power, so let us use ours for God's glory and not our own conceited agendas.

**Do your words reflect
your appreciation toward God?**

Precious Promise

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

ROMANS 16:20 NIV

This powerful promise is preceded by a message from Paul to the Christians in Rome, cautioning them against false preachers and teachers who twist the truths of God to fit their own agenda. They deceive their followers to serve their own purposes, and they do so in the name of God. In truth, they are not followers of God, but of the father of lies. In summary, Paul assures the believers that God's truth will always triumph.

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The power of the devil will one day expire and all the deceiving which was accomplished under his reign will be overturned. Every wrong will be made right and all people will know the truth. Satan will be crushed, God will bring peace to the whole world, and the grace of Jesus Christ will be with us. This is a precious promise we have from the Lord, and we can find our hope and security in it.

**What is your response when confronted
with evil and deception?**

JANUARY 30

Part of the Equation

*The human body has many parts,
but the many parts make up one whole body.*

So it is with the body of Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12 NLT

To love each other as if we were one body requires a different perspective than the world teaches. In a culture which promotes entitlement, individualism, and pride, Paul counteracts such empty pursuits by challenging believers to consider who we are in Christ. If we have truly separated ourselves from our sinful natures and been grafted into God's family, then other believers are our family members. It is as if we are one body, and we need to care for each other as such.

Within a marriage where a husband and wife become one flesh, this is even more imperative. Marriage is meant to be a picture of Christ's love for us. When we begin putting the needs of our spouses before our own, we portray that image the way it was intended.

**What can you do to care for the needs
of your spouse today?**

JANUARY 31

Better Days

*God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.*

PSALM 46:1 NIV

Our spouse can offer great solace and comfort, but nothing in this world can compare to the safety and strength offered by the Lord Almighty. When troubling times come, he is nearby, supplying us with the wisdom and guidance we need. All the strength necessary to make it through the most challenging days can be found in our Father. He is our hope for the future, our light in the darkness, and our peace amidst the turmoil of life. He stays near to us, evidenced in the promise of the Holy Spirit.

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Rather than turning to our own strength to see us through, or another person to affirm our fears, our first move should be to seek the Lord and lean on his promises. Other people can offer incredible love and support, especially our spouses, but nothing and nobody else can offer the impenetrable refuge that our Father in heaven can.

**What is one promise that God has made
which brings you great comfort and strength?**

February

God created mankind in his own image,

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in the image of God he created them,

male and female he created them.

GENESIS 1:27 NIV



Ruling a Kingdom

*LORD, the God of our ancestors, are you not the God who is in heaven?
You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in
your hand, and no one can withstand you.*

2 CHRONICLES 20:6 NIV

Does it ever feel like this world and its problems are too vast and intense? Injustice looms and threatens to overthrow our efforts. Sometimes the tragedies in our own lives seem like more than we can cope with, and other times we are devastated by news from far away. Yet amidst all the anguish stands a resolute promise, that the Lord is nearby and he hears the cries of the suffering. Nothing escapes his loving glance, and there is no adversary who can stand against him.

Although God may allow evil to reign for a time, giving us opportunities to follow him in faith, his ultimate plan will be enacted. We will be saved from everything which threatens to undo us. His kingdom is forever, and his judgment is sound. Within him is all power and all love! Even now he is holding us with his mighty hand, and although the threat seems strong, there is nothing that can separate us from his love. He has been guarding and upholding his people since the beginning of time and he is not going to change that now.

**When you are feeling overwhelmed
or dismayed, what Scriptures bring you
comfort and encouragement?**

Openness in Love

*Better is open rebuke than hidden love.
Wounds from a friend can be trusted,
but an enemy multiplies kisses.*

PROVERBS 27:5-6 NIV

A true friend cares more about you than they do your opinion of them. Sensitive matters must be addressed gently and respectfully, but truth should always be the prevailing word. A fragile friendship may crumble under offense, but when true love exists, it does not have to worry about the relationship being crushed by critique.

One who is self-seeking may use flattery to win attention from others, but their words are not based in truth or love. When hard times come or their own desires lead them elsewhere, they will be gone and with them their empty praises. Someone who sincerely loves will be open and forthcoming. They understand that the depth of the relationship requires honesty and integrity of speech. When someone who cares for us criticizes us with no personal gain achieved, we would be wise to listen and consider the matter.

**How well do you receive criticism
from your spouse?
How kindly do you offer it?**

Inner Circle

*Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise,
but the companion of fools suffers harm.*

PROVERBS 13:20 NRSV

This proverb is not instructing us to avoid or reject unwise people. Jesus himself regularly kept company with the degenerates of society. It is cautioning us to choose wisely who we associate ourselves with on a continual basis. We should surround ourselves with wise people so that we learn from them and become wiser ourselves. Being the companion of fools implies that we are accompanying them in their foolishness.

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We should have no hesitation in becoming friends with sinners or in enjoying life, but when our friends start walking down a foolish path, participating in their thoughtlessness will bring about consequences for us as well. Recognize the difference between loving people like Jesus and being led and influenced by people who are unlike Jesus. Keep wise people in your inner circle to help keep you accountable and encourage your pursuit of God. Pray for wisdom in all things.

**Do you have wise people who you regularly
keep company with?**

A Reliable Friend

*One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin,
but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*

PROVERBS 18:24 NIV

It is no secret that who we associate with has a tremendous influence on us. A person who proves to be unreliable should, clearly, not be relied upon. We can still care about this person, but it would be foolish to depend on them when difficult times come upon us because we will ultimately be led to ruin. They will not come through for us regardless of how much we love them or want to believe in their potential.

Trials reveal the true nature of people, and they can also divulge. Property of BroadStreet Publishing. Do not duplicate.

who are dependable friends. The loyalty and good nature of some people will spring forth during hardships, and these are the individuals who prove to be as dependable as our own families. A steady, trustworthy friend is worth more than riches because they will be there in the fun times as well as the bad. Their faithfulness and love can keep us from ruin, and we should strive to offer the same loyalty and consistency to them. These are the friendships worth fighting for.

**Which of your friends would you
turn to in an emergency?
Who would you look
to for a true answer?**

God-Positioning System

*In all your ways acknowledge Him,
and He will make your paths straight.*

PROVERBS 3:6 NASB

There is so much wisdom and backstory to this admonition which King Solomon gave to his son. He had been down the road of self-pursuit before, had all the worldly wealth someone could ever imagine, and he had seen that it was futile without the Lord.

Acknowledging the Lord in everything and seeking his direction will save us from endless amounts of unnecessary trouble. When difficulties come despite our obedience, we are assured that they are working for our betterment. Sometimes trouble is self-imposed by our own recklessness and failure to seek God's guidance. Why invite additional problems? It is better to seek God and remain on the straight path than to follow our own pursuits.

**How can you and your spouse seek God's will
and acknowledge him together while you are
making plans and goals for your life?**

Cold Water

"If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward."

MATTHEW 10:42 NIV

Jesus gathered his twelve disciples and laid out instructions for them detailing how they should go out into the world. He concluded this account by turning his words out to the world, declaring that they should be received: whether a prophet, a righteous man, or even a little one.

A cup of cold water may sound meager and insignificant, but anyone who has been thirsty knows how necessary it is. Anybody can give water, so nobody has an excuse to not give in Jesus' name. We may have an abundance or very little, but we can always give. Charity is everybody's opportunity, and the Lord so richly blesses it! A cup of water in exchange for heavenly rewards sounds inconceivable, yet that is how dearly the Lord loves generosity. When we give what we can out of love, God sees it and he rewards us. We cannot out-give God.

A cup of cold water in the Middle East during the time of Jesus was not always easy to come by. In our day and culture, what might be a parallel need you could help fill for someone?

FEBRUARY 7

Unmerited Favor

The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

1 PETER 5:10 NIV

Our salvation in Christ does not mean we will not face struggles. Rather, it all but guarantees we will have troubles as a result of our faith. In those moments, we remember that God is going to one day mend the broken, right the wrong, and restore what has been taken. In the meantime, we look to him for strength because he is unshakable. We find a steadfast hope within his promises and we can stand certain that all will be well in the end.

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The favor and grace that he has for us is unmerited but joyfully given. The Lord has already accomplished the work of our creation and salvation, not to mention sustaining us every day, so we have ample evidence of his faithfulness. We know his words are true. He will also do the work of our restoration just like his Word promises us.

**What has been broken in you or
taken from you that you are eager
for the Lord to restore?**

New Grip

*Take a new grip with your tired hands and strengthen your weak knees.
Mark out a straight path for your feet so that those who are weak
and lame will not fall but become strong.*

HEBREWS 12:12-13 NLT

Suffering is not enjoyable, but it is purposeful. Disciplining children helps them be able to self-discipline later in life. Since God is a good Father, he disciplines his children out of love. He is protecting us and maturing us. By embracing his correction and learning to say no to the things which are bad for us, we become stronger and we will not fall nearly as often.

Like an athlete trains for a game, if we expect to win, we must also buckle down and train. Take hold of what is good, strengthen yourself through prayer and obedience, and plan to do what you are called to do. We must actually mark out a straight path by determining to do the right thing and by avoiding obstacles. If we allow life to just happen to us and hope to avoid temptations and trials, we will succumb much more frequently than we will if we have a training plan in place.

What actions can you and your spouse take to mark out a straight path for yourselves?

Blossoming

*We all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory,
are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory,
which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

2 CORINTHIANS 3:18 NIV

Previously, our sins separated us from God. There had to be an atonement for our sins before we could approach God in all his glory. When Jesus Christ became our atonement, he removed the sin which was blocking us, and as a visual message, the temple veil ripped from the top to the bottom. It became understood that we could now approach God in his perfection because he had made us pure.

Now, just as if the veil had been taken away from our faces, we can come before God. The more we spend time with him and learn from him, the more like him we naturally become. This process, known as progressive sanctification, is not something we can accomplish on our own through discipline or good works. It is the Spirit of God who instigates this change in us, and it is for his glory.

**As you contemplate the Lord's glory,
what qualities amaze and inspire you?
Which of God's characteristics
do you aspire to mature in this week?**

Elementary Teaching

Leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

HEBREWS 6:1-2 NASB

As we continue to grow in our relationship with God, our understanding of him matures. We should not be mulling over the same elementary teachings but diving deeper into his Word to uncover more of his glorious mysteries.

After being married for years, you would not continue to ask your spouse the same questions you did when first getting to know each other; instead your conversations would consist of topics with more depth, built on a foundation of understanding which has already been laid. In the same way, our closeness to God is evidenced in how we have sought him through prayer and reading, and how we have carried out his instructions. This happens over time and takes intentional interaction with the Lord.

**Since we know that relationships do not stay stationary, how can you pursue the Lord today?
How can you pursue your spouse?**

Mature in Love

When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:11 NIV

In the past, we were children with time to waste and little responsibility. Most of us only needed to take care of ourselves. Our speech was childish, and our reasoning was limited. As we matured, however, we began to take on more responsibility. We talked less about childish fantasies and more about our daily responsibilities.

After we got married, we learned even more how to take responsibility for our choices, words, and actions since they directly affected someone very close and dear. In a healthy marriage, we continue to mature in love. Our capacity to care for someone else grows, and our love for the Lord extends even further. God is ready to bring us to new heights and open our eyes to his mysteries if we are willing to walk in obedience and lay aside our immaturity.

What is the difference between childish understanding and child-like faith?

Artist, Builder, Writer

Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.

1 TIMOTHY 4:14-15 NKJV

Each of us have been given gifts and a calling. As we mature, these things become more evident. Drawing close to the Lord, combined with self-awareness and the insight of others, often reveals our uniqueness as God intended.

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Timothy was given gifts of leadership and teaching, and Paul was urging him to not waste them. There were many false teachers at that time and Timothy was being sent out among them. His mandate was to live devoted to God, given entirely to the things which he had been called to. The people needed to see the difference between the false teachers who were operating in their own strength for their own gain, and Timothy who was using the gifts God had given him and acting in obedience. The progress Timothy was making in comparison to the others was evident to all. When we use our God-given gifts for his glory rather than our own, it will be obvious and powerful!

**Just like Paul encouraged Timothy,
how can you encourage your spouse
to step out in their God-given gifts?**

FEBRUARY 13

Better Balance

*Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
To him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.*

2 PETER 3:18 NIV

In the final salutation of his letter, Peter left his readers with two tasks: to grow in the grace of Jesus Christ and to grow in the knowledge of him. To grow in grace does not mean to acquire more grace, since grace is given to us by God and we already have it to the fullest measure. Peter is encouraging us to grow and mature within the grace that has been provided to us.

When we truly understand how radical and thorough God's grace is, we can begin to live in the freedom that he gave us. Instead of focusing on our shortcomings and introspecting too much, we can rejoice in the grace allotted to us by Jesus Christ and gain a healthier perspective. Our focus can be on how to love God and serve other people, instead of sinking in our own insecurities. We are also to grow in our knowledge of Jesus Christ, which reveals God's heart and perspective. It is important to learn to see things the way God does rather than relying on our own limited views.

**What does growing in the grace of Jesus
look like in your marriage?**

Everyday Sweetness

*A person finds joy in giving an apt reply—
and how good is a timely word!*

PROVERBS 15:23 NIV

Life is very difficult sometimes. What a joy it is to have a spouse who actively seeks to make the marriage as pleasant as possible! We should strive to be that spouse. Each one should think about his or her words as if they build up or tear down. We might ask ourselves, "Are the words I want to say something that I would like to have spoken to me?" Having a kind word or a calm and timely answer to a problem will go a long way toward maintaining peace in our marriages.

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We can compare this proverb with other Scriptures found throughout the Bible, including Colossians 4:6, which says, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." Just as a meal is so much more enjoyable when properly seasoned, so our marriage will be if we season our words with love and kindness and use good judgment in the timing of what we say. We should always build each other up and be looking for ways to give a good word at the right time.

**Have you ever received the right word of
encouragement exactly when you needed it?
What was that like?**

FEBRUARY 15

Don't Look Back

*Let not your heart turn aside to her ways;
do not stray into her paths.*

PROVERBS 7:25 ESV

There are many sins the Bible tells us to stand up to and fight against, to go forth in courage and overcome! When it comes to the issue of sexual sin, however, it always cautions us to run. Steer clear, do not look back, and avoid it at all costs. God created us to be attracted to other people, which is why marriage is such an incredible and powerful gift. Yet it also means it is easy to become ensnared in our lustful urges especially in a culture which freely propagates sensuality.

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When we choose to follow our fantasies rather than our commitments, we scorn the gift God has given us and we hurt ourselves and our loved ones. The marriage bond is holy and deserves our loyal attention. Our love and commitment both to God and our spouses compels us to live a disciplined and chaste life, and we should not test our human natures by even flirting with the notions of adultery. It is never worth it.

**What can you do when confronted
with sexual temptation?**

**Have you adopted any habits or safeguards
in your marriage to help you choose purity?**

FEBRUARY 16

Wisdom Granted

*For the LORD grants wisdom!
From his mouth come knowledge and understanding.*

PROVERBS 2:6 NLT

To be with God is to grow in wisdom. James warns that self-seeking leads to confusion but when we seek God, he opens our eyes to the truth and we grow in our knowledge and understanding of how things really are. There are many pursuits in this world that captivate the hearts of mankind, but our heavenly Father should be our greatest desire! He is the originator of every good thing, and the only one who will truly satisfy our souls.

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There are many delights in this life that offer temporary gratification, but if we choose to pursue them instead of seeking the Lord, we will end up dissatisfied and confused. The Lord has given us many good things, but they are not to infringe on his place in our lives. An example of this is our spouse. Marriage is an incredible gift from God. It is a symbol of his love for us, and we are expected to treat it with respect and care. It is a high priority that requires love and attention, but it is not our source of strength or fulfilment. God alone grants wisdom, and from him comes the understanding we need to advance in all other areas of our lives.

**As you and your spouse together seek the
Lord for wisdom in your marriage this week,
what do you want to better understand?**

FEBRUARY 17

Knitted Together

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.

ACTS 2:46 NIV

When Jesus died on the cross, the temple veil was torn in two, symbolizing that we had access to God through his sacrifice for our sins. No longer was it necessary to go through all the ceremonial washing before approaching God because Christ had cleansed us. No longer was it a requirement to seek God at the temple only because his Holy Spirit was with us. We can pray to God anywhere at any time and have certainty that he hears us.

The early Christians at first were viewed as a sect of Judaism, but as their teaching extended, clear distinctions were drawn. They had not converted away from their original laws but had correctly concluded that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of the law. Others who did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah were still trapped in the mindset that worship must take place at synagogues or temples. These early Christians, however, realized that our whole lives are to be a form of worship to the Lord—everything we do and say.

How is your life a form of praise to the Lord?

Does your marriage mirror a sincere heart?

FEBRUARY 18

Drink Deeply

*With joy you will drink deeply
from the fountain of salvation!*

ISAIAH 12:3 NLT

Water serves many purposes: it refreshes, cleanses, heals, and causes growth. A deep drink of water when you have been thirsty rejuvenates your entire being. In a similar but much more profound and eternal way, Christ's salvation has refreshed our weary spirits by offering hope. It has cleansed us from all our sins, it heals us from our wounds by giving us forgiveness and the ability to forgive others, and it allows for us to grow in our relationship with our God and Father.

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Salvation brings greater joy than anything found within this world! There is no sensation like being washed by the fountain of salvation because its cleansing power is lasting. We are no longer guilty because we have been made pure. We are no longer hopeless or thirsty because when we drink of the water Jesus' offers, its effects are eternal.

**Do you feel refreshed or weary these days?
Do you need to spend time hearing
from the Lord?**

Rejoicing in Suffering

Rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

1 PETER 4:13 NIV

More than simply enduring suffering on behalf of Christ, Peter explains that we should rejoice in it. This sounds strange and counterintuitive, but Christians have great reason to celebrate and be grateful when persecution precedes. Before we were in Christ, our lives held no eternal value. Christ invited us into his inheritance—this includes both the rewards and the sufferings.

Only Christ could pay the price of our sin and suffer on our behalf, but that does not mean we will be freed from suffering. In fact, he told us to also pick up our crosses and follow him. Someone who is following Jesus' leadership and walking in his footsteps is promised to encounter peril. When the sorrows and stumbling blocks hit on account of obedience to God, we can rejoice because we are sharing in the goodness of Christ. When his glory is revealed, it will also be revealed that we have faithfully aligned ourselves with him. Our invitation is to share with him, both in his suffering and in his reward.

What are some different ways Christians suffer because their lifestyles mirror Christ's and are not conformed to the systems of this world?

Pleasing Presence

*How happy your people must be! How happy your officials,
who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom!*

2 CHRONICLES 9:7 NIV

When the Queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom, riches, and greatness God had given to Solomon, she was astounded! Every one of the king's friends and servants alike were happy and satisfied under his rule. His kingdom was both impressive and inviting. His reign was based in compassion and justice. Imagine, then, how wonderful and powerful the Lord of Hosts is, who gave Solomon all that he possessed; both his external wealth and his internal wisdom.

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How blessed we are to serve under the rule of the Lord God of the heavens! It is he who gives us everything we need; who offers us comfort, encouragement, purpose, strength, and direction. When we consider who the Lord is and what he has done, we realize true joy and untouchable contentment. He is the source of all wisdom—that of King Solomon's and our own. There is no reason to be dismayed when our hope is in God and when we are submitted to his wisdom.

**In what ways are you and your spouse
serving the Lord?**

FEBRUARY 21

Know-It-All

Live in harmony with each other.

Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people.

And don't think you know it all!

ROMANS 12:16 NLT

If Christ, who was the fullness of God, was willing to come to this earth and submit himself to the company of humans, then we have no excuse to disassociate anyone because we perceive them to be less than ourselves. One of the revolutionary aspects of the early Christian church was how inclusive it was toward women, foreigners, slaves, the uneducated, prostitutes, lepers, and anyone else.

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We have all come from different places with separate struggles. God has welcomed with open arms anyone humble enough to accept his message. Until all has been revealed, there will continue to be disagreements within the body of Christ. These are inevitable, but they also provide us with the opportunity to exercise humility. Paul is not instructing us to avoid differences of opinion or all think the same way, but he is teaching us that we ought to fine tune our words and actions to be harmonious with other people. We can all learn from each other if we are not too proud. None of us has all the answers.

Is there anyone in your life who believes differently than you? How do you associate melodically without compromising your convictions?

Mind Reading

*Have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love,
a tender heart, and a humble mind.*

1 PETER 3:8 ESV

Having previously addressed separate groups within the body of Christ (wives, husbands, slaves), Peter now summarizes five overarching commandments applicable to all people. Christians are to have unity of mind with regards to the teaching of Jesus. His words are what continue to unite us across all generations and far reaches of the world. We are also to be sympathetic to the needs of others. It is not enough to only care about our individual standing before God. Since we are collectively members of a greater body of believers, we are to treat others as if they were part of our own body and express active compassion for them.

To have brotherly love for one another further clarifies the perspective we are intended to have as members of the family of God. Displaying a tender heart means more than simply sympathy; we are moved to respond. Our hearts are tender toward the hurts and needs of others and not suspicious, judgmental, or calloused. All of these are much easier if we have a humble mind. Our motivation is not our own glorification but to glorify God. We can do that by loving and supporting his people just as he taught us to do.

**What do each of these five traits look like
when lived out?**

FEBRUARY 23

Open Your Pantry

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

2 CORINTHIANS 9:10-11 NIV

We have a duty to one another. How can we expect to receive mercy from God whilst withholding grace from each other? Our Father loves us deeply and has given us many blessings. In turn, we ought to share what we have with his other children whom he also loves. This is the greatest way we can thank him for his generosity toward us.

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As Christians, we do not need to stockpile or hoard worldly goods since we understand that it is God who supplies for our needs. Of course, we should be wise, thrifty, and perceptive of the days to come, but not to the extent that it replaces charity and hospitality. If we truly want to worship God and show him love, then we are to serve others and attend to their needs. That is what he has asked his followers to do.

What is the difference between wisely saving for the future and being greedy?

FEBRUARY 24

Pure Religion

*Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this:
to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself
unstained by the world.*

JAMES 1:27 NASB

Over and over Jesus emphasized that he was not impressed by religiosity or ceremonies exalting pious performances. He preached love. He taught humility. He lived selflessly. Furthermore, he expects his followers to do likewise. Assisting those in need is far more precious in the sight of God than legalistically maintaining an image of devout Christianity.

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Keeping unstained by the world does not mean avoiding others who we feel are less virtuous than ourselves. It is cautioning us away from following the world's systems, which are built on a framework of self-gratification and individual promotion. If our eyes are fixed on our own goals and aspirations, we will likely miss the plights of those around us who are in distress. As Christians, we are not to become so self-absorbed, pursuing the world's version of success, that we lose sight of our true calling which is to be the hands and feet of Christ

**Who do you know in distress? How can you
love that person this week the way Jesus
taught you to?**

FEBRUARY 25

Giving Time

Suppose someone has enough to live and sees a brother or sister in need, but does not help. Then God's love is not living in that person.

1 JOHN 3:17 NCV

Following the money trail is a good way to expose a person's heart and true motivation. Obviously, God does not need our money, but instead of addressing all the needs of his people he invites us to participate with him. We have been given an opportunity to love others as ambassadors of God. Are we stingy with our wealth and possessions—the very wealth assets God entrusted to us to begin with? That reveals the place our hearts are; caring more for our own preservation and comfort than for our brothers and sisters.

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Are we generous with what we have been blessed with? Giving to others displays gratitude for what we have been given, trust in God to supply for all our needs, and an active love for others, which is the Gospel message. God has promised to take care of us, so we ought to care for one another. We find our comfort in his promises not in financial security or worldly pleasures.

**Who is in need today? What do they need?
How can you love them?**

FEBRUARY 26

Supporting Others

*We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak
and not to please ourselves.*

ROMANS 15:1 NIV

The Lord did not grant us freedom from the law so we could use it to indulge in our own desires, but so we could proclaim his freedom to those still stuck in captivity. Everyone is on their own walk with the Lord and at varying levels of maturity. It is not for us to judge, but to love them and support their walk. Even after accepting Christ's salvation, many Christians do not understand the full extent of the forgiveness and freedom they have been given.

It is Christ who makes us pure, Christ who sanctifies us, and Christ who bears our weaknesses.

When someone weaker in the faith is caught up in the letter of the law rather than the love of Christ, our response should be to show them the love of Christ. God does not require complete understanding and maturity from us immediately because he understands that sanctification is a process. It is important that we allow others the grace and time to come to a fuller understanding of the love of God as they realize it over time. We can support them through the process by laying our own liberties aside for the sake of their conscience.

**What is God calling you to lay aside
for the sake of someone else?**

FEBRUARY 27

Honest Communication

*Love does not delight in evil
but rejoices with the truth.*

1 CORINTHIANS 13:6 NIV

True agape love as Paul describes here rejoices when truth triumphs. Evil can be appealing, and at times we can find our hearts delighting in seeing sin prevail, but that is not aligning ourselves with the God of truth. It may be tempting to find thrill in well-executed revenge, or cheer for the passion mixed up in a sensual affair. Cheating or stealing without getting caught can offer an adrenaline rush, while mocking someone behind their back may result in laughs. But all these deeds are contrary to how God expects his children to behave. We are held to a higher standard than these petty, self-gratifying, evil actions. We are to love what is true.

We should love when someone forgoes revenge, remains pure, upholds integrity in their business dealings, and refuses to gossip. A child of God will be an honest communicator who rejoices when God's values are held to especially despite what would otherwise make them feel good or offer them human affirmation.

Does truth reign in your marriage? How can you resist the urge to seek revenge or get even when things do not go your way?

Walk in Light

*If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness,
we lie and do not live out the truth.*

1 JOHN 1:6 NIV

Walking in the light of God exposes our sin because there is nowhere to hide. It forces us to confront our bad habits, our mess-ups, and our ungodly attitudes. It helps us to deal with sin and overcome it rather than continuing to muddle in it. Walking in the light is difficult because it requires humility, honesty, and a willingness to change. The darkness is appealing because it discloses our ugly side. Nobody sees what we do in the darkness and we can get away with our feel-good flaws for longer.

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Hiding in the darkness and putting forth a false image is not representative of the Father of Lights whose qualities are pure, truthful, and approachable. We do not serve a hidden God who lets us wander or keeps us guessing; we serve a God who crossed heaven and hell to be near his beloved children and reveal to them all the mysteries of the universe. When we live contrary to our King, we separate ourselves from him. Although it may not cost us our salvation which we were freely given, it invites trouble into our lives and the lives of those who are affected by us.

**How does hidden sin affect your relationship
with God? With your spouse?**

March

Place me like a seal over your heart,

like a seal on your arm.

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For love is as strong as death,

its jealousy as enduring as the grave.

SONG OF SOLOMON 8:6 NLT



MARCH 1

Ask for Wisdom

*Know also that wisdom is like honey for you:
If you find it, there is a future hope for you,
and your hope will not be cut off.*

PROVERBS 24:14 NIV

The immediate reward of honey is its sweet taste. But honey also has incredible health benefits. Similarly, wisdom has both immediate and lasting advantages. Wisdom requires searching as is implied in this verse and throughout the Scriptures. It is not contained in this world, so our searching requires prayer and a relationship with God.

A healthy fear of the Lord is only attained when we realize the true greatness of God. God has shown us immeasurable amounts of love and grace, but God hates sin. Sin separates us from him in our hearts and our hearts begin to grow dull. Knowing God and fearing him should help steer us away from sin. We should shun sin, as wisdom decrees, and cling to our future hope in Christ. Sin, after all, brings only temporary pleasure, but our true hope found in Christ Jesus will never be cut off.

How far are you willing to go to search for wealth which passes in time? How far are you willing to search for wisdom which is eternal?

Eternal Futures

We do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-17 NIV

Paul was no stranger to suffering. Having been beaten with rods, pelted with stones, thrown in jail, shipwrecked, and stranded, Paul's body must have truly looked like he was wasting away. His inward strength, however, was only increasing and renewing throughout every hardship he encountered. His strength came from the Lord, and his assurance from God's promises. He knew that regardless of how great his suffering was, it did not even compare to the eternal glory waiting for him.

Everything around us that vies for our attention or attempts to intimidate us is only temporary. One day, it will all fade away and only what is grounded in God will remain. That is the hope we have been given and the reward we persevere for. Be careful not to become engrossed with your temporary, physical appearance. It is what God is doing inside our hearts that counts because only that will remain.

**Do you spend more time working
on how you are perceived by others
or on the condition of your heart?**

MARCH 3

Hope and Mercy

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*

1 PETER 1:3 NRSV

We deserve death, but God showed us mercy by withholding our due punishment and paying the price of our sins himself. This ultimate sacrifice and incredible display of love is worthy of our praise and obedience. The best way to praise God for his abundant mercy is through how we live. Our actions and choices reveal what is in our hearts.

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If we truly grasp the magnitude of the freedom we were gifted, then our hearts would be flooded with love and gratitude. This, in turn, would reveal itself through us by the way we act toward others and how we navigate life's rocky paths. Through Christ's death and resurrection, we have been given a living hope that will not die or be disappointed. We cannot stay silent or passive about a hope that saved us from death and promised us a life forever with our Maker.

**How is your attitude toward your spouse
impacted by the mercy and grace you receive
from the Lord?**

MARCH 4

You First

*Humility is the fear of the LORD;
its wages are riches and honor and life.*

PROVERBS 22:4 NIV

Marriage is a perfect practicing place for humility since the Lord constantly calls us to serve each other and put our spouse's needs before our own. Regardless of whether our spouses seem worthy of our love and service or not, we give it to them because we owe it to God. Humility leads to understanding, which leads to a fear of the Lord, which leads to wisdom. A wise person will recognize the richness of walking with the Lord. Those who are wise are often also honored and respected. They find greater peace and contentment in life because their assurance is in God, and this leads to a better quality of life.

Our marriages will benefit greatly from walking in wisdom, which starts with humbly serving the needs of the other and loving them in a way that brings glory and praise to God. We were loved when we were utterly undeserving, and we can choose now to love our spouses because of our great love for God and the gift of marriage that he has entrusted us with.

What does your spouse need help with today? How can you serve as if serving the Lord himself?

MARCH 5

Pride or Honor

*Pride brings a person low,
but the lowly in spirit gain honor.*

PROVERBS 29:23 NIV

Pride was what manifested in Lucifer, the angel of light. The desire to be worshipped led to his fall from heaven. Pride is a preoccupation with serving ourselves and inevitably leads to greed, stubbornness, jealousy, and rebellion. We cannot serve two masters who have separate agendas. Often God will lead his children places they do not want to go or ask them to do things they do not want to do.

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If we are infatuated with ourselves and slaves to our own desires, we cannot serve God in the moments that really matter. If our spirits are submissive and humble, we will recognize our King's voice and find joy in following him. This path leads to great honor because there is nothing more worthy than to spend our lives serving our Savior! The kingdom of God is paradoxical; he brings low those who attempt to elevate themselves, and he bestows honor on the lowly and obedient. It is in the heart of every person to desire recognition and respect, but we can allow God to bring those in his time and in his way. By chasing them, we lose sight of what truly matters.

What does it mean to be lowly in spirit?

MARCH 6

Ability

We are not saying that we can do this work ourselves.

It is God who makes us able to do all that we do.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:5 NCV

As soon as we begin to find our confidence in ourselves, we start to drift off the path. Our strength and our skills are pathetic in comparison to the might of the Lord. It is God who makes us able to act righteously, resist temptation, and stay our course.

When Paul penned these words, it revealed his changed heart. As someone who had previously prided himself on his own merit, he had in time discovered his complete inability, and fallen to his knees before his Creator. He wrote that of all people, he had the most he could boast in. He was zealous, righteous, blameless, and came from a perfectly religious background and upbringing. And yet he came to realize that all his worthiness could not save him, nor help him to accomplish his mission. It is only by the strength of God that we live, and we rejoice in that.

What has God laid on your heart to do that seems too great for you? Have you asked him to give you strength to accomplish it?

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MARCH 7

You Before Me

*Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others.
Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.*

PHILIPPIANS 2:3 NLT

When we live for the goal of impressing others, there is no room for unity and love. The two different ambitions do not coincide, so we are faced with a decision: us or others. Denying selfishness and choosing to serve other people requires humility. Humility comes from a proper perspective of who we are and who God is.

When we realize how wonderful God truly is, our perspective should change to one of joyful service rather than self-focus. How empty is a life which revolves around the glorification of self? Rather than waste our efforts on worthless attempts at others' approval and applause, we ought to keep the bigger picture in mind. Joining together with God to serve other people and allowing our lives to be a form of worship to him is far more fulfilling and lasting than any conceited promotion of ourselves.

**Do you think of your spouse as better
than yourself? How can you practice
putting them first?**

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MARCH 8

Tears of Laughter

*Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then they said among the nations,
"The LORD has done great things for them."*

PSALM 126:2 ESV

How remarkable to know that Jehovah God, the Almighty of the universe cares so much for us that he enjoys seeing us happy and rejoicing. Jehovah does not need us, and yet he derives pleasure in giving us joy. Because of his love, we have life and a hope for the future. God's Son, Jesus, perfectly imitated his Father's unselfish love by giving his perfect life as a ransom for us.

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We are also made in the image of God and can reflect his qualities. In doing so, our experience is that when we give others a reason to laugh, a reason to shout joyfully, and do kind things for them, we bring happiness not only to them, but also to ourselves. Seek each day to make your spouse, your family, and your friends happy and joyful. Strive to pursue the best interests of others and you will always be rejoicing.

**What great things has the Lord done for you
and your spouse lately?**

MARCH 9

People of Integrity

*I know that you are pleased with me,
for my enemy does not triumph over me.
Because of my integrity you uphold me
and set me in your presence forever.*

PSALM 41:11-12 NIV

David knew where his help came from. He did not attribute his numerous victories to himself but to the power of God. Confidence that God was pleased with him was evidenced in the fact that David's enemies were unable to overthrow him. The Lord had always protected and provided for David, and David always gave God the glory. As virtuous as he was, David still realized that his goodness and integrity were not enough to sustain him. It was the Lord alone who upheld him, and only by God's greatness was David able to accomplish all that he did.

More than anything else in the world, David proclaimed loud and often that he wanted to be in God's presence. This mattered more to him than all the kingdoms of earth. His pure desire to be close to God was why God referred to him as a man after his own heart. In fact, the tense that David used while scribing this psalm was present, stating that he knew he was already in God's presence. It wasn't a hope he had for the next life, but a reality he clung to in his daily life on earth.

**How do you know that
God is pleased with you?**

MARCH 10

Yes and No

*Do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath,
but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no,
so that you may not fall under condemnation.*

JAMES 5:12 ESV

Since we are children of the Father of truth, our words should reflect it. God does not deceive, and he instructs us to be honest in all our dealings as well. It was common practice in the time of Jesus and James to make oaths as a way of convincing someone that you will uphold a certain deal or that what you were saying was true. If someone must swear on something that they are being truthful, they might not resemble a trustworthy person.

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Honesty and integrity should be trademark features of a Christian since we represent our Father. Our characters and past dealings should be enough to reassure people that what we say is true and what we promise will be delivered. There should be no need to swear since we are already known to be dependable people. Living up to this standard is both necessary and different from the world around us which is why James thought it necessary to echo these profound words of Christ.

**Do people believe you when you
tell them something or do they dig
for further reassurance?**

MARCH 11

Follow Me

*"Come, follow me,
and I will show you how to fish for people!"*

MATTHEW 4:19 NLT

When Jesus came to earth, he came in human form to interact with humans. The messages he brought were of heavenly truths, but he used analogies and explanations which were easier for us to understand. It was common in those times for rabbis to go out and select the mentees they would like to accompany them in their teaching careers, so Jesus similarly went forth to find his disciples. Rather than searching the synagogues, however, he approached impressionable fishermen. His selection was truly "salt of the earth" workers who held no authority within the religious circles of society. When he approached them, he spoke a language that made sense to them.

Peter and Andrew knew what the Teacher meant when he said, "Come, follow me." They understood that he was calling them to a different life than they had ever imagined for themselves. Then he said, "I will show you how to fish for people." He was calling them to not simply feed people with fish anymore, but to reach them with the truth of the gospel message, which would feed them forever. They knew exactly what he was saying because he used their own terms and language to call them.

Why is it important to meet people where they are, and use terms they can understand?

MARCH 12

Many Advisers

*Without counsel plans fail,
but with many advisers they succeed.*

PROVERBS 15:22 ESV

Our lives are comprised of a series of choices: what to study, where to work, who to marry, where to live, whether to have children, what to believe, and so forth. Relying on our own insight offers us only one perspective which is a very limited view. The Lord does not need counsel since he is both omniscient and omnipresent. However, we are human and subject to err.

As a married couple, we have the benefit of a partnership already available for creating and modifying plans, but there is wisdom in numbers. Along with our spouses, we should seek wise counsel from trusted and godly friends. Fools rush forward, but the wise exercise patience and a willingness to listen. God made us to need each other, and we are more likely to succeed with a wider perspective. No human has all the answers, but by heeding the warnings of others, we have far better odds of avoiding potential pitfalls and unforeseen dangers.

Who do you go to for advice?

Constructive Criticism

*If you listen to constructive criticism,
you will be at home among the wise.
If you reject discipline, you only harm yourself;
but if you listen to correction,
you grow in understanding.*

PROVERBS 15:31-32 NLT

Many people struggle to receive criticism because it feels demoralizing. For the sake of others, we should learn how to deliver truth and criticism in a helpful way and not a harmful one. By going the extra step to ensure a kind delivery, we stand a greater chance of our message being received and effecting change.

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We should also make it our objective to be able to receive criticism well because through it we can correct our mistakes and continue to mature. This humble acceptance of truth, even when it stings, will lead to wisdom and understanding. Discipline is an act of love from the Lord who desires us to grow and reach our full potential. Similar to correction, discipline can either be accepted or rejected. Accepting it helps us learn from our pasts and improve, but rejecting it only stunts our growth and reveals our folly. If we want to become more like Christ, it will require that we learn to embrace correction and discipline.

Why is criticism difficult to receive? Have you learned to give and receive criticism well with your spouse?

MARCH 14

Brotherly Affection

Love one another with brotherly affection.

Outdo one another in showing honor.

ROMANS 12:10 NLT

The Greek word for love which Paul used here is *philia* which refers to brotherly love and is where the name *Philadelphia* came from (the City of Brotherly Love). He was exhorting us to truly realize that we are brothers and sisters in Christ and we should love and support each other like a family. God has bound us together in love, and if we have love for our Father then we should have love for our siblings as well.

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It is very common for siblings to have disagreements, but that does not entail a separation from the family. Even when we are angry at each other, we are still family, and normally family members strive to sort out their differences. Furthermore, we are to strive to outdo each other when showing honor. If we all endeavored to prefer our Christian brothers and sisters over ourselves without expectation for remuneration, the Body of Christ would look very different to the watching world.

Within your marriage, do you strive to outdo each other in showing honor?

Maker Marked

Woe to those who quarrel with their Maker, those who are nothing but potsherds among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, "What are you making?" Does your work say, "The potter has no hands."

ISAIAH 45:9 NIV

Isaiah proclaims clearly the sovereignty of God, and his words force us to recognize just how insignificant we are in contrast with the Creator of all. Our hearts deceive us into imagining that we hold some level of worthiness, importance, or stature apart from our Maker and by our own merit. We may even imagine that we are our own master and in control of our lives. Pride clouds our judgment to honestly assess ourselves and realize how pitiful, weak, and helpless we are without God.

To make a good piece of pottery we must practice it repeatedly. It takes time, dedication, effort, and lots of energy to master it; yet, sculpting a pot out of clay is one of the simplest ways to create something. God formed the entire universe just by speaking it into existence! He created everything from the air we breathe, to the food we eat, to the ground we walk on, to the sun that shines on our faces. He created us and every person we have ever loved. It would be wise for us to humble ourselves in the presence of the Almighty God and trust his creative process.

**Do you ever complain about how you
were created, doubting the wisdom
of God's decisions?**

MARCH 16

Celebrate Often

Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which he has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun.

ECCLESIASTES 9:9 NASB

This is a beautiful reminder from the designer of marriage, God himself. God loves to see our marriages thrive and to be enjoyed. Sadly, as years go by, some marriage mates drift apart. Should we give up on the wife or husband of our youth? Or do we work to improve the situation so that we can enjoy life with our spouses again?

Worldly advice tells us that we could look to another person for happiness if we have problems with our spouse. Is it wise to follow your own heart on this matter? Instead of following our hearts, we are told to safeguard them above all else because they are deceitful and wicked. Truly then, how much wiser to keep our hearts and minds clean from any thoughts of abandoning our marriage. Do you trust that what Jehovah says about life and marriage is true? Then by all means, guard against wrong thinking, stick closely to your spouse, work hard to improve anything that needs attention, and you will definitely enjoy life.

Do you believe that following our loving and wise Creator will result in happiness?

MARCH 17

Eternal Blessing

May the LORD bless you and protect you.

*May the LORD smile on you
and be gracious to you.*

*May the LORD show you his favor
and give you his peace.*

NUMBERS 6:24-26 NLT

The Lord's Blessing, also referred to as the Priestly Blessing, was dictated from Yahweh to Moses to give to Aaron for the Israelites. Bestowing blessings was a deeply rooted tradition within the Israelite culture at that time, and this blessing in particular held great importance.

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Aaron was the high priest of Israel, and he was to bless all the people on behalf of Yahweh, thus reminding everyone that blessings come from the Almighty and not from any man or woman. Aaron and Moses held positions of great prominence, but they were still simply servants of the Most High. Only God is able to offer protection, grace, favor, and peace. His blessings are eternal and true.

Have you asked the Almighty to bless your marriage? Have you accepted his protection, grace, favor, and peace over you both?

MARCH 18

Good Works

We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

EPHESIANS 2:10 NASB

Good works are not required for salvation, but they are the result of salvation. When we accept Christ as our Lord and Savior, he begins to renew our minds so we transform back to how he initially intended us to be. Before we were even created, God had prepared work for us to do. He has a plan for each of us, and it is good!

Although it may be difficult, the work is fulfilling, and it was furnished with us in mind. The way he created each of us was to uniquely display his glory. We are his workmanship, his art, his creativity on display. Living out our calling brings forth our true potential and highlights even clearer how marvelous our Creator truly is. Don't wish for someone else's calling. God purposefully planned a specific calling for you.

How are you unique? How does your personality reflect the one who created you?

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Unique Gifts

In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well.

ROMANS 12:6-7 NLT

Although we are to live harmoniously, we all play a different role within the Body of Christ and God's kingdom. Becoming envious of the gifts someone else has or the attention they are receiving only distracts us from recognizing our own unique callings and investing in them. We need to encourage each other to use their gifts, and not expect everyone to perform the same way.

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When operating together in our own special ways, under the authority and leadership of Jesus, the church can offer beautiful worship to the Lord. We are different members of the same body with individual gifts and callings, serving God together in unity. Selfishness can throw us out of tune, but God is faithful to continue to guide us back to himself if we are willing to follow.

What gifts has God given you, and how are you using them?

Power in Weakness

"My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10 NLT

It is hard to appear weak, but the truth is we are all inadequate humans already. When we recognize and admit our weaknesses, both to God and to each other, we can begin to grow in them and mature. Our shortcomings are no surprise to God; he is aware of them and still chooses to use us for his glory. It is in our fallen state where God meets us and draws us to himself.

Instead of attempting to be strong on our own, our only hope is to approach the Lord in our weak and frail state, requesting his strength to compensate and make us whole. He willingly gives us what we need, and the process is so much smoother when we do not try to fool ourselves and others with false airs of grandeur. Our spouses, more than probably anyone else, are well acquainted with our weaknesses, so any attempt to cover them up may only produce feelings that are ingenuine. It would be better to help each other in our weaknesses and look to each other for strength.

**Do you respond to your spouse's weaknesses
with contempt or with kindness?**

MARCH 21

Family Support

*Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him.
Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one's youth.*

*Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.
They will not be put to shame when they contend
with their opponents in court.*

PSALM 127:3-5 NIV

There are many ways in which our Father showers us with blessings, and children is one of those ways. We cannot create life; only God can do that. He uses us as vessels to bring forth children, and he entrusts us with their care. Having children, especially many of them, means more work, more bills, and more sleepless nights. But it also means more laughter, more love, and more cuddles. When they grow up, it means more people willing to help take care of us.

The Lord always provides for us, and sometimes he does so in ways we would not expect while we are simply trying to follow him. His Word makes it clear that he loves children, and that they are a reward from him. They are blessings which add value to our lives, not curses which steal from us. Even in the difficult days, we should remember this and treat them like the valuable heritage that they are.

Do you have children of your own or are there children in your life who you love and care for? What has God taught you through them?

MARCH 22

Continual

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

ACTS 2:42 NASB

Spanning time and crossing cultures, the church has taken many different forms and faces. But the original functions of the church of Christ remain the same. Christians are to devote themselves to learning more about the Lord Jesus and his Word just as they always have. We are called to fellowship with one another—to offer strength and encouragement to the body of believers assembled as they worship the Lord together.

Similar to how the early Christians broke bread together and shared whatever they had with one another, we are expected to use what we have to help meet the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Prayer is a bond between us and God and us to each other. Praying together is powerful because we go before God in agreement. It unifies the body when we pray for each other or with each other.

**Have you and your spouse found time to pray
to God together today?**

MARCH 23

Strength in Numbers

If one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him.

A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.

ECCLESIASTES 4:12 NASB

We were never intended to walk alone. It is the Creator's intention that we fellowship with one another, pray for each other, and share in the troubles of others. The enemy will try to deceive us or attack us when we are alone, just like a predator attempts to draw its prey away from the larger herd. By staying connected with others who share our faith and by asking for help when we need it, we surround ourselves with strength that the enemy has a harder time penetrating.

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Marriage offers us a lifelong partner who can help support us in the bad times and laugh with us in the good times. We are stronger together. It is also important to have others as well that we can go to. We do not need to include them in all the details of our married lives, but we do need other perspectives and voices to help us stay on course.

**Do you and your spouse pray for each other?
Who else is praying for you and
for your marriage?**

MARCH 24

Encouraging Words

*Worry weighs a person down;
an encouraging word cheers a person up.*

PROVERBS 12:25 NLT

Worry is the enemy of faith. Worry forgets that Jehovah is in control, that he has been since the beginning of time, and that he will continue to be for all eternity. Our omnipotent Father is both willing and able to protect his children, and we have nothing to worry about. This does not mean that we should turn a blind eye on the realities of this world, nor that we put on a false front of being carefree.

We are supposed to care, but we cast our cares on the Lord and maintain focus. He is our rock, our light, and our path home. When worry overtakes us, we look to him for reassurance and receive it. If we see that others are becoming consumed with worry and with the anxieties this world produces, we should remind them of the greatness of God and of his perfect plan. Clearly we cannot avoid the trials and the evils of this world, but as we make our way together, let us never forget how powerful an encouraging word can be.

**Do you know anyone who
needs encouragement today?
How can you offer that to them?**

MARCH 25

Words that Wound

*If you bite and devour each other,
watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.*

GALATIANS 5:15 NIV

Just as living under the law is a waste of the freedom Christ Jesus gave us, living for ourselves is also a waste of our freedom. We have been called to a far greater existence than one which begins and ends with ourselves. Within our marriages, we can daily practice living for someone else. As soon as our intentions and actions become self-focused, blaming and demanding ensue.

Two people living for themselves together will assuredly cross paths when their desires do not align. However, two people committed to serving each other, attempting to outdo the other with love and honor, and resolute in their sacrificial love will be blessed beyond measure! Marriage is a powerful yet fragile gift that the Lord trusts us with. Our words can wound, but they can also empower. Decide to build up rather than destroy.

**Have you exchanged any regrettable words
with your spouse that you would like to make
amends for now?**

MARCH 26

Choose Better

What pleases the LORD more: burnt offerings and sacrifices or obedience to his voice? It is better to obey than to sacrifice. It is better to listen to God than to offer the fat of sheep.

1 SAMUEL 15:22 NCV

Talk is cheap when actions are essential. When a parent asks a child to do something, they expect obedience, not only verbal compliance. If we say we will do something but we fail to do it, that is considered lying. It would have been better if we had never falsely professed it in the first place.

King Saul had a righteous external persona, but his decisions communicated that he was living for himself and his own agenda, not for the Almighty. When we ask God to give us patience, wisdom, generosity, peace, and so forth, we had better be ready to exercise those gifts when confronted with foolishness, need, and chaos. It is easy to profess the truth with our mouths, but it is our actions which reveal the conditions of our hearts.

Have you obeyed in word and deed what the Lord has asked of you?

MARCH 27

Our Safe Place

*A gossip betrays a confidence,
but a trustworthy person keeps a secret.*

PROVERBS 11:13 NIV

Gossip serves our own purposes at the expense of another. For the thrill of feeling important, or getting the attention of someone else, or even simply getting a reaction, we sell the secrets of another person. The cost might range from embarrassing to damaging, but the sin is still intolerable. Using people for our own gain is dishonorable and dishonest.

The Lord rewards trustworthy people who know how to respect others. He after all, knows every wicked thing about us, but he handles our sin in a discreet and loving fashion. He is our safe place where we can bring all our troubles. Following God's example, we should strive to be a safe place for others also, especially our spouses who we are supposed to love and respect. When our spouses confide in us, that should be held safe as the gift of trust that it is. Breaking that trust can cause great harm and doubt within something as sacred as a marriage bond.

**How do you handle negative
news about others?**

MARCH 28

Breaching a Dam

*Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam;
so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.*

PROVERBS 17:14 NIV

The book of Proverbs is filled with practical wisdom: a treasure trove of sorts for everyday life. This specific proverb is as straightforward as they come, although perhaps difficult in execution. Becoming engaged in an argument is not usually a pleasant experience. Depending on who the argument is with, emotions can flare up quickly and words may be exchanged that cause hurt to either or both parties, and it does not take much to escalate matters to this level.

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It is such a common scenario which could be diffused if we would take notice of the wisdom in this verse. There is so much more to gain by refraining from an argument than asserting our opinions and winning it. The short-term advantage of coming out on top in an argument does not compare to the long-term damage sharp words will cause in a relationship especially in a marriage. The apt comparison to breaching a dam highlights the destruction which is sure to ensue downstream. So, before a quarrel even begins, it is better for us to take stock of what might happen if we insist on continuing down that road.

When you and your spouse break into a dispute, do you consider whether the matter could easily be dropped before engaging?

Like Honey

*Kind words are like honey—
sweet to the soul and healthy for the body.*

PROVERBS 16:24 NLT

A kind word goes a long way. It can have an immediate physical effect on the receiver. When someone shares a kind word with another, defenses lower and the recipient feels calmer and more assured. So many other positive feelings can ensue as well, simply from an encouraging word spoken in kindness.

Worry and anger cause actual physical harm to a person's body. It can build up and fester, causing anxiety and illness. Caring

compliments offer health and happiness to a person's body because they are uplifting and inspiring. They can remove doubt and suspicion, or they can reignite faith in truth and goodness.

A word spoken in wisdom can help a person feel valued and accepted. Kindness is also incredibly contagious. A person who feels grateful for the kindness they have been shown is more apt to pass that kindness along. Words have tremendous travel power, and when issued in godly wisdom, they can pull people back from danger and into the light of Christ.

**When you notice something positive
about another person, do you share it
or keep it silent?**

MARCH 30

Cast Your Cares

*Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you;
he will never let the righteous be shaken.*

PSALM 55:22 NIV

David's enemies were growing in number, troubles were overwhelming him, and his close friend had just betrayed him. He was emotionally low and concerned about his kingdom. Instead of admitting defeat or of trying to control his situation, his response was to turn to the Lord. In humility and awareness of his own humanity, David prayed to God, brought his cares before him, and found strength in knowing the Lord would sustain him. Because he was rooted in the truth of God and he knew that the Lord held him, David has full confidence that he could not be shaken. He would prevail against his enemies because God's plan will always come to pass.

The nature of God is unchanging, and the same way he upheld David is how he will sustain his righteous sons and daughters today too. When we choose to put our trust and security in the Lord, to give our cares and worries to him, and to derive our strength from our relationship with him, we can march forward in the same confidence the king had that we cannot be shaken.

What is troubling you in life today that you need to trust to the capable hands of God?

Deep Yearnings

"For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition which I asked of Him. Therefore I also have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives he shall be lent to the LORD."

1 SAMUEL 1:27-28 NKJV

Hannah grieved deeply because she had no children. Her husband's other wife added to her misery by rubbing it in her face that she was barren. In brokenness and despair, she went before the Lord and asked for a child. The Lord had mercy on her and granted her a son! When the child, Samuel, was old enough, she dedicated him to the Lord for fulltime ministry. Each of our stories is going to be different, but the lessons learned from Hannah's gratefulness and God's grace can be applied to any of us.

Our Father does not owe us anything, yet he chooses to give good gifts. In reverent thankfulness we need to remember it was him who gave us the good gifts and see how we can use them for his service and praise. Our marriages could be one example of this. God has given us an amazing blessing in the form of our spouse! How can we dedicate our marriages to the Lord as a form of praise and demonstration of gratefulness?

**What has God given you
that you can use to serve him?**

April

Love flashes like fire,

the brightest kind of flame.

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Many waters cannot quench love,

nor can rivers drown it.

SONG OF SOLOMON 8:6-7NLT



APRIL 1

Way of Fools

*The way of fools seems right to them,
but the wise listen to advice.*

PROVERBS 12:15 NIV

It is natural for us to believe we are right, and others are wrong when it comes to matters of dispute. A fool will not heed correction nor consider other perspectives. A wise person recognizes that everyone has room to grow and learn. None of us hold all the answers, and all of us have been wrong at times. Therefore, rather than disregarding a person or an idea before you have humbly reflected on the matter, pray and ask God to reveal his truth. Listen to wise counsel and advice. Learn to put biased and preconceived notions to the side and be teachable.

Wise people know they do not have to prove their worth or defend themselves because God has already accepted them, and he is their defender. Consider the words of your spouse especially because God gave us marriage as a gift. Refuse to be foolish and listen to what your beloved gift from God is saying. Two minds and hearts working as one can accomplish and understand far more than either one can individually.

**Are you open to hearing advice?
How do you react to being wrong?**

APRIL 2

Do Good

*Let us think of ways to motivate one another
to acts of love and good works.*

HEBREWS 10:24 NLT

God's beautiful design for the body of Christ was that we should live together in unity, help each other through difficulties, and encourage one another toward love and good works. It is not God's intention that we isolate and attempt to walk out our faith alone. We are motivated by the words—sometimes just the presence—of others. When difficult times come, rather than draw inward and cut off from other people, we should look for ways to motivate others and inspire them to keep pressing toward love and good works.

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If we ourselves are feeling unmotivated or unloved, the temptation is often to distance ourselves and detach from others, but that is not how the Bible teaches us to cope. Instead of numbing our minds through media and entertainment, we should find someone else to interact with who can encourage us to keep going. Maybe your spouse is that someone else.

**What motivates you to keep going?
How do you like to motivate others?**

Ask for Directions

Look here, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit." How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it's here a little while, then it's gone. What you ought to say is, "If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that."

JAMES 4:13-15 NLT

There are moments in life when we realize how little control we have over our own fate. There are people and powers far stronger than us in this world, and often we are at the mercy of their decisions. Plans are created and cancelled regularly, and we must constantly be adapting to whatever the day holds. Disappointment is common, and still we must make plans.

It would be foolish to not have plans for our lives, yet James is explaining that our intentions should never supersede God's directions. Instead of obstinately insisting on sticking to the plan, our hearts should be open to hear what God is saying and recognize where he is leading. It is enough that we know God and his trustworthy reputation; we can fully rely on him to lead us tomorrow as well.

**What plans do you have for your life?
Are you constantly submitting them to God?**

Gracious Homes

The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

JOHN 1:14 NASB

The Word of God is an actual picture of Jesus. All through the Old Testament are signs of the coming Messiah. Once Jesus arrived and dwelled among his people, the gospels testified of it. Following the gospels, the rest of the New Testament declares Christ's goodness and how we ought to follow him.

The entirety of the Holy Scriptures is the testimony of Jesus Christ.

He is the Word of God. He came literally in the flesh as a man so

that he would experience every hardship and temptation that his people do and walk through them sinless to show us the way. He

was and is the glory of God because he is God! The term John used to describe him here as "begotten from the Father" is the same one he used later in the well-known verse John 3:16. The term is *monogenes* which means Jesus is the one and only God.

**Why would the Almighty God of heaven
come and dwell among his people?**

APRIL 5

Nazarene Neighbors

Jesus traveled to Nazareth, where he had grown up. On the Sabbath day he went to the synagogue, as he always did, and stood up to read.

LUKE 4:16 NCV

Our Lord Jesus had recently concluded his forty day fast in the desert where he was tempted by the devil. Having overcome, he returned to Galilee and went to Nazareth. Taking a scroll which had the words of the prophet Isaiah inscribed on it, he stood before the familiar faces of his hometown. Then he read, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." When he finished, he told them that today this prophesy was fulfilled.

Everyone in the synagogue was transfixed by him. They knew he was Joseph's son, yet was he claiming to be God. Jesus continued to speak, but they were furious and attempted to kill him. Sometimes it is most difficult to bring up controversial truths with those who know us best, and yet truth must always be on our lips. Jesus knew he would be rejected, but because of his love for his people, he continued to teach the good news of God's salvation plan.

Are you willing to share the truth of the gospel with those closest to you?

APRIL 6

Keep the Peace

*"Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined,
and every city or household divided against itself will not stand."*

MATTHEW 12:25 NIV

When a country is divided against itself, it can result in a civil war. When a household is at odds, it causes disunity, tension, anger frustration, and hurt. Ultimately, it can lead to divorce. If we are of the kingdom of God, and our marriage is dedicated to him, then we should hold fast to godly principles even in the face of conflict. We can disagree and still be loving and kind. There are no laws against patience and thoughtfulness.

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Jesus had just healed a demon-possessed man and the Pharisees accused him of being of the realm of Satan. He challenged them to consider how that would benefit his cause if he were turning against those who were of the same intent as he. No, he assured them, he was decidedly sent by God and would valiantly stand by anyone who followed him. Those of us who are of the kingdom of God should love and protect our brothers and sisters in the Lord, knowing that the Lord Jesus is always loving and protecting us.

**What happens among Christians when
purposeful debate turns into vengeful
fighting and backbiting?**

APRIL 7

Practice Love

*Dear children, let us not love with words or speech
but with actions and in truth.*

1 JOHN 3:18 NIV

Professing love is important, but it is proven through our actions. If our words do not match our deeds, what weight do our words truly hold? Jesus came preaching love, but he also showed it through the way he lived. He washed his disciples' feet, he healed the sick and raised the dead, he wept with those who mourned, he lived a modest life, and he withstood ridicule and false accusations. Finally, in a true test of love, he endured a horrific death to free us from the bondages of sin.

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Jesus' love was evident to all in the way he lived his life. Simply saying we love someone is not the same as showing them. Marriage is the perfect place to practice love. Wedded union is not a mutual agreement that all should be fair and both parties do their part. The love that Jesus showed us, his bride, was not even close to fair. Marriage is a commitment to love and serve each other even when it is not fair. Love cares about the other person even unto death.

**Have you told your spouse that you love
them today? Do your actions prove it?**

Humble Arguments

*When pride comes, then comes disgrace,
but with humility comes wisdom.*

PROVERBS 11:2 NIV

Pride often pushes us to show off what we know, and sometimes it leads us to say foolish things that we have not thought through. If we are wrong, or if it was inappropriately said, we bring disgrace on ourselves. Our own proud words and focusing on making ourselves sound important bring us shame.

A humble heart will first listen to others. It considers whether what it wants to say is beneficial and godly or self-serving and foolish before speaking. It uses wisdom to direct its speech in a way that brings glory to God rather than attention to itself. In keeping with this standard, we can argue with others in a humble and impactful way. We do not have to agree with what other people say, but we do need to treat them with respect since they are also created in the image of God and are dearly loved by him.

**When your spouse questions your words
or decisions, how can you respond in a way
that is respectful and honoring both
to them and to God?**

Surviving the Drought

*Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though
there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice
in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.*

HABAKKUK 3:17-18 NIV

Habakkuk was grieved at the lack of obedience to God from the people of Israel. They were not bearing fruit or listening to what God was commanding them. The whole community was in somewhat of a spiritual drought. Yet the prophet continued to preach—not for them, but for God.

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Even if the good we are doing seems pointless, even if our words seem unheard, and even if our efforts at sharing the truth do not seem to be accepted, we must persevere because we are doing so for God and his glory. Amid despondent situations, we can be joyful in our Lord and Savior because we know the truth of his gospel. Our lives are to be a form of praise and worship to God not because of the results we see with our eyes but because of who God is.

**When the good you do is rejected,
how can you continue to find
the stamina to keep doing good?**

APRIL 10

Considered Conversations

These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.

Impress them on your children.

*Talk about them when you sit at home
and when you walk along the road,
when you lie down and when you get up.*

DEUTERONOMY 6:6-7 NIV

We live in a world that scoffs at God and criticizes his commandments. They do not respect the Almighty, nor do they obey his voice. Unless we constantly remind ourselves of his life-giving words, other voices will begin to overpower, and the world's influence will drown out the truth that leads to peace. It is one thing to read the Word of God, and another matter to imprint his words on your heart so they can be remembered in the moments they are needed.

To take something to heart it must be understood, accepted, and familiarized. As we go about our day and as we spend time with our families, the words of God should be present. If we learn to lean on them in the good times, then when the bad times engulf us, we will already be leaning on an unshakable support. The Bible is not a resource book to turn to when we feel like it or when we have a need, it is the written Word of God which our whole lives should testify of.

**What is one way you can familiarize yourself
with certain Scriptures?**

Nearsighted

"How can you think of saying, 'Friend, let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye?"

LUKE 6:42 NLT

As humans, we are so hasty to find fault in others, forgetting quickly to handle our own affairs. Sin truly does blind us, and it can become a tendency to want to find fault in others to normalize the sin we are guilty of ourselves. In truth, this sort of spiritual nearsightedness not only stunts our growth but renders us incapable to help others. How can we possibly see clearly enough to assist others in overcoming their issues if we have not dealt with the sin in our own lives?

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A humble and contrite heart is imperative for growing in godliness and being used by God to help others as well. Luke made it clear that we will receive in like measure what we offer to others. If we judge, we will be judged. If we condemn, we will be condemned. However, if we forgive, we will be forgiven. If we give to others, God will give us more than we can imagine! He is a fair and generous God.

**What do you need to work on
in your own heart?**

APRIL 12

Received

*"Anyone who receives you receives me,
and anyone who receives me receives the Father who sent me."*

MATTHEW 10:40 NLT

As the time was nearing for Jesus to return to heaven, he began teaching the disciples less allegorically and more literally. He commissioned them to go out in pairs of two and preach his message of good news and salvation. The instructions he gave were intentional and specific. The authority he was entrusting them with was great and the responsibility even greater. Those who received them, would also receive Jesus, and since Jesus clearly testified that he was God himself, they would also receive God.

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What Christ was referring to here was more than simply receiving the disciples into their homes and being hospitable. To receive them also implied receiving their message about who Jesus was and what he had done. Anyone who was humble enough to hear this good news and receive it into their hearts would receive God's love and forgiveness. That was the commission Jesus gave the disciples to carry into the world after his death and resurrection.

**Is your heart humble and open to hear
Christ's invitation to salvation and his
commission on your life?**

Creator and Judge

*Who are you, O man, to answer back to God?
Will what is molded say to its molder,
"Why have you made me like this?"*

ROMANS 9:20 ESV

The people were struggling with the fact that God hardened Pharaoh's heart and then also punished him for his actions. They wanted to know how this was fair. Rather than addressing the intricacies of this solitary example, Paul turned the question back around and challenged his readers to consider who we are in comparison to God. It was God who created us, Pharaoh, and everything else in existence. It was God who judged perfectly the hearts of all people and knew Pharaoh from before his infancy.

We do not hold God accountable for his actions because all wisdom, love, and power are his. He does not owe us an explanation. In fact, he does not owe us love, grace, compassion, or freedom either, and yet he gives them out of his mercy and kindness. In his great wisdom, he created each of us in a unique way to play a specific part. It is not for us to question why we are the way we are, but to ask God to give us wisdom to know how we can best love and serve him.

**Do you ever wonder why you were created
the way you were? Why might God have
made you this specific way?**

Bonds of Peace

*Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit,
binding yourselves together with peace.*

EPHESIANS 4:3 NLT

Christ did not call us to a life of tolerance of other Christians or of apathy toward them. He does not even expect us to keep distance from each other in order to avoid conflict. His intention for his children is that we fight for each other and fellowship together. We are to make every effort for unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul even goes so far as to use the analogy of “bonds,” of which he was no stranger. He had himself been bound together with other prisoners in jail and knew what it was like to be shackled with nowhere to hide.

There are some days when marriage is not easy, and rather than avoid the issues, we are instructed to put forth every effort to work through them for the sake of our unity. Some days may even feel like we are shackled in jail together, but peace and love are so important that we ought to praise God for our shackles and thank him for each other.

**What sort of efforts can you make to pursue
peace and unity in your marriage?**

APRIL 15

Sharing Wisdom

*Wise people can also listen and learn;
even they can find good advice in these words.*

PROVERBS 1:5 NCV

With wisdom comes responsibility. The purpose of wisdom is not to simply make us wise and give us an air of importance, it is so we can teach others how to live wisely. As is the intention of every gift from God, it is not supposed to stop with the receiver but flow out into the community. We are vessels of God's grace and proclaimers of his truth. If we have been given wisdom, it is so that we can use it to serve and teach others.

Through wisdom we have clearer understanding and that enables us to help others as well. As Solomon wrote these words to his children, they must have been a somber realization of the trials he had crossed to become wise enough to pass his wisdom on to them. He did not want his children to make the same mistakes he had made, so he beseeched them to receive his wisdom and learn from his life. This should be our prayer as well when passing on our wisdom to others.

**Do you share your God-given wisdom
with others or keep it to yourself?**

Understanding

*As you do not know the path of the wind,
or how the body is formed in a mother's womb,
so you cannot understand the work of God,
the Maker of all things.*

ECCLESIASTES 11:5 NIV

The only thing certain in this world is that things are uncertain. We can predict the weather, but only God knows the path of the wind. Plans can be formed, but in an instant they can change. The Lord creates life. We have power over neither life nor death. We can make plans, but only God knows how to form the perfect body of a baby within a woman. All things are in his hands. If we plan our lives according to our own desires and intents, we will face many disappointments and frustrations.

The Maker of heaven and earth, the one who creates life, he who directs the wind, the King who all of nature submits to is the only certain hope that we have. If we place our plans in his hands and we live according to his desires, we will always have surety that everything will work out well in the end.

**What do you do when your plans
are disappointed? Do you try to control
the situation, or do you go back
to God for directions?**

Cause and Effect

*A glad heart makes a cheerful face,
but by sorrow of heart the spirit is crushed.*

PROVERBS 15:13 ESV

The condition of our hearts has an effect on our physical demeanor. A smile adds a lot more to a lady's countenance than makeup ever could, and a man who is joyful is so much more pleasurable to be around than a despondent one regardless of his physique. Joy and sorrow are much deeper than happiness and sadness. Circumstances can affect our moods, but we cannot allow them to change the condition of our hearts. Our hearts beat for our Savior, and we are joyful because of what he has done for us!

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Even when tragedy hits and we are grieving, we can still cling to joy because of the hope and the love Jesus has filled us with. He gives us a peace that goes beyond human understanding and is stronger than any situation we may experience. When we have this joy in our hearts, it radiates through our being. Others will notice it and may even be encouraged by it. The masterful cause and effect of following the Lord is immediate, powerful, and contagious.

**How can the joy you experience
and carry in your heart be a blessing
to your spouse as well?**

Praise Wins

*Through the praise of children and infants
you have established a stronghold against your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.*

PSALM 8:2 NIV

Whenever God chooses to use the weak things of this world rather than what we see as strong, he proves that true strength comes only from him. When the daughter of Pharaoh found Baby Moses crying in the reeds, her heart was moved for him. By that baby's cry, a chain of events was set in motion that would one day take down the entire Egyptian army. When Christ came as a baby into this world, he terrified the powers of earth through Herod as well as the armies of Hades. They knew their days of reigning and oppressing we numbered.

Praising God goes a long way toward actual change and the conditions of our hearts. Sometimes as adults we overcomplicate things or try to control more than we should. Children are used to not having much control over their lives. They are still naïve. Their praises carry great power because their innocent dependence on God and appreciation of him is pleasing to him.

**When was the last time you released
control to God and simply praised him
for his goodness?**

Set in Stone

*You can make many plans,
but the LORD's purpose will prevail.*

PROVERBS 19:21 NLT

The obvious separation of wisdom and understanding between the mind of the Lord and that of a mortal human should be convicting enough that it is by God's divine intent only that we live and act and have meaning. Spiritual truths beyond our comprehension dictate where our paths lead. Even understanding our temporal reality, we are compelled to form plans, strategize, and motivate ourselves with goals. This is to be expected and, according to the Scriptures, even encouraged (Proverbs 21:5), but the trouble lies in attempting to exert control over our own destinies rather than seeking wisdom from the Lord.

If our plans contradict the beautifully orchestrated plans of the Lord, then all our misaligned intentions will fail. The Lord's purposes will always prevail over human tactics and strategies. By seeking the Lord and understanding his divine will, we can have a mind like Christ which strives to obey the Father in every aspect of life. Only then can we know that our plans are wrought in wisdom and are in alignment with the master planner.

**What plans have you made for your life?
Have you asked God to align your mind
and your desires with his?**

APRIL 20

Combat Loneliness

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!

ECCLESIASTES 4:9-10 ESV

Our God is a relational God who wants us to be part of his family. To emphasize his love for companionship, he created marriages and families to represent a picture of himself and his heart for mankind. Having a spouse offers immense benefits to our physical and spiritual walk. In life, we have someone with whom we can share responsibilities, be intimate, and raise a family. With regard to our spiritual walk, our spouses can help keep us accountable, be a safe place and comfort when the woes of this world press down, and lift us back up when we stumble.

Together under the blessing and direction of the Most High, couples can combat loneliness, pray for each other, and help refine the gifts from God that they have seen in each other's characters. It is beyond a doubt better to have a companion to walk through life with than to attempt to make it alone.

**Other than your spouse,
who walks with you through life?**

APRIL 21

With Passion

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

COLOSSIANS 3:12 ESV

The way Paul identified Christians was intentionally empowering. When we recognize who we are in Christ, the lies of the enemy that we are unworthy or incapable lose their hold on us. We are God's chosen ones and he chose us before he even laid the foundations of the earth. He chose us over his own life! We are holy because he made us so and set us apart for something more important than living for this world. We are beloved of God, which should cause any enemy of God to tremble before us.

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With a proper understanding of who we are, Paul tells us to be compassionate, kind, humble, meek, and patient. Although he possessed all power and might, this is the way Christ lived as a model for us to follow.

**Do you struggle to accept
the identity God calls you by?**

Dissonance

*What harmony is there between Christ and Belial?
Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?*

2 CORINTHIANS 6:15 NIV

Who or what we associate ourselves with every day influences our beliefs and worldview. Many believers associate this verse with marriage, discouraging holy matrimony between two people who do not share the same faith. It does stand to reason that something as bonding as a marital union will be strained if only one person is following Christ, and the other is not because the two will be traveling in different directions. Paul's warning is broader than marriage, however.

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The wisdom found here can be applied to any relationships which necessitates the kind of camaraderie that shares an end goal and a moral path to it. If two or more people do not hold the same values or desire the same outcome, they cannot achieve nearly as much as those who agree on the purpose and the execution. For anything to get done, there must be unity of values and vision. We will have trouble if there is misalignment, and this is the heart of Paul's warning about light and darkness. They are not compatible since they are at odds with each other.

What are some examples of healthy relationships between believers and unbelievers? Which relationships would cause disharmony?

APRIL 23

Choosing Contentment

Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.

PHILIPPIANS 4:11 NASB

Contentment, like love, is a choice. It is not a mere feeling that comes and goes depending on life's circumstances, but an attitude of someone who is submitted to God. Choosing to be content both with much and with little demonstrates a faith in the Lord that supersedes what happens to us in this life.

Often it is through experiences that we learn how to have a biblical mindset, so we can learn contentment both in seasons of plenty and in seasons of need. Paul spent many years in jail and under house arrest, yet he declared that he was content while writing from his imprisonment. He was grateful for the gifts the church sent him, especially because it revealed the condition of the church, but he was also clear in his testimony that everything he truly needed for joy and sustenance came from God.

How do you choose to be content?

Undeserved

*Bear with each other, and forgive each other.
If someone does wrong to you,
forgive that person because the Lord forgave you.*

COLOSSIANS 3:13 NCV

In light of all we have been forgiven for it seems petty not to extend forgiveness to others. We have been forgiven of all our sins and the death consequence they required! In response, we are called to forgive others. As simple as it sounds, forgiving others is difficult. Our flesh cries out for justice, and often justice is delayed. Regardless of whether a friend insults you, a stranger robs you, a government official says something that offends you, or your own spouse cuts you down, the task of every Christian is to repay evil with good. Another person's sin does not allow for sin to be returned.

Because we have been forgiven much, we can also forgive much. Where someone may be weak, we should bear their burden. Praise God for his forgiveness, mercy, and love both for us and for others.

**Who do you struggle to forgive?
Why do you think that is?**

APRIL 25

Unchained

*Forget the former things;
do not dwell on the past.*

ISAIAH 43:18 NIV

Israel was in captivity. Again. Their history was rich with wonder and miracles of how God freed them from the Egyptians, led them through the desert, granted them the Promised Land, and continued to redeem them again and again from their enemies. Yet their greatest enemy, the devil, continued to torment them. Their greatest captor was their own sin with which they could be charged as guilty.

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By his unfathomable love, God had a plan of redemption for them from that too. Isaiah was not instructing them to forget their pasts in the sense of erasing from memory all the wonderful ways Yahweh had already delivered them. He was saying that in comparison to what Yahweh had coming for them still, the past was not even worth dwelling on! The best was yet to come, and they should keep their perspective forward. We are encouraged to do the same. We don't want to forget the many blessings of God, but we can put aside the disappointments in life and move forward.

**Do you anticipate greater things from God
still to come than you have already seen
play out in your life?**

APRIL 26

Mine

My lover is mine, and I am his.

SONG OF SOLOMON 2:16 NLT

Marriage is not just a mutualistic relationship; it is synergistic, meaning it is greater than the sum of its parts. It is a union of a man and a woman with God at the center, in which both spouses are built up by each other to be better than they are alone. Marriage is a giving over of oneself, in a state of complete vulnerability and trust.

Just as Jesus committed himself to God's will by living a life on earth and dying on the cross for the sake of his bride, so a man is asked to give his all to protect and care for his wife. Just as the church is called to fully deny itself and follow the loving instruction of the Almighty, so a wife is encouraged to give herself completely to her husband. In a God-ordained marriage, both husband and wife can trust that their self-denial will be met with tender and unselfish love.

How can you be more vulnerable with each other? How can you meet your spouse's vulnerability with a Christ-like attitude?

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APRIL 27

Command and Promise

*“Do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”*

ISAIAH 41:10 NIV

It is easier to be afraid when we are alone, or to feel dismayed when we feel overpowered. Yet the Lord promises to always be with us. He assures us that he is our God so we cannot ever be overpowered. We need not feel weak because he promises to be our strength and our help. With his right hand and by his righteousness he declares he will uphold us.

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How could we fall if it is the Lord who holds us up? All his sovereign grace and loving protection he offers with a command: do not fear. Fear is the rival of love. To fear is to momentarily forget who protects and strengthens us. Under the ordinance of the Lord's perfect love, fear is cast out because there is nothing in all of heaven or hell that can stand against God or those whom he upholds. Keeping this perspective is paramount to living free of fear and full of hope.

What do you do when you feel afraid?

Overflowing

"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."

LUKE 6:38 NIV

Even our smallest acts of good the Almighty sees, and he celebrates! He wants us to help each other and to give from our hearts. When we do, he lavishes us with far more in return. It is impossible to out-give God, for his generosity is unmatched and his resources are endless. The love of God is the strongest force in existence, and he is constantly giving that love to his people.

Sometimes the blessings he gives us are instant and earthly. Other times, he stores them up for us in his kingdom where they can never corrode or be destroyed (Matthew 6:19). However, we see his hand of providence play out in this life; we are assured that the Lord gives back to us when we give and it is in good measure, overflowing, and exuberant. Giving should be a selfless act of love for another person, but knowing this promise fills us with thankfulness and love so giving becomes a blessing to us as well.

**What can you give to your spouse today?
Who else can you give to?**

APRIL 29

A Guard

*Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth;
keep watch over the door of my lips!*

PSALM 141:3 ESV

The mouth can lead the rest of the body in a direction it should not go. Our words betray our thoughts, but they also help shape the thoughts of others. Imagine a child overhearing certain phrases that become lodged in the memory until those phrases become what the child believes. Or consider words spoken in the heat of a moment that do damage and cannot be recanted.

King David knew that he needed the Lord's help to guard his mouth. He had found his way into trouble because of words spoken in haste and in passion, so he sought the Lord and requested his help. All of us need help from the Lord to overcome our sinful tendencies and become more like Christ. The Lord Jesus was intentional, kind, and true in every word he spoke. What's more, he knew when to speak and when to remain silent. As we circumvent communication casualties, we need to ask the Lord to guide us in wisdom and truth so the words we utter bring life, truth, peace, and encouragement to those who are listening.

Are you cautious about your words and how they might impact those around you?

APRIL 30

Full Acceptance

*Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you,
in order to bring praise to God.*

ROMANS 15:7 NIV

There are plenty of hot topics debated within the church that should not bar someone from acceptance within the body of Christ. At the time Paul wrote these words, issues such as eating meat which had been sacrificed to animals, drinking alcohol, and remarriage were causing rifts between believers. Today, the dividing differences may be different, but they are no less tolerated.

There is an appropriate time and place for discussions to happen and issues to be addressed, but that can only happen after acceptance has been established. It is not for any of us to choose who to extend the grace of God to. He invited the fringe of society into his close circle, and from there change and maturity could more naturally flow. Our job, as Christians, is to accept one another and praise the Lord together.

What is the difference between accepting someone and accepting their life choices?

May

If a man tried to buy love

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with all his wealth,

his offer would be utterly scorned.

SONG OF SOLOMON 8:7 NLT



With Integrity

*The one whose walk is blameless is kept safe,
but the one whose ways are perverse will fall into the pit.*

PROVERBS 28:18 NIV

As children, we learn about cause and effect. It does not take us long in life to deduce that our decisions lead to consequences. Patterns emerge which prove that good choices normally lead to good outcomes, and the opposite is also true. God has a perfect track record of speaking the truth and following through on his promises. We know his Word is true, and it is a failproof guide to live by.

When we walk blamelessly, we tend to avoid perilous situations. Even if trouble finds us, the Lord will be our defense. If we choose to sin, however, we set traps for ourselves and invite trouble into our lives. Sin may seem appealing in the moment, but the consequences are never worth it in the end. Our Father knows what is best, and he detailed guidelines in his Word to keep us safe. Follow his laws and keep away from that pit!

How can you and your spouse help each other walk blamelessly and avoid life's pits?

MAY 2

Be a Builder

*Let us therefore make every effort
to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.*

ROMANS 14:19 NIV

Are our personal liberties worth causing our brothers or sisters to stumble? We are called to a higher standard: to do whatever we can to maintain peace within the family of God and to prioritize mutually edifying relationships. That does not give others the right to judge us, and we should not feel condemnation for exercising our freedoms in Christ, especially on the altar of false humility or religious appearances. But submitting our rights to the wisdom of God, not abusing our freedoms in the faces of others, and demonstrating moderation and self-control are all ways we can worship God and join him in his mission to share his love with others.

In our efforts for peace, we need to remember not to judge each other regardless of whether we agree with them or not. We are also not judged by God based on another person's feelings so, although something may be permissible, it may not always be wise.

What is a liberty that you have which you moderate or even abstain from for the sake of someone else?

MAY 3

Strong and Courageous

*"Have I not commanded you?
Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid;
do not be discouraged,
for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."*

JOSHUA 1:9 NIV

Shortly after Moses died, the Lord spoke to Joshua and instructed him to take up the mantle and lead the people of Israel. They were to cross the Jordan River and claim the Promised Land. Regardless of the dangers or the magnitude of the task, the Lord promised Joshua that he would preserve him. Nobody could come against him and overthrow him, and everywhere he stepped would become his land. What incredible assurances to be made to one person!

Our powerful, purposeful God could do the work himself, yet he chooses to use people and reveal himself through his children. Remaining open to his leading and being courageous in our identities as his beloved and redeemed children is the best way to become involved in his plan to save the world. He eagerly uses willing individuals who chose to follow him at all costs.

How does the Word of God help you become stronger and more courageous when it comes to handling the issues of life?

Like Jesus

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness...he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death.

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8 NIV

The King of the universe chose to come humbly to this world which he had created in the form of a servant. He could have arrived in all his power and demanded that we serve him, but instead he showed us compassion and came to teach us how to serve others.

He washed feet, ate with sinners, preached until he was exhausted, healed the sick, and even gave his own life. He taught us how to love and how to live sacrificially.

The world will be able to identify followers of Jesus by the love they show to other people. We have a lot of love to give because God first gave it to us. Instead of status, we should aim to pursue servanthood.

How can you use what you have been given to serve your spouse and others?

MAY 5

Hear and Obey

*"Blessed rather are those who
hear the word of God and obey it."*

LUKE 11:28 NIV

Jesus was healing the sick, teaching crowds of people, and intellectually schooling the Pharisees when a woman called out to him, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you" (verse 27). Jesus responded that rather than giving birth and raising the Son of God, it is even more blessed if someone were to hear the Word of God and do what it says. Obedience to the Lord is paramount in the Christian walk.

Adhering to God's statutes sets us apart from the narcissism of this world and fixes our eyes on what is eternal. All around the world, Mary, the mother of Jesus, is praised and often prayed to out of reverence for her role in God's master plan. Yet Jesus made it clear that obedience is what God honors. Mary's greatest virtue was not that she gave birth or raised a child, and it was not even her earthly parental affiliation to the Christ child. Mary was blessed by God because of her obedience to him. The same blessings are available to us.

**When you read the Word of God, do you look
for ways to apply its truth to your life?**

Boasting

"Those who wish to boast should boast in this alone: that they truly know me and understand that I am the LORD who demonstrates unfailing love and who brings justice and righteousness to the earth, and that I delight in these things. I, the LORD, have spoken!"

JEREMIAH 9:24 NLT

Considering the works of God's hands and the wonders he has orchestrated, boasting in our own flesh seems trite. We could feed our own egos by attempting to amaze others with our talents or accomplishments, or we could boast in the Lord by declaring his unfailing love and perfect justice for the world. He fills the earth with righteousness, and he wants to call us his friends. That is a wonder worth boasting about!

To truly know God and understand him is the greatest affiliation anyone could have. It is worth boasting in and sharing with everyone who wants to hear. Far greater it is to boast in the one who created us than to take pride in ourselves and boast in the very skills or nature that God gave us to begin with. We are on this planet for only a moment, so our sense of worth should be appropriately found in our relationship with God because only what is of him will remain.

If someone were to hear you boasting about God, what would you be saying?

MAY 7

Come Boldly

*Let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God.
There we will receive his mercy,
and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.*

HEBREWS 4:16 NLT

We do not serve a faraway god who is uncaring or aloof. The God we serve is near to anyone who calls for him, he is compassionate toward our struggles, and he extends his merciful hand to help us. He is a kind and loving Father who cares for his children. He cares so much for us that he came to earth, endured every temptation and worldly pain without sinning, and now stands as judge over the world. He knows our struggles because he experienced them too.

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He invites us to come before him and ask for his help. We will receive mercy and grace from him when we ask. If earthly parents love their children enough to support them, care for them, discipline them, or even die for them, how much more does our Father in heaven love us? This sort of love did not originate with us; we are merely a reflection of God when we choose to be loving toward those around us.

**When you go before God in prayer,
do you feel safe to truly open your heart
and ask him for mercy?**

MAY 8

Eternal Contentment

Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you."

HEBREWS 13:5 NASB

Those who are led around by a love for money will never know contentment in Christ. They will be easily led and manipulated because money is fickle and easy to lose. Security cannot be found in money; it can only be found in God who faithfully promises to never forsake us. Wealth can give no such assurance. Proper use of money can be a blessing, since money itself is not evil. When greed flares up, money can become a stronghold in someone's heart and push aside the love of God.

God is not willing to share his lordship with anyone or anything else because he alone is worthy. Therefore, we cannot submit ourselves both to him and to the pursuit of money. If we make lots of money in our obedience to God and in using the gifts which he has given us, then let us use that money to praise him and love others. If we make barely enough to get by, let us continue to praise him and find everlasting contentment in his grace.

How do you and your spouse ensure that your pursuit hasn't shifted away from God and toward making money?

Getting Advice

*Get all the advice and instruction you can,
so you will be wise the rest of your life.*

PROVERBS 19:20 NLT

Life gets the best of us all at times, and we are left wondering what to do in particular situations. It may be that we have never faced certain situations before, or that we simply have not practiced wisdom in some of the choices we made. There is an African saying which teaches that an old man can see sitting down what a young man cannot see while standing in a tree. In other words, it is a good idea to heed wise advice, especially from a trusted source that has time and experience on their side.

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Self-discipline is vital if we intend to accomplish anything worthwhile. Even the most menial tasks require discipline to undertake. It is good practice to listen to advice and accept correction, since this approach with God is how we attain wisdom. Discipline and wisdom go together; in fact, an undisciplined person cannot find wisdom since it is hidden with Christ. By applying simple, fundamental lessons from God's Word to our lives, we grow in wisdom and understanding. God's Word is not only a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, it is life itself.

Who do you and your spouse ask for advice?

MAY 10

Give Generously

They share freely and give generously to those in need.

Their good deeds will be remembered forever.

They will have influence and honor.

PSALM 112:9 NLT

The things which God delights in and the things the world delights in are very different. It is better to be on the side of delighting God since his opinion is the one that matters. The world will love us and then it will hate us. We cannot rely on the world to sustain us. On the other hand, God can bestow honor and dishonor, he can sustain us for all of eternity, and his love is unbreakable.

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The works of the righteous are pleasing to God, and he gives them both influence and honor. Righteous people live to love and serve since they are made in the image of God. They are not easily frightened nor become worried when receiving bad news because their hearts are steadfast in God. Their enemies have no power over them because they look to their Maker for protection. From what they have, they give what they can in order to help those in need. Even their giving is joyful and wrought in gratitude. It is acts like this which will be forever remembered.

**How can you and your spouse
live righteously together?**

MAY 11

For You

What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else?

ROMANS 8:31-32 NLT

Who can stand against the One who created all things? There is nothing more powerful than God, so we know that if God is for us then nothing can stand against us either. We are immovable when we are rooted in Christ. This is a promise from the Lord, whose words have always been true.

We can find great comfort and assurance in this, but how do we know that God is for us? We can have confidence in this as well because he proved it to us by not even sparing his own life on account of his great love for us. If he didn't withhold even his own life, what else wouldn't he withhold? He freely and generously gives us blessings beyond measure!

When was the last time something came against you and the Lord protected you?

Growing Up

Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

HEBREWS 5:14 NIV

A baby cannot process solid food. There is no shame at all in a baby beginning with milk and learning to eat solid food in time. As the baby matures and grows, milk becomes inadequate for full nourishment. You would never see a full-grown person sustaining themselves on only milk.

Our spiritual lives work the same way. A new believer is expected to start with learning the basic truths of the Bible, and there is no shame in that. In time, however, they should be maturing and growing in their faith and in their knowledge of the Lord. We cannot sustain our walk with the Lord through basic Bible lessons because relationships do not remain stationary. All relationships either grow closer or fade with time.

What Scripture passages have challenged your thinking lately? How do you maintain a good relationship with your spouse?

Humble Harmony

*Never pay back evil with more evil.
Do things in such a way that everyone
can see you are honorable.*

ROMANS 12:17 NLT

We cannot control the decisions of other people and we cannot always control what happens to us. What we do have power over is our response. Another person's sin does not permit us to retaliate with more sin. We have the option in those moments to either sink to the level of the perpetrator, or to become more like Christ.

In order to practice forgiveness, we first need someone to forgive.

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Anyone can love someone who is lovable but choosing to love someone who intended harm toward us displays the love of Christ. Rather than become defensive and strike back, we should view these times as opportunities to live as Christ. It requires humility to live in harmony with others, but when we have the mind of Christ it is far more conceivable. Christ did not pay our evil back with evil, but instead covered it with love. Love is more powerful than hate because love can reach places that hate cannot.

**What happens when you respond
with love toward your spouse?**

Iron Bars

*A brother who has been insulted
is harder to win back than a walled city,
and arguments separate people
like the barred gates of a palace.*

PROVERBS 18:19 NCV

A warning is being issued in this verse, not an excuse. In natural law, this is considered a pendulum effect. When what was previously exchanged between two people were feelings of love, companionship, trust, and bliss, the insult can cut that much deeper because of the close bond shared. The pendulum swings in an equal direction the other way as the insulted person now experiences feelings of hate, estrangement, betrayal, and loss.

It is altogether better to avoid an offense like this between two people and to work hard at keeping peace. If a dispute such as this does arise, this verse is not issuing a pass from mending the bond. In fact, Scripture states that we are to seek reconciliation before even making offerings to God. If it is you who has been offended, seek wisdom from God on how to lower your barred walls and work toward healing the relationship.

**How do you work through feelings of hurt
when your spouse insults you, either
intentionally or unintentionally?**

Be Still

*"Be still, and know that I am God.
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!"*

PSALM 46:10 ESV

The lyrics of this mighty song were written to the Sons of Korah and historians believe it was during a time of strife or war in Israel. The whole psalm is written in third person until verse ten when, as we see, it shifts to second person. Instead of the psalmist proclaiming encouragement and the wonderful attributes of the Lord, Yahweh is now speaking directly to the people of Israel and declaring who he is.

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Stop striving. You do not fight alone. Turn to the one who is exalted to farthest reaches of the earth and watch him work his wonders! Be still before him and take time to heed the voice of your Maker. It is he alone who every nation will praise, and who the entirety of humanity will bow before. When we face trials, rather than brazenly pushing forward or cowering in dismay, we need to intentionally be still before God so we can witness his power and learn how we ought to walk.

**Have you taken time to be still before
God today? What battles are you facing
that need to be submitted to him?**

Unquenchable Love

*Many waters cannot quench love;
rivers cannot sweep it away.*

*If one were to give all the wealth of one's house for love,
it would be utterly scorned.*

SONG OF SOLOMON 8:7 NIV

Who would not desire to have the undying love described in the beautiful account of the Song of Solomon? Here we see a young woman in love with a poor shepherd boy. They both know they will not have much material wealth in life, but they have grown to love each other so ardently that even though the young woman was offered all the riches and comforts of the wealthiest man on earth in exchange for her hand in marriage, she refused to even consider it. In the verse preceding this one, she tells Solomon that the fire of love is as the fire of Jehovah, which is why it is unquenchable!

While most would not think of trading true love for material things, we sometimes put ourselves in a position of working so much to gain wealth or prestige that we actually neglect our marriage. While we should be good workers, we also must be content with what we have and put more value on our marriage. If the intense love described in the Song of Solomon has burned low in your heart, work hard together to rekindle the flame so that even a river cannot extinguish it!

What material things have held greater appeal than your love for your spouse?

How can you change your heart?

MAY 17

Love that Lasts

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.

EPHESIANS 4:2 NCV

Paul is not saying that we should tolerate sin, since sin is abhorrent to God. He is addressing the way we approach someone who is sinning. Oftentimes sin is a symptom of a deeper underlying issue. They may feel insecure or unloved, or they may have believed a lie. Whatever the case is, aggressively disputing their sin or their fault will only heighten the problem they are already facing.

If we lord our "righteousness" over others in an attempt to convict them of their sin, they may shirk back or become defensive. We must be humble and remember everything we have been forgiven of. Gentleness creates a safe environment for people to share their troubles. Patience is important because rarely is change immediate. Most of all, love is vital because it is what binds us together.

When your spouse is at fault, do you hold it over them, or do you gently forgive them?

Loving the World

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life are not from the Father but are from the world.

1 JOHN 2:15-16 ESV

Someone who does not love the things of this world cannot be controlled by the powers of this world. When our love is for our Father, we will be led safely by our Father. We cannot live in two kingdoms. We were placed in this world and it is not wrong to live to the fullest measure here and now, but we need to maintain an eternal perspective that reminds us of where we are going.

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The three types of desires John addresses here—the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life—are not referring to natural, human desires but when they encompass more of our heart than God does. For instance, being led around by what our flesh wants, or our eyes see rather than what God wants is putting our love and allegiance into the world, not our Lord. When we starve the pride of life, we are choosing to love and serve God rather than ourselves.

What are some examples of the three worldly desires that could draw our focus away from God?

Needing Help

*Where there is no guidance the people fall,
but in abundance of counselors there is victory.*

PROVERBS 11:14 NASB

Our personal interests and agendas can often blind us to making rational, unbiased decisions. All of us, presidents to parents, need the insight of others to help us stay on track. This wisdom is true in any situation where decisions are made. Regardless of whether you are running a family, a business, or a country, we need other people in our lives to offer wise counsel, correction, and accountability. Each of us needs help and should not be too proud or too embarrassed to ask for it.

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God does not need counselors since he holds all wisdom, but we were created with a need for community. Having a spouse offers an immediate partner to help us determine whether a plan is wise or foolish. Instead of insisting on our own way, it would be wise for us to listen to our spouses and consider the fact that the Lord gave them to us. Marriage is a precious gift which can help keep us from stumbling because of the nature of accountability within the union.

**Who do you seek guidance and advice from
when navigating big decisions in life?**

Healthy Ways

No 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.

HEBREWS 12:11 NIV

Caring parents teach their children right from wrong. They guide them in healthy, safe ways, and discipline them when they misbehave. Understanding cause and effect is necessary for a child to learn how to take care of themselves and navigate through life. If actions do not lead to reactions—good and bad—then we are free to do whatever we please regardless of the outcome.

It is only through consequences that we learn how to make good decisions. We do not like discipline, but it is a loving lesson from our Father because he wants us to mature and do well. It is a sure sign that the Lord is working in our lives. If we are wise enough to heed his interjection and learn from it, we will become more righteous and find peace. Training requires discipline to follow through, humility to learn, and determination to keep going. The Lord's training should not dishearten us but encourage us that growth is happening.

**How do you sense the Lord
guiding you in healthy, safe ways?**

Our Safe Place

*The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed,
a stronghold in times of trouble.*

PSALM 9:9 NIV

Trouble is guaranteed for those who live according to the Word of God. This world and its systems are not designed after Biblical principles, and we who live righteously cannot conform to the patterns established throughout our society. There are times when we need deliverance, either from oppression or temptation. When those times come, it is the Lord who we must turn to. No amount of personal strength can carry us farther than the cross is able. Our safe place, our refuge from trouble, is found in God. He promises to be our stronghold, and his arms are open wide for his children.

There is no power on this earth that can destroy a Christian when they have sought the protection of God. David knew this even in the midst of war, personal temptation, and betrayal. His hope was secure as was his faith. Plant yourself firmly in the only one who can deliver you from every attack of the enemy and every single one of your personal sins.

**Have you sought God with your spouse
and asked him to surround your marriage,
so it may be an extension of his refuge,
a safe place free from oppression?**

Mouths of Babes

*He called a child, whom he put among them, and said,
"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children,
you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."*

MATTHEW 18:2-3 NRSV

Jesus' disciples asked him who the greatest in the kingdom of heaven was. There had been bickering among them and pride was beginning to fester in their hearts. We all want to feel important, but our importance comes from our identity in Christ, not from our stature or position. Jesus clarified this perfectly when he motioned to a child and announced that they needed to become like a child in order to enter the kingdom of heaven.

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Christ's followers were constantly trying to appear knowledgeable and important in the eyes of each other. Children are not distinguished, respected leaders of society. Children are obedient, dependent, and innocent of a lot of things. They are led by others, and they have a sort of humility that grows thin as they age. In order to enter the kingdom of heaven, Jesus tells us to revert to when we were dependent, humble, and childlike. That is his definition of greatness in his perfectly paradoxical kingdom.

What does it mean to have childlike faith?

Bitter Roots

Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many.

HEBREWS 12:15 NLT

Be watchful that sin does not creep in and cause disbelief or disobedience. Assuming God's blessings and protections even while living in willful waywardness is fooling ourselves. This sort of behavior invites a poisonous root of bitterness. Sin can spread and affect not just the person infected, but others also. Pay close attention to how we are instructed to handle a person who has accepted a lie or who is living in sin. The Bible does not tell us to cast them out or withhold love from them. It tells us to look after each other. Caring for one another, keeping accountable, and choosing love creates an atmosphere difficult for bitterness to take root. Lies cannot spread where truth is prevalent.

We need to look after each other in order to be reminded constantly of the truth, and to encourage away corruption and bitterness. When it comes to sin, we must be offensive, not just defensive. It will destroy us if we do not dig it out with the persistent, unwavering love of Christ.

**How do you overcome a habit of sin?
How can you help care for others
who are struggling?**

Unwholesome Talk

*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths,
but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs,
that it may benefit those who listen.*

EPHESIANS 4:29 NIV

Our words carry power. We can use them to build up or break down, to spread truth or lies, to praise God or bring shame on ourselves. We are also responsible for our words on social media. It might be more tempting to use cruel or vulgar language when looking at a screen instead of another person's face, but the impact is the same. The words are still intended for and heard by other people.

James likened our tongues to a fire which has the power to spread and destroy. In one moment, we may be speaking blessings and praising God, but the next we are tearing someone down or gossiping about them. Since all humans are God's beloved creations, we are disgracing his handiwork when we participate in such foolish talk. James even said that blessing and cursing cannot come from the same heart any more than fresh water and salty water can flow from the same spring. Our words reveal the condition of our hearts, so let's ensure our hearts are full of love and grace.

When you are tempted to use unwholesome talk, what can you do instead?

MAY 25

Shine Like Stars

*Do all things without murmuring and arguing,
so that you may be blameless and innocent,
children of God without blemish in the midst
of a crooked and perverse generation,
in which you shine like stars in the world.*

PHILIPPIANS 2:14-15 NRSV

People who serve themselves will often conflict with the agendas around them since those agendas are not serving them. For instance, someone who walks into their workplace to see how much they can get out of it rather than how much they can put into it will be at odds with the company, since the company exists to grow itself. Someone who stays home with children will struggle more if they expected that children would somehow make them feel better about themselves, rather than carrying the mindset that their responsibility is to raise and serve their children to honor the Lord.

People are inherently selfish, so when someone joyfully serves without complaint, it stands as a stark comparison against a dark backdrop. Children of God are called to be innocent in their speech, to fight the urge to complain, and to avoid dishonoring arguments. Doing so will set us apart from all the crookedness and perversion of our generation, and people will more clearly see Christ's influence in our conversation. Those closest to you will benefit greatly as well.

How can you honorably and blamelessly disagree with someone?

Following

You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him.

DEUTERONOMY 13:4 NASB

Often the Bible contrasts good with evil, obedience with rebellion, and so forth. It will detail the destruction of the wicked and then reveal the rewards of the righteous. Here, the Scriptures warn about false prophets, especially when their predictions come true. If they attempt to lead us to worship other gods, we are to refuse.

What is the best way to refuse? This verse, immediately following the warning, outlines it perfectly. Each of these six directives—follow, fear, obey, listen, serve, and cling—will give us the resistance we need to see through the lies and avoid the snares. We will not become manipulated by the devil's tricks when we know the truth. God is the actual miracle worker and Savior of mankind, everything else is only a copy of the original. Spending time with him familiarizes us with the sound of his voice. Clinging to him keeps us from falling. He will keep us from going astray.

**Do you ever worry about being tricked?
How can you better familiarize yourself with
God's truth together so you can identify lies?**

MAY 27

With God

In keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

2 PETER 3:13 NIV

Whether Peter is inferring that a new heaven and earth will be created, or whether God intends to purify the current ones and make them like new has been a debated issue for hundreds of years. It is difficult to surmise the complete intent of this verse; however, the important part is that we will be where righteousness dwells. Since God is righteousness, we understand that this means we will be with God. What is more incredible than that?

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Peter's words align with Paul's revelation of the end of days when he said, "God himself will be with them as their God" (Revelation 21:1). Regardless of how it unfolds, our greatest hope and most astounding promise is that one day we will live with God! Believing this offers us great endurance in this life because, as unjust and unloving as love can be at times, that will all one day pass away, and we will be left in the presence of the one who is perfect.

What creation in nature inspires your imagination and makes you wonder about the new heaven and earth?

Freedom of Forgiveness

*"Lord, how often shall my brother
sin against me and I forgive him?
Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him,
"I do not say to you, up to seven times,
but up to seventy times seven."*

MATTHEW 18:21-22 NASB

The instructions Jesus gave to Peter regarding forgiveness both superseded Jewish tradition and held a deeper association with a well-known Old Testament passage. It was custom among the Jews to offer forgiveness up to three times. Peter, believing he was being more than generous, asked his Rabbi if seven times would suffice. In essence, Jesus was saying that forgiveness should be limitless, just like God's forgiveness toward us. A long time before this conversation transpired, the young earth saw two murders: Cain and Lamech. Since God had already issued discipline to Cain, nobody was allowed to hurt him further. The punishment issued would be sevenfold. Lamech then announced that the retribution for harming him would be seventy times seven (Genesis 4:24). This testimony of violence and vengeance would have been well-known to Peter and the Jews. Jesus wisely used it to illustrate the power of forgiveness, which is far stronger and lasting than revenge.

**Can you show forgiveness to your spouse
as many times as needed without seeking
reciprocity or reward?**

MAY 29

Great Exchange

*You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor,
so that by his poverty he could make you rich.*

2 CORINTHIANS 8:9 NLT

Writing to the Corinthian church on behalf of persecuted and poor Christians, Paul was encouraging them to fulfil the commitment they had made to give to those who were in need. He related that the Macedonian church had given above their means, even though they were severely struggling themselves.

When we consider all that we have, and we recognize that every good gift comes from God, it should compel us to consider the plights of our brothers and sisters in Christ. What is our gain for? Jesus himself set aside all the glory of heaven to come in such a humble manner for us. He was born in a manger, the son of a carpenter, did not have a place to lay his head for years during his ministry, and died the death of a thief even though he was innocent. He became poor for us so we could inherit the kingdom of God. The riches of this world are not worth clinging to when we have our eternal security and our hope already rooted in the Lord.

**Do you spend your time and energy investing
in this life or the next? How can you and your
spouse plan to invest in God's kingdom?**

MAY 30

Habit of Prayer

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

MARK 1:35 NIV

The day before had been a full one for Jesus. He had spent the whole day in Capernaum healing the sick and attending to as many people as came to him. The busy day did not hinder Jesus from rising early the following morning to spend time in prayer. More important than sleep or any other human need is our relationship with the Father, and Jesus was demonstrating that for us.

When we feel overwhelmed and overworked, it is important to stay connected to God. He is our source of strength and encouragement. Fostering a habit of prayer will help us stay on course and not drift. It will keep us aligned with God's will and plan. Prayer is essential for our well-being and Jesus knew that. When we are not listening to God's voice, we are susceptible to other voices who may try to mislead us. In marriage, we have someone else who can remind us and encourage us to pray, and they can also pray for us. What a blessing that can be.

**Do you have a habit of prayer in your life?
If not, what can you do to create one?**

MAY 31

The Listening Ear

*You must all be quick to listen,
slow to speak,
and slow to get angry.*

JAMES 1:19 NLT

Obeying God leads to noticeable differences in a person's life and attitude. If we are living for ourselves and believe that it is our responsibility to take care of ourselves primarily, then we will feel the need to be heard and to control whatever we can. If, however, we are living to worship God and love other people, then we know that God is our defender and we will care about others enough to want to hear what they have to say. Listening to someone communicates that you care about them and what they think. Being slow to speak demonstrates self-control and humility.

When we know that God is the ultimate judge and has our best in mind, we have more control over feelings of anger because we can trust the outcome to him. Everyone feels angry at times, and sometimes it is justified. James cautions Christians against being easily set off and quickly succumbing to anger because it leads to all sorts of negative outcomes. Christians can bring their anger to God, and handle situations as he has taught them to through his Word.

**What typically makes you angry?
How can you tame your response?**

June

Love is supreme and must flow through

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each of these virtues. Love becomes the

mark of true maturity.

COLOSSIANS 3:14 TPT



JUNE 1

The Pursual

*The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men
to see if there are any who understand,
who seek after God.*

PSALM 14:2 NASB

The pursuit of the Lord in any relationship is the most important thing to dedicate ourselves to. God is our solid foundation to weather us through storms and keep us sheltered throughout any trials we face. If we find ourselves in times of trouble within marriage, one of the first things we should check is the condition of our personal pursuit of God.

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We should think of our marriage as an equilateral triangle with us and our spouses on the bottom corners and God on the top; the closer we draw to him, the closer we will become to each other. As married couples, we represent the relationship God has with his church. If our connection with him is weak, our representation of him will also be weak. By drawing near to him, our marriages will flourish.

**Could you and your significant other
seek God more diligently
both individually and together?**

Hard Knocks

*I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty.
I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation,
whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.
I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*

PHILIPPIANS 4:12-13 NIV

Our time on this earth is like a blink of our Father's eye, and throughout our lives we will witness both poverty and plenty. The Lord provides as he sees fit and always has a plan unfolding in the background, despite how it may feel at times. During times of difficulty, we must praise the Lord for how we are being strengthened to serve him more effectively. In times of rest and plenty, we shall praise him for his blessings in our lives and use them for his glory.

Both need and plenty belong to God and he will give and take away according to his wisdom, while also providing us with the strength necessary to overcome adversity. While enduring a struggle with family, it is easy to shift to many sinful mindsets such as blaming, hopelessness, or apathy. Additionally, during seasons of plenty, it is frighteningly easy to forget the Lord who pulled us out of struggle, thus squandering the blessings he has provided. We must stay attentive to one another in the good times and the bad. If we seek the Lord for our strength, we shall never grow weak.

How has God used struggles in your life to strengthen you? How have you gotten the most out of the blessings he has given you?

Seek the Lord

Sow righteousness for yourselves, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers his righteousness on you.

HOSEA 10:12 NIV

The good we sow will directly contribute to the love we reap. The bad we sow will also return to us. God calls us to sow righteousness just as he called Israel to. In a marriage relationship, we must be intentional about sowing good seeds, otherwise we will reap bad fruit. We must make conscientious efforts to help our loved ones in ways they would appreciate and profess our love through actions.

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We can and should speak life into our marriages. But without action and effort supporting our speech, all our declarations will fall flat. Marriage is like growing a fruit tree. If nurtured and taken care of, it will yield enough for us and others to be blessed and to carry us through the droughts. If we ignore the tree and fail to provide the love and care it needs, when we arrive at times of struggle, we will not find fruit to sustain us. If we nurture our relationships by being willing to put the work into giving what is required, then we will reap the blessings of it also.

What does sowing righteousness into your marriage look like?

What are some examples of fruit it might produce?

Two Masters

"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other."

LUKE 16:13 NIV

God should be the master of our entire lives including our relationships. Wealth, success, personal interests, and even our loved ones must fall in line after him. A healthy, godly relationship will have only one thing commanding its course, and that is the Lord who has promised to lead us in the way of everlasting life.

It is surprisingly easy to assume we are following the Lord's direction, place our attention on autopilot, and then one day look at our lives and realize that something else has been our driving force. When a man and woman come together in matrimony, they are promising to serve each other as they would serve the Lord. The goal of serving each other is to sacrifice our own selfish desires for the needs of our spouses and serve the Lord together while we assist one another in staying true to that course. Our relationships to our partners should be full of love and caring servitude, never one of master over servant.

Is God the one guiding you through life, or have you let something else take the reins?

JUNE 5

Daily Savoring

*Every time I think of you,
I give thanks to my God.*

PHILIPPIANS 1:3 NLT

Having someone you love more than life itself is beautiful and illustrative. Our love for our spouses points directly toward the love our Father has for us. Our loved ones are gifts from God to help us both understand him and represent him better. When our minds and our hearts are right, we cannot help but thank God for his incredible blessing of the person we love most. If we see them serving our Father, we rejoice on their behalf. When we witness their sorrow, we long to comfort them just as our Father comforts us. **Property of BroadStreet Publishing. Do not duplicate.** In this passage, Paul is rejoicing in the faith of the church of Philippi and giving thanks to the Lord who is shaping them to be his people. In the same way, we ought to apply this principle to our own lives and rejoice when the ones we care about so deeply are similarly being used and shaped by God. We rejoice in their growth and in the glory their lives bring to our Savior.

**Have you made an effort
to thank God for your spouse?**

JUNE 6

Fullness of Joy

*You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

PSALM 16:11 ESV

If our goal is to obtain fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore, then we will rapidly realize that such a goal is only achieved through following the path of life illuminated by God. A common mistake made in relationships is a shift in goals from seeking that closeness with God to seeking that closeness with the person who has captivated our attention. People cannot offer true fulfillment no matter how invested and loving they are.

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The only relationship which can bring total satisfaction and endless love is with God, and the greatest of human relationships are the ones that are fully committed to and blessed by him. When two people seek the Lord together, the result will be that they become closer through their shared objective. God wants all his people to seek him, and two people encouraging each other are stronger together. Obedience to God results in a healthy relationship, life, joy, and eternal pleasure.

**Are you and your partner walking the path
of life toward God or searching for fulfillment
in each other?**

JUNE 7

Authentic Models

"Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."

1 SAMUEL 16:7 ESV

We should focus more of our attention on the condition of our hearts than our physical appearance or our reputation among others. God looks deeper than skin and considers the motivations of our hearts. He chose David to be king even though David was not impressive in physique or stature; in fact, he was the youngest of his brothers.

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When we consider other people, we should ask God to teach us how to see past outward appearances. Even regarding our spouses, our bodies wither with age and what will end up mattering in the end is character, specifically faith. It is far more blessed to walk through life with someone who has a beautiful heart because looks are deceiving and will fade in time. The consideration God gives to our hearts is not something we can avoid or hide. Anything hidden he will bring to light, so we commit our hearts to him and ask him to grow us in righteousness. When we marry someone, every part of us becomes a part of them. Maintaining a healthy Christ-centered life is the key to longevity.

**Do you care more about your appearance
or that your heart is right before God?**

JUNE 8

Carrying Burdens

*Carry each other's burdens,
and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*

GALATIANS 6:2 NIV

What is the law of Christ? What are we fulfilling? This verse has a fairly straightforward meaning which can be interpreted simply and accurately as “carry each other’s burdens,” but on a deeper level, how does that affect God? Firstly, the term “law of Christ” is used only once in Galatians, once in 1 Corinthians, and both times by Paul. This term is not defined in text, but we can interpret its meaning if we look at Christ himself. Jesus said that the most important law is to love the Lord, and the second most important is to love our neighbors (Mark 12:28-31). He seems to be pointing at the condition of the believers’ hearts in both commandments.

If we serve out of love, then we are following the will of Christ. His desire is that we serve one another and carry each other’s burdens out of love, which is how he treated us and how we fulfill his law. Love is the root of every commandment the Lord gives us. In a relationship, serving each other out of love is a true reflection of Christ.

**How can you help carry your companion’s
burdens better?**

Abandoning Self

“Respect the LORD and serve him fully and sincerely. Throw away the gods that your ancestors worshiped on the other side of the Euphrates River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD.”

JOSHUA 24:14 NCV

It may not be common to have physical idols, but there are spiritual idols that many of us serve which cause terrible damage to both our romantic relationships and our relationship with God. The Israelites were in Egypt for an extremely long time; long enough to adopt the gods of their captors. When God rescued them from Egypt and from their slave masters, he also commanded them to leave the Egyptian gods they had adopted behind. His intention was to free them spiritually as well.

Whether we find ourselves addicted and captive to worldly things like media, drugs, alcohol, money, success, or even unhealthy relationships, they all detain us from firstly and fervently following the Lord. We cannot follow two masters, so we must leave our former idols in the past and walk into the light. Doing so will help us be better partners for our spouses and more faithful servants for God.

**What idols do you think
you might be serving?**

JUNE 10

Personal Jesus

We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

1 JOHN 1:3 NLT

It is necessary that we prioritize our relationship with God since from it flows all other answers for life. Our primary purpose is to fellowship with God and worship him. He also designed us for fellowship with one another, and we have been commissioned to share with others who he is and what he has done for us. How are we supposed to honestly share who he is if we do not know him because we have not put the effort into cultivating a friendship with him?

We should prioritize spending time with the Lord whether through prayer, reading his Word, or worshipping. When we prioritize time with him and ensure that his voice is the one guiding us, we will see a drastic difference in our behavior and lifestyle. Every relationship needs to have Jesus as its foundation, otherwise it will crumble under the storms of life. Our fellowship with him strengthens not only us but those around us by motivating them toward a deeper relationship with their Creator.

What have you prioritized that outranks your time with God, and how can you ensure that you have time for fellowship with him?

Little and Great

*"Whoever can be trusted with very little
can also be trusted with much,
and whoever is dishonest with very little
will also be dishonest with much."*

LUKE 16:10 NIV

God allows us to experience trials and tribulations for many reasons. One of these reasons is that trials give us a chance to prove how much we really trust him. When we experience a difficult time, it is an opportunity to show people that we are not shaken by things of this world. When God sees his children putting their trust in him that way, he is honored, and he will entrust them with much greater tasks.

Trust is not bought or easily obtained; it is proven by constant faithfulness, humility, and sincerity. Marriage is one of the greatest ways to demonstrate our love for the Lord because we are constantly being presented with a choice to be selfless or selfish. Every day is a new chance to show we can be trusted with very little. Can you imagine the things God has planned for you, if only you prove to be a faithful servant?

**How can you practice being
trustworthy in your marriage?**

Differences

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free,
there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

GALATIANS 3:28 ESV

Although the Creator God designed us with a variety of features and faces, when it comes to the issue of faith and forgiveness, no one is outside of his grace. All are of equal importance and where their Maker is concerned; men and women, poor and rich, all ethnicities, all backgrounds. Paul confronted the misguided idea that Christ came for the Jews only.

Everyone was made in the image of our Father. He holds the only position of power and prominence within his eternal kingdom and we are all beloved children under him. Any reliance we have in our own supremacy and any discrimination we feel toward someone else is in opposition to the Word of God. Jesus came for the freedom and forgiveness of all, and our job is to show love and compassion to everyone.

**How can you make a point not to classify
people by their heritage, gender,
or role in society?**

JUNE 13

Unswerving Faith

*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess,
for he who promised is faithful.*

HEBREWS 10:23 NIV

The Jewish Christians were under great persecution at the time this letter was written. They were being urged to return to Judaism and to forsake the teachings of Jesus, but they knew that their newfound freedom was only available to those who followed the Messiah. They could not knowingly put themselves back under the law and abandon the grace God had given them. He is always faithful to what he has promised, so these early Christians held fast to their hope in Christ even though it meant persecution for approximately seven million of them and gruesome deaths for about two million.

Our enemies today may not carry swords, but they are still set on destroying us and turning us away from Jesus. The death of our spirits is far worse than the destruction of our physical bodies, so with the same unswerving faith of the early Christians, we must take hold of ourselves and keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

**Is there anything that tends to distract
you from God or causes you to engage
in unwholesome behavior?**

Guard Your Heart

*Above all else, guard your heart,
for everything you do flows from it.*

PROVERBS 4:23 NIV

Temptation is a real and serious threat, and passive admittance of its existence is not enough to avoid its snares. Furthermore, attempting to strongarm our way through temptation will also eventually lead to our overthrow and destruction. It is only by guarding our hearts and avoiding temptation that we stand any chance to maintain holiness, and the only way to guard our hearts properly is by equipping ourselves with the truth found in the Gospel.

God fashioned our hearts and He is the only one who can protect them from the enemy's attacks. This world and all its alluring ruses threaten to undo the work of Christ in our lives, but when we immerse ourselves in the Scriptures and actively walk with God, any attempts to deceive us will be thwarted by the truth we have embedded in our hearts. When we fail and our hearts wander, God is gracious to draw us back to him and cleanse us. Seek him together and ask for his grace today.

**How are you actively guarding
your heart against temptation?**

JUNE 15

Always Hope

*"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."*

JEREMIAH 29:11 NIV

The Bible talks a lot about plans. We tend to make plans for ourselves and desire to stick with what we think is best. All too often, however, our idea of how things should be does not completely align with God's will, and we need to be ready to drop everything to follow him.

God really does know what is best for us, and he wants to see us draw closer to him. This cannot happen if we refuse to let go of what we want, thinking we know better. Trusting God with our futures may sound scary, but it is incredibly freeing. If we are willing to give God control of our lives, he will bless us by building our faith and dependency on him, rather than ourselves. We do not have to worry about what will be, because God is in control. We can believe him when he says he has amazing things stored up for us.

**In what ways can you surrender
your future to the Lord?**

JUNE 16

Joyful Medicine

*A joyful heart is good medicine,
but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.*

PROVERBS 17:22 ESV

Have you ever started the day in a really good mood, only for it to be ruined by someone else with a sour attitude? Or have you woken up on the wrong side of the bed, but the kind words of a friend brought sunshine to your day and turned your temperament around? That is what this verse is talking about. When we are good to people, especially when we do not feel like it, that kindness can have a powerful impact on their emotions, as well as ours.

Being kind often goes hand in hand with denying ourselves in some way, whether that means choosing to talk to a friend instead of watching TV, or just pulling ourselves up out of a pile of self-pity in order to be a welcoming face for our spouses. God uses these moments to teach us selflessness; a tiny reflection of what Jesus did for us. Employing a kind spirit is honoring to God, a blessing to those around us, and refining maturity for ourselves.

**How can you be good medicine
for yourself and for your spouse today?**

Climates of Chaos

I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain.

All these things are gone forever."

REVELATION 21:3-4 NLT

Prior to Christ's sacrifice, sin separated people from God. Atonement had to be made for sins in the form of animal sacrifices, and people had to travel to the temple for their prayers and offerings. When Jesus came to fulfil the law and offer himself as the final and ultimate sacrifice, he explained that it was no longer necessary to travel to the temple to worship God. What mattered now was that those who worshipped him did so in spirit and in truth.

We have been given direct access to God through prayer. Although this is an astounding privilege, it is still far removed from the close relationship God shared with his people in the Garden of Eden and from what he desires to have with his people now. One day when we are finally called home to be with the Lord, we will have that kind of personal and intimate relationship with our Creator again. All death and sorrow will be cast out, and we will walk with God just like he intended from the beginning.

How can you take time now to focus on growing your relationship with Jesus?

JUNE 18

Heavenly Peace

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

JOHN 14:27 NIV

Jesus spoke these words to his disciples in preparation of what he knew was about to happen. He was going to be arrested and crucified and his disciples—his closest friends—would scatter. They would feel lost and confused until Jesus returned to them from the dead, but even after that, he would leave them. His Spirit of peace would remain with them to help them because after his ascension they would undergo great persecution.

God does not leave us unprepared or alone, he always prepares us for what is coming and walks with us every step of the way. It is by his strength and because of his teachings that we can navigate our way through life. The world cannot offer us lasting peace, only passing pleasure. The peace Jesus gives fills us with courage and satisfaction. Our hearts are not troubled when we are walking with him. Nothing can fill us with fear when we are already filled with Christ's love.

**Do you struggle with fear?
Why is fear the rival of love?**

Teamwork

Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you." In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:20-21, 24-25 NLT

Before looking down on the work of someone else or issuing excessive praise to those who have more esteemed roles, we should remember that each of us depends on others just as if we were one body. None of us can complete the work of the Lord alone, so unity within the body of Christ is of utmost importance.

Harmony and respect should be primary traits of those professing faith in Christ since it is he who binds us together and all glory belongs to him. We can show our love and appreciation for Jesus by how we treat other members of his body of believers.

How does your spouse fill a different role than you, and why are you grateful for him or her?

JUNE 20

Real Success

Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

JOSHUA 1:8 NIV

It is commonly understood that we are what we eat—or what we consume. When we watch too much television, we start acting like what we view. When we listen to a lot of a certain kind of music, it influences our behavior. When we are immersed in the Word of God, we start behaving in accordance to what he instructed. The only way to draw nearer to our Father is by constantly seeking his presence, and one of the best ways to do that is by reading the Bible.

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God gave us the Bible to learn who he is and what he desires. It is a guidebook for eternal life. If your spouse gave you a book about their life, the things they have done, and the people they have loved, would you not pore over it? Memorize it? Surely you would take advantage of the opportunity to know them as best as possible because that is what you do when you love someone. Further, when you do not understand something, you would ask them about it. That is what God intends for us to do with his written words.

**Do you struggle with
meditating on the Bible?
How can you challenge
each other to improve?**

Price of Wisdom

*The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom.
Though it cost all you have, get understanding.*

PROVERBS 4:7 NIV

This may seem like circular reasoning, but the insight included in these words are, in a very literal sense, soul-saving. The first step to obtaining wisdom is to recognize the value in wisdom and our need for it. This understanding and eternal perspective requires a certain amount of wisdom initially. In other words, a wise person recognizes the value in wisdom and continues to search for it at any cost.

To be wise is far greater than to be rich, successful, well connected, or even happy. Sometimes obtaining wisdom reveals injustices and other sorrowing realities, but it is still worth the price of our ignorant happiness to gain truthful understanding. Turning a blind eye to truth has the same repercussions as lying. All other opportunities, objectives, and goals should pale in comparison to our desire to receive wisdom.

**What steps are you taking
in your search for wisdom?**

JUNE 22

Fear God

*Only fear the LORD and serve Him in truth with all your heart;
for consider what great things He has done for you.*

1 SAMUEL 12:24 NASB

God is so mighty; he flooded the entire world and restarted humanity. Countless times he defeated massive armies through just a few of his faithful people. He came to earth and gave up his own rights and life so we could be made righteous. There is nothing he cannot do and no enemy he cannot defeat!

When we feel ourselves forgetting the wonders which God has done, we should read through the Old Testament and be reminded.

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Look at Moses in Egypt and the lengths God went to for his people to be freed. Consider Gideon, the shy man God used to defeat the Israelites' most powerful enemy of that time. Remember David, the shepherd that God used to take down a giant. It was not his own strength that won him that victory, it was the Lord working through him. Fear of the Lord does not look like other earthly fears; it is a reverence, awe, and worship of God and his holiness.

Are you filled with the fear of the Lord?

JUNE 23

Good Reputation

Encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.

TITUS 2:6-8 NIV

The way we live and the words we use should be an example to others—especially those younger than us—of Biblical teachings and holy living. If our teaching is pure but our actions speak otherwise, we are hypocrites and untrustworthy. Our lifestyles should exemplify our speech. What we say should also be carefully examined and intentional.

Rather than being quick to offer our opinions and advice, it is important that we exercise self-control and humility. In every area of life, we are called to demonstrate integrity and set an example for others. Regardless of whether other people praise our name or seek to shame us, our intention should be to live like Jesus did and point all honor back to him. We will not be condemned if the purpose behind our actions and our words is to bring glory to our Father.

When someone says something bad about you, are you quick to defend yourself, or are you tactful, allowing your good reputation to discredit their claims?

JUNE 24

Cultivating Patience

*Whoever is patient has great understanding,
but one who is quick-tempered displays folly.*

PROVERBS 14:29 NIV

Keeping a level head is not easy especially if we have been mistreated or antagonized. The temptation when we have been aggravated is to let loose our anger and give people our unrefined feelings. The overwhelming desire to lash out at pain and take it out on the object of our wrath is common but not condoned by God. A wise person realizes that it is God who defends us, and it is far more advantageous to show restraint, breathe, and consider the outcome of what we intend to do

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In a moment of anger and intense passion, rage overtakes reason, and the voice of the Holy Spirit is drowned out. When we fail to hear and heed the leading of the Holy Spirit, we are bound to end up sinning and going astray. This proverb serves as a warning to believers that we should not let anger and a quick temper get the best of us. It is not godly to be quick-tempered and it certainly does nothing to better the situation. Acting in self-control and maturity will bless our relationships with our spouses, friends, and the entire body of believers.

**Do you have certain triggers that create
angry responses? What do these buttons
reveal, and how can you bring your responses
under submission to God?**

JUNE 25

Created with Purpose

*Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.*

PSALM 139:16 NIV

Each of us was created with a purpose, masterfully and in the image of God. He displays himself through his handiwork and he loves us like a perfect Father. Before we had even been formed, he already knew everything about us; how we would look, who we would love, and what our struggles and strengths would be. He ordained every day of our lives and he keeps record of us.

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Any notion that Jehovah is a distant, detached God is disproved in this psalm. We all have a desire to be known and loved.

Understanding someone reveals a level of closeness, the greatest of which is often shared with our spouses. The more we learn about someone we love, the dearer they become to us. There is nobody on earth who loves you the way your Creator loves you. He knows you intimately, and he is ever faithful to lead you the way you should go.

**Do you make attempts to get
to know your spouse better?
Do you try to get to know God better?**

JUNE 26

Delighted in You

*"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart;
I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."*

JEREMIAH 1:4-5 NIV

Jeremiah wanted to respond to God's call on his life as a prophet, but he was hesitant. He doubted whether he was qualified for the task God had anointed him to do. He was focused on his own human limitations, and not the power of God. It is the Lord who works through us. True to his nature, God addressed his concerns and reminded Jeremiah that he knew him even better than he knew himself, for it was he who formed him and crafted him in a very specific way.

Jeremiah was set apart for the work God created him to do. The Creator understands us in a way we cannot even comprehend. He knows what we are capable of, what our breaking point is, and what we can achieve through his strength. Instead of doubting our abilities, we should trust his voice. It is his power we walk in not our own. We can trust him with our lives, we can trust his leading, and we can trust that everything is under his control and will be used for his glory in the end.

**What are some of the insecurities you have
about the way you were formed?**

JUNE 27

New Command

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."

JOHN 13:34 ESV

We love others not because they deserve it but because our Father loves us even when we are underserving. At times it may be difficult to find it in our hearts to extend grace, but Christ has made it possible for us through the abundant love he poured out. In fact, by forgiving us from all our wrongdoings, he has made it impossible for us to give any adequate reason why we should deny someone love.

Rarely is love earned or deserved. Love is a gift that we choose to give, sometimes when we do not want to. Often our pride threatens to get in the way, so we must intentionally lean into the grace of God and learn to love like he does. This is what makes us different and sets us apart from the rest of humanity: others will see Christ through us and know who we are by how we exhibit love.

How can you show your gratefulness to Christ by loving your spouse even more this week?

JUNE 28

Tuned Together

*"If a house is divided against itself,
that house cannot stand."*

MARK 3:25 NIV

Those who accused Jesus of being sent by Satan to do his work had no basis for their allegations. Jesus cast out demons, healed the sick, forgave sins, and did the work of the Father on earth. With this premise, he invites us into his family and his kingdom. What we must understand is that as believers, we are all one body under him. When we bicker and fight amongst each other, we cause a divide to form which threatens to topple us over. We are not unified under Christ.

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Within marriage, our home is destined to fall if we cannot uphold each other and learn to submit to one another. Both partners should be in submission to God and to each other out of love, as well as to others in the faith. Our own pride and freedoms are not worth division within the church of God or our homes. Our differences should be worked through on every level in a humble and loving way which honors God.

**How can you and your spouse disagree
in a healthy way while maintaining unity?**

Value above Worry

"Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

Are you not much more valuable than they?"

MATTHEW 6:25-26 NIV

What is the motivation of your heart? As is always the case with the Jesus, he cautioned his listeners to stop worrying and keep trusting that God is good and faithful and generous. Even the birds are fed and provided for. Christ is not advocating for carelessness or irresponsibility but warning us not to obsess over money or material possessions.

Hard work is important, but our pursuit of prosperity should not be at the cost of our relationship with God, time with our family, or emotional and physical wellbeing. These are the truly valuable things in life which are worth far more than wealth. Remembering our worth and how valuable we are to God ought to remind us to recognize the various ways he cares and provides for us every single day.

Are you working in a way that is detrimental to your relationships and health?

What can you do to ensure you keep a healthy work life balance?

Fierce Peace

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7 NIV

It is amid travesty and despair that the peace of God really emulates from a believer's heart. When all around us is calamity, anguish, and injustice, what is within us is peace and thanksgiving. Our first response to tragedy should be prayer.

When the world reeks of anxiety and people are losing their minds, we can remember that our hearts and minds are safe because they are being guarded by the God of peace. The kind of peace he fills us with cannot be understood through human intellect; it is a peace which transcends all worldly knowledge. No matter what life may throw in our paths, our hearts and minds remain steadfast in the grace and peace of God because these gifts are of heavenly descent. God's peace is a fierce sort of peace that is stronger than anxiety or any of the cares of this world. Grab hold of it today.

How can you combat anxiety with the peace of God? What prayers and thanksgiving can you offer to God in difficult situations?

July

A man shall leave his father and
mother and hold fast to his wife,
and they shall become one flesh.

GENESIS 2:24 ESV



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JULY 1

Growing in Love

*The LORD longs to be gracious to you;
therefore he will rise up to show you compassion.*

For the LORD is a God of justice.

Blessed are all who wait for him!

ISAIAH 30:18 NIV

How graciously the Lord longs to pour out love and compassion on his children! If read in conjunction with the previous verses, this verse clearly shows God's promises to the people of Israel through his prophet Isaiah even though Israel was once again acting in disobedience. In their depraved state, God was ready and longing to forgive them and display his compassion.

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This verse testifies to the goodness of God, that it is not his desire for any of his created people to be destroyed, and he will go to great lengths to reach them. God is love and he hates for any of his children to come to destruction. He waits for us to turn back to him so he can restore us. Since the Lord is the embodiment of love, he has always had our best interests at heart just like any lovingly married person wants the best for their spouse. When we make mistakes or act rebelliously, God is always ready to hold our hand and help us if we turn back to him.

What are you waiting on God for?

JULY 2

Winning Teams

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

ROMANS 15:5-6 ESV

The purpose of our lives is for the praise and glory of God, and we truly feel an overwhelming sense of satisfied accomplishment when we are living the way we were created to live. The best way to do that, however, is not alone. We are meant to serve each other and to serve God together. The metaphor Paul uses to describe this unity is one voice in harmony. Within a harmony are different parts. By his brilliant design, God created each of us with separate skills and abilities but with the same calling to praise him.

We work best when we allow each person to operate within their range but still adjust our voices so we can harmonize together. We each have a different part to sing, but we are still singing together and ought to remember that. This is neither a song to us nor about us. Our lives are meant to be a form of worship to the Almighty Maker who gave us life and a voice. Showing grace and adjusting our pitch for the sake of others around us blesses the heart of God and beautifully unites us as a family.

How have you and your spouse learned to harmonize? How do you serve God differently but still together?

Keep Romance Alive

Your love delights me, my treasure, my bride.

Your love is better than wine,

your perfume more fragrant than spices.

SONG OF SOLOMON 4:10 NLT

It is such a gift from God to view our marriage in light of how King Solomon viewed his bride. This book is in the Bible for marriages! Song of Solomon shows us how to view our love for our spouses differently than many—maybe most—marriages in the world. We have the choice of cherishing our relationship with our spouses over everything except our relationship with God.

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As we delve into God's Word, our hearts are opened and warmed toward our spouse. We can see the gifts that God has blessed them with, the characteristics that honor him, and the traits that are revealed only through intimacy. King Solomon basks in the love of his bride, and we also can cherish and enjoy the love of our spouse. As we turn our eyes upon God, the opportunity for a deep, soul-inspiring relationship within our marriage is right there. The Lord intends for us to cherish and seek our spouses more than we long for the luxuries of this world.

**Do you choose your husband or wife over
all other people, all luxuries in life, and all
beautiful things that pass through your day?**

JULY 4

Better than Fireworks

*Trust in the LORD and do good.
Then you will live safely in the land and prosper.
Take delight in the LORD,
and he will give you your heart's desires.*

PSALM 37:3-4 NLT

The topic of trust is thought-provoking. We tend to trust people a lot; we even place our confidence in complete strangers because our society would not function without a level of trust. For example, we trust that the people who constructed the buildings we live, work, and shop in ensured that they were structurally sound. If we ever need to go to the hospital, we rely on doctors and nurses to properly care for us. When we purchase food at a store or restaurant, we trust that it is safe to eat. How much more should we depend on the Author of Life who knows what is best for us and loves us greater than anyone else in existence?

When we have faith in our Maker and delight in him, it becomes easier to see past what is temporal and recognize the eternal purposes he has for us. Even when things in this physical life are not well, we have peace that comes with the knowledge that God is in charge and all will be as it should be in his hands.

**When you take delight in the Lord,
what do the desires of your heart become?**

JULY 5

Peace in Humility

*Humble yourselves under the mighty power of God,
and at the right time he will lift you up in honor.
Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.*

1 PETER 5:6-7 NLT

We all crave significance and recognition. We long to be honored, and that desire is not wrong. It is the way God created us. When it becomes a problem is when it distracts us from honoring and glorifying God because we become engrossed with serving ourselves and getting credit for what we have done. God instructs us to be humble. In truth, simply understanding the majesty of God should be enough to humble any of us!

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God promises to lift us up and honor us in the right way. He knows that desire is in us because he created us, but he wants to be the one to give that recognition and approval. By searching for it from others we only deprive ourselves of the real deal, which can only come from God. The praises of men and women will never satisfy the desire for approval in our soul.

**Do you trust that God is more than enough
to fill your heart and satisfy your soul?**

JULY 6

Heavenly Songs

*"Worthy are you to take the book and to break its seals;
for you were slain, and purchased for God with your blood men
from every tribe and tongue and people and nation."*

REVELATION 5:9 NASB

John wept as he realized the depth of his sin—of humanity's sin. We could not cover the cost of our depravities fully, for we all fell short of the righteousness required. Death was imminent. Then, in an allegorical taking of the scroll and opening of its seals, the perfect and pure Christ paid the ransom for our sins and redeemed the entire world from death. Now, rather than weeping, there was great rejoicing! A new song broke out across heaven as all of creation praised the Worthy Lamb for the salvation he had brought.

The holiness and importance of this act can never be overlooked. Every nation on the planet received grace that day; it is ours to accept. Never allow the enemy to whisper lies in your ears about limited grace or try to fool you into believing you are somehow unworthy of God's love. Indeed, you were unworthy, and Christ stood in your place. You are now completely accepted, fully purified, and an heir of the kingdom of God.

**Does the weight of your sin
bring you to your knees?
Can you fathom Christ's forgiveness
and rise up in that freedom?**

Not Where but How

"A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

JOHN 4:23-24 NIV

While speaking with Jesus, it became apparent to the Samaritan woman that he was aware of her sinful lifestyle and she quickly shifted the conversation to the topic of worship. Where should worship take place: on the mountain where they stood or in Jerusalem? Of course, Jesus knew her heart and loved her despite her brokenness. He meets each of us where we are, and he addresses the conditions of our hearts before even turning to our sinful symptoms.

Jesus usually asked a very direct question to whomever he was addressing that cut right to the matter mulling in their minds. For the Samaritan woman, who had been through a series of relationships and never found the love she was so desperate for, Jesus promised her that if she drank the water he offered, she would never thirst again. He answered her question of worship by explaining that worship starts in the heart. We don't need to be in a physical place to worship God but in an honest place within our hearts of truly seeking him.

How does God meet you where you are?

Grace Agents

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of suffering.

1 PETER 5:8-9 NIV

Our gift of salvation does not mean the elimination of pain. In this life, we are guaranteed to have troubles. We will face hardships, and many will face persecution. This is not an indication of lack of love or care from God. On the contrary, we are sharing in the suffering of Christ, just as we will share in his eternal glory. God has made us co-heirs of his kingdom with Christ Jesus, and that means that we each have our own cross to bear. It is by his kindness that we have been called to shine the light of Jesus in the darkness, and with the darkness comes deep depravity.

Corruption and wickedness should not intimidate us or silence our message because we have a promise from God that he will always uphold us. When our lives are over, we will be invited into the eternal glory reserved for us because of God's great kindness. One day, all our pain and suffering will be over, but until that day comes, we press on because of our connection with Jesus.

**How does suffering benefit
your relationship with God?**

Love

Love is not rude, is not selfish, does not get upset with others.

Love does not count up wrongs that have been done.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:5 NCV

The love we have to give is greater than what is produced in this world because our love comes from the Father who so abundantly poured himself out for us. Because we have experienced the kindness of God, we can lean into that and rise above being rude to others. Selfishness seems petty and pointless when we have been given so much grace and so many blessings.

It is easy to become upset with people, especially our spouses, because they are bound to disappoint us from time to time. Real, godly love covers those feelings of annoyance with patience and peace that help us resist our natural urges. Praise God that he does not keep a record of the wrong things we have done! We ought to extend the same pardon to others. The love of God demands that we do not count the wrongs of others. He has shown us the way to love, and he has given us the strength and compassion to walk in the same manner.

**How can you avoid unloving reactions
in your marriage and lean on the love
of God instead?**

JULY 10

Sprouting Seeds

*Do not be children in your thinking.
Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.*

1 CORINTHIANS 14:20 ESV

Being smart about the ways of the world garnishes great respect from those who are products of this world. We are attracted to the "bad" we know we ought to avoid, and those who are skilled at what is worldly often entice us too. As we become wise to the ways of God, he continually fascinates us with his wonder and glory. The more our eyes and hearts are opened, the more of him we want. The things of earth begin to fade and stop satisfying.

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Once we have experienced what is real and good and pure, the things which are fake and destructive begin to lose their appeal. Our marriages are a great place to practice mature thinking as we invest our time and energy into what is real. Our obedience to God is easily displayed in the way we treat our spouses.

How has thinking maturely about the good that God has given you changed your life?

Confident Hope

Faith is the confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

HEBREWS 11:1 NIV

We have been called to have faith in what we do not see, but not in what we do not know. Our heavenly Father has proven himself faithful and true to his promises. His words have been established time and time again, and never in all of history has he forsaken his elect. It is our joy and honor to follow him into an unseen future, but we don't follow blindly because we know in whom we place our faith.

The hope that we have is not a simple wish that things will happen as the Bible predicts. We are completely persuaded without doubt that everything will happen exactly as God promised. Faith in God is not a gamble or a dart thrown in the dark because he has made himself known to his people. Our faith is the unquestionable confidence we have that he is holy and dependable and will continue to lead us in the way that is right.

How does faith require active obedience?

JULY 12

Make Music

*Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another
with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit.
Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord.*

EPHESIANS 5:18-19 NIV

As a stark opposite example of being drunk or “filled with wine,” Paul told Christians to be filled with the Spirit. Instead of being controlled by our own intoxication, we should give control of ourselves and our lives to the Lord. His Spirit fills us, guides us, and guards us.

In response to being filled with the Spirit and with the joy that accompanies it, Paul noted different forms of worship and praise. Although there were several separate styles mentioned, the focal point of all of them was the Lord. Christians enjoy many different genres of music. If the purpose is to worship God and our hearts are filled with joy and love for the Lord and others, then we should not get caught up on the style of the song. God cares more about the conditions of our hearts.

**How do you prefer to worship the Lord?
What style of music encourages your heart?**

Captive Thoughts

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.

*Then you will learn to know God's will for you,
which is good and pleasing and perfect.*

ROMANS 12:2 NLT

Instead of approaching life asking, "What do I want?" or, "What is the best thing for me?" we should abide by the question, "What does God want of me?" We were, after all, created to worship our Creator and there is nothing more fulfilling or exhilarating than that. This world and its pleasures fight for our attention, but their promises are empty. Living for ourselves accomplishes nothing noteworthy or eternal and it certainly doesn't honor our spouses.

The behaviors of this world are vulgar and narcissistic; we ought not copy those. By allowing God to transform our minds, by opening our hearts to hear his truth and recognize the lies we previously believed, we start to resemble him more and the world less. Eventually, we will look out of place here, but that is because we have modeled our lifestyles after an eternal kingdom with heavenly values that will never fail or pass away.

**What is an example of a commonplace,
worldly custom that is contrary
to a godly lifestyle?**

JULY 14

Fruit of Kindness

*Praise the LORD, for he has shown me the wonders of his unfailing love.
He kept me safe when my city was under attack.*

PSALM 31:21 NLT

If there were ever a book to encourage and uplift us, the Psalms would be the place to turn. It declares God's goodness, often during times of significant distress, and offers hope in the Lord no matter how dire life may seem. There were so many times King David found himself in a rut or a jam and he needed divine help. As testified in this verse, God came through for him, and he will come through for us. His answers are not always what we expect them to be, and sometimes the wonder of his love is simply that his presence is with us to help and guide us, but even that is miraculous.

The God of the universe is on our side, and he never leaves us to fight alone. He was with David in the city under siege, and he is with us through every one of life's difficulties as well. He is involved in our marriages, our struggles, our relationships, and our futures. No matter what attacks may befall us, big or small, he is with us, showing the wonders of his love.

**Do you actively involve God in the
different elements of your life?**

JULY 15

Heavenly Comfort

*I truly believe I will live to see the LORD's goodness.
Wait for the LORD's help. Be strong and brave,
and wait for the LORD's help.*

PSALM 27:13-14 NCV

God is here for us today; we can see his goodness all around. We can view his goodness in those around us, in nature, or in small miracles which help remind us of his nearness. The way God reveals himself can be as common as the hues which transform the sky, or as miraculous as healing the terminally ill; yet none of this compares to the fullness of his goodness which will be revealed to us one day.

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Until then, God's majesty is issued through his creation. Seeing his wonders takes intention; it is a choice. It requires strength and courage since the evil in this world is so obtrusive and rampant. God's goodness is evident to anyone who has eyes to see it. We must not lose focus, nor the hope and strength to endure, for we will one day see God's glory in its complete and unmasked form.

**If God does not send his help right away,
do you have the courage to wait for him?**

Sleep in Peace

*I go to bed and sleep in peace,
because, LORD, only you keep me safe.*

PSALM 4:8 NCV

David often had to hide for his life; he had seen battles, and he had made mistakes. There was always uncertainty and danger in his life, yet the one thing he was certain about was that his God loved him and would always be watching out for him. In his heart he had the peace of God, so he was able to unplug from the day's drama and sleep soundly.

Peter offered a perfect example of resting in the promises of God.

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James had just been killed. Peter was in prison, chained between two guards, and Herod planned to execute Peter the next day. Even with his looming doom, the uncomfortable conditions, and the tragic news of his friend, Peter's faith was fully in his Father. He slept so soundly, in fact, that when an angel came to free him, he had to smack him on the side in order to wake him up (Acts 12:7)! Give the day's cares to God and rest in the knowledge that no matter what happens your Father will always be there for you, keeping you safe.

Where does your safety lie?

Distinctly Unique

"I will make him a helper fit for him."

GENESIS 2:18 ESV

After each miraculous creation, God declared it to be good. For the first time, God announced that something was not good, and that was that man was alone. He made a helper for him, a companion. The word *helper* here was translated from the Hebrew word *ezer* which refers to an indispensable purpose of saving and supporting. It is used twenty-one times in the Old Testament: twice in reference to Eve, three times to define people helping in life-and-death situations, and sixteen times to describe God himself.

Both gender roles, although different, are of great importance and were created to be compatible. Marriage is a powerful union, established by God for our blessing and his praise. By respecting each other, defending the roles and the values of our spouses, and celebrating what makes each of them distinctly unique, we offer worship and thanks to God for the good things he has made. Learning how we are different and yet complementary is an eye-opening venture for a lot of couples, but paramount to a peaceful marriage.

**How can you use your strength to be a blessing and a help to your spouse?
How can you demonstrate gratefulness to God for the indispensable gift he has given you?**

Blessed

*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.*

PSALM 1:1-2 ESV

The downhill trajectory of this psalm is a warning to not even begin to go toward sin. It may start with simply walking among the wicked, but then it transitions into standing the way they do and finally joining them by sitting in their seat. The more we immerse ourselves in unrighteous behavior and align with those who scoff at what is virtuous, the more we begin to take on their features.

Soon, we appear just as they do, and not long after that, we have fully joined them in their wickedness.

The person who avoids this slippery slope will experience blessings from the Lord. A rational result of refusing to participate in regrettable acts is that regrets are evaded. Rather than sin, we ought to delight in the Word of God. There is great joy and revelation found within its texts which bring delight and further blessings to the reader. Day and night it should be before us so we can learn to walk the way it teaches us to and discover the Lord's astounding blessings.

**What have you read in the Bible recently
that delighted you?**

Together in Grief

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."*

MATTHEW 5:3-4 NIV

Jesus was not addressing financial standings in this beatitude. To be poor in spirit means being humble enough to recognize the depravity of our own human condition and dependent on God. It is the opposite of arrogance or having a sense of being spiritually superior or self-sustained. Those who are poor in spirit recognize they are undeserving of acceptance in the kingdom of heaven, yet it is this exact meek mindset that grants them entrance, since they request it of God rather than assuming it for themselves.

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Similarly, those who mourn do so out of a contrite and broken heart. Their mourning may be a result of sin they have committed, sin committed against them, or simply living in a fallen world which is under the dominion of death. Whatever the case, with the kingdom of God comes an end to sin and death, and so their mourning will be no more. To be *blessed* is much deeper than just being happy. Clearly those who mourn are not happy, but they are still blessed because they have been given a promise that their mourning will end.

**When your spouse is grieving,
how can you offer comfort?
How is this considered kingdom work?**

JULY 20

Be an Encourager

*Encourage one another and build one another up,
just as you are doing.*

1 THESSALONIANS 5:11 NASB

The context of this message is based on the end of the world. Paul recognized that the believers in Thessalonica were doing a praiseworthy job at encouraging each other, and so he commissioned them to keep going. This mandate is as applicable and essential now as ever. Even when the world gets rocky and the future is uncertain, it is our obligation to build one another up because this present life does not dictate our future hope in Jesus Christ.

The very understanding that we will be spending eternity with our loving Creator is motivation enough to reach out to other believers and reassure them of the promises we have received. When we turn on the news and see the headlines, we should not become dismayed because we know what awaits us at the end of the age. Together we should focus on serving the Lord and equipping each other. The powers of earth will taunt us and try to demoralize us, but we stand on the truth of the Word of God, and we cling to his promises for strength.

**How can you encourage
and build up your spouse today?**

JULY 21

Love Always

*Love bears all things, believes all things,
hopes all things, endures all things.*

1 CORINTHIANS 13:7 ESV

While reading through the love passage of 1 Corinthians 13, it becomes apparent that the true nature of love puts the needs of others first. Love lays itself down for the sake of others. This is the kind of love Jesus demonstrated for us, and it's the love we are supposed to have for each other. Love does not quit when times are tough or relationships are difficult; it bears all things. This does not mean we need to subject ourselves to injury or insult, but we are also not supposed to return hate for hate. Perhaps we remove ourselves from the destructive circumstances; but we still bear the weight of love and we never give up.

Love believes all things: not in a naive sense but in a way that validates others and creates a safe place of vulnerability and trust. If someone is lying, that is between them and God and they must carry their own sin. The dishonesty is not ours to bear or meddle in, we only need to show love and acceptance. Those who have known the love of Christ know also how to secure their hope in him. This helps us in the midst of hard times to endure all things in the name of love.

**What can you do to put the needs
of your spouse before your own today?**

JULY 22

The Golden Rule

"Do to others as you would have them do to you."

LUKE 6:31 NIV

This is a straightforward verse yet heavy with meaning. These words are at the heart of the Christian message: to love others as yourself. It is fondly known as the Golden Rule. Most of us strive to take really good care of ourselves and at least are aware when something is wrong. Most people first and foremost consider their own needs, wants, gains, and success. However, as Christians we are told to consider the needs of others first and do to them what we would wish to have done to us.

Self-centeredness is contrary to love, and it creeps in when we become too inward focused. The example Christ set for us demonstrates incredible selflessness that goes beyond human expectation or reason. Despite the contempt he was shown by the people he came to save, Christ sacrificed his own body to save our souls. It behooves us, therefore, to joyfully go the extra mile in loving our neighbor, spouse, sibling, stranger, parent, or whomever needs our care. We are told to love as we love ourselves which takes effort and discipline in a world that glamorizes self-idolization.

What does it look like in daily life to love and care for your spouse the way you want to be loved and cared for?

JULY 23

A God Decision

*I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.*

PSALM 32:8 NIV

The mysteries of God are many. So great is his love for us. In his wisdom, he chooses to reveal his answers and intentions at the right time. We love to be known and understood by each other, and in the same way God loves to be known and understood by us. In his caring, paternal way, he divulges secrets if we only take time to listen. The path to life he has made known to us, and he teaches us his ways as a Father teaches his children.

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Anyone who has opened their heart to receive the Lord's lessons will receive them, and their understanding will increase. He does not hide his face from us but keeps his gaze upon us because we are his beloved creation. It is by his counsel through his Word that we learn the best ways in which to live. He is a good teacher and the best mentor; he walks together with us so we will not go astray. There exists no other leader as great as our King, and he will rule and reign forever!

**What has the Lord been
teaching you recently?**

Serving Together

I have been a constant example of how you can help those in need by working hard. You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

ACTS 20:35 NLT

Paul penned these words for the church in Ephesus at a trying time both for himself and them. The example Paul was setting to the believers was that everything is God's work and God's money. He appreciated when the church was generous and recommended it for their own sake, but he also worked very hard to support himself so that nobody would get the wrong idea of what he was in ministry for. His lesson for us, both written and lived, was clear: there are intangible blessings which accompany generosity.

When we give what we are able, it sends a clear message of what Christianity is all about without a word being uttered. When our actions and our priorities embody our spoken testimony, it brings validity to our words in the eyes of the world. It is one thing to say we live for Jesus, and another thing to actually live for him. There is no clearer way to show love and compassion than by giving something which has cost us. May it also be a reminder to us of the sacrifice and obedience of Christ. Nothing we do could ever come close to his level of generosity.

If your spending signified the priorities of your life, what would it demonstrate that you value?

JULY 25

Gratitude Always

*Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

EPHESIANS 5:20 KJV

The type of thankfulness Paul describes here is not a one-time act of appreciation but a lifestyle of thanksgiving. By giving thanks always, we constantly remember the grace we have been shown, and our gratitude pours out into all corners of our lives. Someone who appreciates life and feels grateful will act differently. They care about the needs of others, they are not constantly pushing to get their fair share of everything, and they are generally more pleasant to be around.

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Thanksgiving creates a positive countenance, welcoming disposition, and a gracious attitude toward others. People who are thankful are not as easily put off by life's trivial upsets because they do not believe they are owed anything. They recognize the incredible gifts of love and mercy they have already received, and their lives are a living tribute to the God who gave them all good things.

**What are you grateful for?
How does your life show it?**

JULY 26

Morning Conversations

*LORD, every morning you hear my voice.
Every morning, I tell you what I need,
and I wait for your answer.*

PSALM 5:3 NCV

When David went before God in prayer every morning, he did so with confidence that God heard him and would answer. Our prayers are not empty one-way conversations. They are not simply symbolic gestures of spiritualism. When we pray, we are talking directly to the almighty maker of heaven and earth, and he hears us.

Our Father listens to our prayers, knows our needs, and answers us.

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His answers are not always what we would like or were expecting, but they are guaranteed to be completely based out of love and wisdom. The Lord has a far better vantagepoint than we do and he understands the bigger picture of our lives and of all humanity. We can go directly before our King with prayers and petitions in full confidence because we serve a caring and compassionate God who desires more than servanthood. He wants an open and honest relationship with us and even calls us his friends.

Do you take time every morning to pray to God? Do you leave time to pause and listen for a response? What are some ways you have seen God respond to your prayers?

JULY 27

Happy Days

*There is a time to cry and a time to laugh.
There is a time to be sad and a time to dance.*

ECCLESIASTES 3:4 NCV

It is easy to recognize that there are times of sorrow and times of happiness. The Lord himself cries and laughs. It takes courage to be able to express these pivotal emotions, and yet both are important in certain seasons. Sometimes life deals us heartache and denying how we feel so we can continue as if nothing happened can be harmful. It is often the Lord's intent to lead us through the hard times not around them. Doing so increases our faith and opens our eyes to our utter dependency on him. He is prepared to be our Comforter, but we first need to admit that we need his comfort.

After the dark night, there comes an appropriate time to lay our sadness before the Lord and rise again. This does not mean we must simply stop feeling, but that we refuse to let the pain keep us down or stop us from following the Lord. To embrace laughing and dancing again is not denying the tragic times but making the choice to press forward in the comfort and love of God.

**Are you in a season of laughing or crying?
Are you comfortable being
where God has you?**

JULY 28

Rejoice Always

Rejoice in the Lord always.

I will say it again: Rejoice!

PHILIPPIANS 4:4 NIV

Joy is a great gift that God has given to his followers. Joy is far more powerful than happiness because it does not diminish due to circumstances. The type of joy that God gives does not come from this world; therefore, it is not dependent on this world. No enemy can steal it and no disappointment can drown it out. It should define our personalities and be ever in our hearts. Paul wrote this letter to the church in Philippi while he was in prison in Rome. He had endured numerous hardships on his way to Rome, then once he arrived, he was wrongly accused and arrested. Still, he chose to rejoice in the Lord because he knew how great God's love for him was.

Understanding what God has done for us will fill us with joy and it will be obvious to those around us. Having a real relationship with Jesus Christ does not mean that we praise him with our mouths on Sunday mornings but that our entire disposition every day is one of rejoicing in the fact that we have been redeemed. Even when we are sad, that joy is still in our hearts and it compels us forward.

**What does rejoicing in the Lord
do for a person?**

Steadfast Love

*Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you;
bind them around your neck;
write them on the tablet of your heart.*

PROVERBS 3:3 ESV

When you made a marriage covenant before God, you promised love and loyalty to your spouse. Marriage is a picture of God's commitment to us, so we also accept the mantle of representing this reflection to the watching world. The word for steadfast love that Solomon used while writing this proverb is the Hebrew word *he'sed* which means "loyalty to one's covenant." When we make a covenant either to God or to our spouse, it is binding. It is to be etched into our hearts.

Sometimes marriages are dismantled because we live in a fallen world where sin exists, but as far as we can while still faithfully following God, our covenants need to be loyally upheld. Our God is forever faithful to us and he teaches us to be like him. He will never abandon us, and we know his words are true. As we cling to steadfast love and faithfulness, we are strengthened in our commitments by knowing that the Lord is committed to us.

**Practically speaking, what does it mean
to bind your commitment to love and
faithfulness around your neck,
or to write it on your heart?**

JULY 30

Letting Go

*Those who do right will continue to do right,
and those whose hands are not dirty with sin will grow stronger.*

JOB 17:9 NCV

Job understood that although he was innocent and still suffering, his plight would make him stronger. He cried out to God for mercy, but he did not despise his suffering. He saw it as a chance to grow stronger. It is worse to sin than to suffer. Sin sometimes disguises itself as freedom, but it is bondage. The strongest of us can be brought to our knees by sin, but thankfully the Lord is stronger, and he teaches us how to overcome. His Word guides us, and his Spirit fills us with the power needed to endure.

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The urge to sin can feel overwhelmingly strong at times, but the power to choose good has already been put in us by God. In moments of temptation, we need to remember it is there and learn how to use it. When faced with the option to sin or abstain, and we exercise restraint as the Lord has taught us, we grow stronger. Every time we cast down one of the devil's sinful ploys, our faith increases because we see the fallibility of our enemy and the dependability of our Father.

How can you and your spouse help each other to choose the right thing?

Devoted to Prayer

*Devote yourselves to prayer,
keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.*

COLOSSIANS 4:2 NASB

As Paul teaches Christians how they ought to speak, he begins with prayer. Devoting ourselves to prayer means to pursue an intentional relationship with our Creator. Any relationship we maintain either grows or diminishes in time. If we want to grow closer to our Maker, we need to spend time in prayer with him. Being mindful of our time with him and making it a priority will help in our devotion.

Relationships always take work. Meaningful ones do not just happen. They require honesty, upkeep, and time. Just like listening to and sharing with your spouse, prayer is a vital part of a Christian's relationship with God. We should approach it with alertness and thankfulness. Our loving Father desires our devotion.

**What do you prioritize in your marriage
as an act of devotion to your spouse?
What do you prioritize in your Christian walk
as an act of devotion to God?**

August

An enemy might defeat one person,

but two people together

can defend themselves,

a rope that is woven of three strings

is hard to break.

ECCLESIASTES 4:12 NCV

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Trained for Battle

God arms me with strength, and he makes my way perfect.

*He makes me as surefooted as a deer,
enabling me to stand on mountain heights.*

*He trains my hands for battle;
he strengthens my arm to draw a bronze bow.*

PSALM 18:32-34 NLT

Although the Scriptures emphasize the virtues of peacemaking and forgiveness whenever it is possible, there are also times the Lord led his people into battle. Our God is a just God and he works all things together for good. David was a known war hero who overthrew his enemy countless times. Without fail, he always attributed his victories to God. He knew that it was God who had equipped him for battle, gave him the strength and courage he needed, and that it was for God's glory that he fought.

When we are faced with oppression, we need to make sure that we are following God and not our own agendas. If we are, then we can rest assured that he will stand by us and strengthen us. He does not lead us down paths where we cannot walk. Throughout our lives he trains us and equips us to face whatever comes our way. That does not mean it will be easy, but he makes us surefooted and strong. With him, we can overcome anything.

**What battles are you facing?
How has he trained you to fight them?**

Ask the Teacher

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

JAMES 1:5 NIV

The Scriptures explain often how we can acquire wisdom. In this instance, James is referring to specific situations. When we are confronted with a decision and we do not know how to proceed, we ask God for wisdom to know what to do in that moment. Making the decision to not haphazardly run forward but taking the time to inquire of God instead protects us from foolhardy choices and regrettable outcomes.

When we seek God, the Bible says, he gives wisdom generously. He is not stingy, nor is he hidden. He is nearby and willing. The greatest source of wisdom is God himself, although he has also established other avenues we can receive wisdom from. He has given us his Word, and he encourages us to seek advice from wise counselors.

Is there anything you need wisdom for today?

Billions of Cells

You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

PSALM 139:13-14 NIV

Human life is a marvelous thing. The Almighty so intrinsically crafted each person exactly how he intended them to be. Every person has a unique design, a calling, and God's fingerprint on them. He created us in his image, and yet his being is so vast and so wonderful none of us could carry it all! So, each of us displays a piece of our heavenly Father.

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We should remember this when we consider the Unborn. Although we cannot see or hear them, their Maker can, and he cares for them. We should also remember this when we consider our enemies. Perhaps there are powerful people who oppress us and what we stand for, or perhaps we have personal squabbles with others who wish us harm. Whatever the case, every person has been fearfully and wonderfully made by God, and he loves them dearly.

**What do you find amazing about the way
your spouse was created?**

Stressful Marathons

We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-9 NIV

We are similar in structure to jars made from clay. God created us to carry his light and love to the world. By opening our hearts and lives to his leading, he fills us with his power which cannot be overcome. There are many evil things at work in this world, but our Lord of Light is more powerful than they are.

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Although there will be times when we feel like the weight of the world is too much for a simple earthen pot, the authority of Jehovah, which he has placed in us, can withstand it. Despite the perplexing problems we face, we need never despair because he has given us an everlasting hope. Even if we face persecution, he will never abandon us. All this world can do is strike us down or even kill us, but it cannot destroy us because it is God who saves and preserves us. Our home is with him.

When you feel like the pressures of life are too great for you to handle, what can you do to persevere in a godly manner?

AUGUST 5

Shield of Love

*You bless the godly, O LORD;
you surround them with your shield of love.*

PSALM 5:12 NIV

We can have confidence in the Lord's judgment. He blesses the godly, punishes the wicked, and avenges the oppressed. Like a giant shield is the Lord's protection. The shield David uses as a comparison in this verse is a standing shield which covered the entire body of a warrior. Our caring Father shields us all around from every attack of the enemy, and he does so with his love.

No matter what happens to our mortal bodies, the Lord's love will sustain us because he has saved us from death's grip before we even face that ultimate enemy. Just like the grave could not hold the Lord Jesus, it cannot hold those who belong to him. He has blessed the godly with his divine protection, his eternal love, and life everlasting.

How does knowing the Lord's love surrounds you as a protective shield change the way you approach difficulties in your life?

AUGUST 6

Just Stay Calm

The LORD himself will fight for you.

Just stay calm.

EXODUS 14:14 NLT

Anyone can talk a big game, but when circumstances are truly bad and it becomes obvious that we do not have control over the outcomes that affect us, our responses betray where our confidence lies. If we are relying on our own strength to carry us through life's obstacles, then when we inevitably become ensnared, our reaction will be desperate and unwise.

Yet, if our lives are hidden in Christ, and we have learned to look to

him for our power, then regardless of the circumstances that threaten

to take us down, we know that the Lord will intervene on our behalf.

He fights our battles, so we need only to trust in him and remain calm. Real life circumstances will reveal whether we are vainly striving for self-sufficiency or wisely placing our trust in the Lord.

**How do you react when life
gets out of control?**

AUGUST 7

Safe and Secure

*God, hear my cry; listen to my prayer.
I call to you from the ends of the earth when I am afraid.
Carry me away to a high mountain.
You have been my protection,
like a strong tower against my enemies.*

PSALM 61:1 NCV

When we find ourselves at the end of our patience, out of options with no way forward, we remember that God always hears our cries. Whether we are facing financial hardship, sickness, marriage trouble, or any other crisis, God offers his protection. At times like these, this psalm expresses vividly the raw feelings we are experiencing and offers hope for us to rise above them with God's help.

Amidst the worry, anxiety, fear, doubt, and defeat we feel, God promises to hear our cries. He offers us safety and security in our most vulnerable of states. The psalm is a sincere prayer without pretense. It encourages us to go before the Lord and pour our hearts out to him despite what we may be facing. It requires honesty and humility to cry out to God, but the comfort and reassurance he offers is unparalleled for those who seek refuge in him. He is more than capable of reaching our deep, dark places where fear, doubt, and hurt reside. He wants to set us free!

What makes you feel afraid?

AUGUST 8

Stepping Away

*Your mercy reaches unto the heavens,
and your truth unto the clouds.*

PSALM 57:10 NKJV

The entire universe is too small to contain God's love. So extravagant is it that he gave his very life to save us. Trying to comprehend that the King of the universe knelt in the dust and washed his friends' feet is absurd! Yet he did. He subjected himself to every vile element of life as a human because his love was that great. The disciples could see how much he cared for them, and that taught them to care for others in his name. God's love spreads like wildfire and has power to conquer every enemy. Even death itself could not thwart God's plan. His faithfulness is evident in everything around us.

All God's promises have already been or will be fulfilled, and he never forsakes his children. The heavens declare God's mercy, for the sun, moon, and stars offer life and balance and beauty. They stretch across the sky, observable and constant, reminding us of the wonders God created. It is through the mercy Christ showed us and the truth of the message he came to share that his love bridged the gap between heaven and earth.

**Why do you think God created the heavens
and all its wonders?**

Clothed in Righteousness

Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.

ROMANS 13:13 NIV

Sin hates the light because it reveals what it wants to hide. The nighttime is known for immoral acts because there are less eyes watching and darkness covers the deeds. During the day, people put on their best façade and present themselves as they want the world to see them. God always sees us, however, and he is the one whose opinion matters the most. It is his heart we hurt when we chose to act immorally.

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As Christians devoted to purity of heart, not just appearance, how we act in secret should be just as honest as how we act in the streets during broad daylight. Carousing and drunkenness are aspects of a reckless, irresponsible individual. Sexual immorality and debauchery stem from someone who is seeking their own personal pleasure above God's standards. Dissension and jealousy happen when we care about our own gain instead of submitting to one another in love. Let us turn from indecent living and choose instead to be clothed in righteousness. The Lord's way is always the best way and will never lead to disappointment.

**Is there anything you have kept hidden
that you need to repent of and ask
for God's help to turn away from?**

Godly Contentment

There is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.

But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.

1 TIMOTHY 6:6-8 ESV

Contentment is a key feature of a person who is living for God and not for themselves. We came into this world with nothing and we will leave it with nothing as well. To spend our days chasing wealth is a waste of life that could be devoted to something meaningful and eternal. The Bible does not speak against having wealth only against allowing it to become your master and pursuit.

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Whether we have great riches or are poverty stricken, we are to be content with what God has blessed us with. The great gain this verse refers to is everything that is rewarded with living a godly and content life: joy, peace, satisfaction, and a spiritual life which is equipped to overcome the world's temptations and snares. Constantly chasing luxuries and material possessions will only rob us of the rich life we can experience when we are content with the gifts we have been given.

**What has God given to you and your spouse
that you are thankful for today?**

Triumphant Wisdom

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
But fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

PROVERBS 1:7 NKJV

To fear the Lord is to hold reverent respect for him. He does not intend us to cower and flee out of fright but to acknowledge that he alone is King. He is worthy of our obedience, and sinning against him carries consequences. Fearing the Lord is the beginning of understanding everything else in life. It sets the precedence for how we ought to live, why we choose to follow God rather than our own whims, and it reveals the bigger purpose of our existence.

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Recognizing who God is opens our eyes to the bigger picture and our role in it. Foolishness disrespects the Lord, chooses disobedience, and is blind to what is happening in the world around us. Those who chose to live that way reject wisdom. They do not respect the Lord and they do not want to be told what to do. These individuals would rather be left to the deprivation of their own selfish lifestyle. In the end, wisdom will triumph and those who fear the Lord will be saved.

**How does the world appear differently
to someone living to worship God
than someone living to gratify
their own desires?**

Gentle Answer

*A gentle answer will calm a person's anger,
but an unkind answer will cause more anger.*

PROVERBS 15:1 NCV

It is one thing to be right, and another thing to create change. By insensitively asserting ourselves, even if we are justified in what we are saying, we may lose more than we gain by intensifying the anger of the other person. If we truly care to create peace and calm the situation, gentleness can diffuse a situation and still get the point across. We do not have to shirk away from sharing what is true, but we do need to be kind.

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Daniel and his friends could have outright refused to eat the forbidden meat of the king, stood their ground, and been persecuted for their godly convictions. They would not have influenced anyone positively, however. Instead, they chose to respectfully request that the king test their theory that they would actually be able to serve him better if they ate the way their God had instructed them to. God's way really was better, as evidenced through the young men, and the king's heart was moved. Simply by using a gentle approach, they changed the course of history and ultimately influenced an entire kingdom.

**When you and your spouse get into a
disagreement, how can you talk it through
without anger taking over?**

Standards of Love

*"Do not judge,
or you too will be judged."*

MATTHEW 7:1 NIV

Following this verse are instructions on how to judge others properly, so this is not a command to never judge. Jesus warns his disciples to judge righteously, not based on outward appearances, so evidently there is a proper way to judge. As Christians, we are called to judge the difference between truth and untruth and to hold each other accountable. What Jesus is referring to in this command is to not judge the motivations of someone else's heart because only God knows what is there. We are not God, and we do not get to bestow condemnation on anyone.

One of the spiritual issues of that time were pompous practices of piety and good deeds on display. There was such an emphasis on righteous living that people were purposefully making big scenes and gestures so others would notice their virtue. They would also judge the actions and intents of those who perhaps did not showcase their generosity to the same degree. God hates hypocrisy. We need to act out of love and respect for God.

**Do you question the motives of others
including your spouse?**

How can you practice good judgment?

A Good Argument

Remind everyone about these things, and command them in God's presence to stop fighting over words. Such arguments are useless, and they can ruin those who hear them.

2 TIMOTHY 2:14 NLT

Throughout this chapter, Paul instructed Timothy to teach the people of Ephesus to stop bickering over the smallest details found within the wording of the Scriptures. In this verse, he shifts his monologue to address the Ephesians themselves. Biblical accuracy is very important, but it is not God's intention for his people to fight over irrelevant specifics. Since Scripture itself teaches us to keep peace whenever possible, any such disputes and divides already defy what we have been instructed.

There is a proper time and way to debate Scripture meaning and application, but it is to be done in a loving, godly way for the purpose of growth and not condemnation. Disputes of this nature can ruin harmony and create chaos. The body of Christ is to be unified, peaceful, humble, and yielded to one another.

When you uncover a scriptural disagreement with your spouse, what would be a godly way to discuss it together?

Testing Patience

*God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it?
Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?*

NUMBERS 23:19 ESV

We have all faced disappointment at one time or another by someone we knew and trusted. We have also likely been the cause of disappointment for someone else. We make promises that we cannot always keep. Sometimes we simply fail to keep them because of our own selfishness or oversight. This vice does not apply to our Father since he is perfect, and he has upheld every single one of his promises since the beginning of time.

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Nothing that God has proclaimed in his Word is a lie or a mistake. He has never spoken an offhand remark that he later regretted. His words are dependable and they offer hope. Even when we fail to be faithful to God, he remains faithful to us because of his perfect character and his unmatched love. He will continue to fulfill every promise he has ever made, and we will see the whole story unfold exactly the way he intends it to.

**How do you approach lying
in your household?**

Two Paths

*Who is wise and understanding among you?
By his good conduct let him show his works
in the meekness of wisdom.*

JAMES 3:13 ESV

James asked a thought-provoking question about who has both understanding and wisdom. The Greek term for understanding is *epistēmōn*, referring to the intellectual knowledge we attain. The word he used for wisdom is *sophos* which is our moral awareness and insight. Both are important, but James highlighted the use of wisdom through meekness as that which a true follower of Christ ought to be practicing.

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Understanding can be attained, but wisdom is a gift reserved for those who walk with Lord and heed his voice. Those who have been given the gift of wisdom will be recognized through their good works done in meekness. Doing good deeds is not necessary for the attainment of either wisdom or salvation, but they are the result of a wise person who has been born again. It is admirable and beneficial to study the Word of God, to learn of his ways, to consider history, and to grow in our understanding. Yet greater still is to listen to the whispers of our Father, to meditate on his Word, to spend time walking with him, and to grow in meekness.

**Why does wisdom change a person's conduct?
How does it change?**

Judgment

*"Do not judge others, and you will not be judged.
Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you.
Forgive others, and you will be forgiven."*

LUKE 6:37 NLT

The commonly misquoted do-not-judge directive is often used to deflect correction, or as an excuse to not confront a brother or sister in Christ. In truth, we are instructed to both receive and give correction of sinful behavior. The purpose of this passage is not to justify our actions or fail to properly admonish a friend, but to not superimpose our condemnation on someone else's heart motives.

There is a way to patiently and lovingly address others regarding their sin, but the purpose should always be restoration and never condemnation.

Pride can easily creep into our hearts and compromise our spiritual health. We therefore have an obligation to hold ourselves to the same standard as we hold others while striving to be an example in word and deed. We can be firm in our Biblical convictions while still demonstrating care and love for those who are rebelling or ignorant of the truth. Correction ought to come from a place of love that does not want to see a fellow believer go astray.

**Have you ever been confronted lovingly?
What sort of change does that produce?**

AUGUST 18

Children of God

*To all who did accept him and believe in him
he gave the right to become children of God.*

JOHN 1:12 NCV

Being part of a family gives us certain privileges. Even amid disagreements, there is a bond that unites family members that runs deeper than other relationships. Those of us who have been welcomed into God's family also experience rights and benefits that those who have estranged themselves to God are not privy to. As children of God, we have an eternal inheritance through Jesus Christ. We did not earn this inheritance, but our God is a loving Father who joyfully gives all good things to his children.

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God's love is given, never earned, but being his child also comes with responsibilities. Since we are members of his family, we bear his name. This honor should cause us to realize just who it is we represent as we go about our days. Faith in Jesus Christ is an active, living faith that does not take for granted the price that was paid for our freedom from sin. Our lives should reflect the place we have in God's family and the freedom we have experienced through Christ's love and sacrifice.

**What sort of privileges do you receive
from your eternal family under God?**

Rewards

*"I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind,
to reward each person according to their conduct,
according to what their deeds deserve."*

JEREMIAH 17:10 NIV

People cannot read minds, which makes it easy to control the way we portray ourselves. God, however, is omniscient. He knows everything. The most fleeting thought that has passed through our minds, our strongest desires, our greatest weaknesses—he knows it all. God knows when we're doing something for selfish reasons, and when we are sincerely motivated. The Bible says that God searched us, and he knew all our days before they existed.

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The good thing is that God is also incredibly loving and forgiving. Above anyone else, he is the safest place to share our hearts and to be open and honest. God does not expect perfection from us, all he wants is for us to give ourselves to him and his plan, trusting him in the process. When we work on keeping our thoughts pure and disciplining the way we think, God rewards us.

**Does the idea of God knowing your thoughts
make you uncomfortable?**

AUGUST 20

Meeting Together

*Let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do,
but encourage one another, especially now that the day
of his return is drawing near.*

HEBREWS 10:25 NLT

The emphasis on individualism and self-sufficiency is strong, but stronger still is the command to meet and encourage one another. As believers, we have been tasked with caring for each other as if we were all one body. This may not be a mandate which garners much attention, but we cannot overlook it. We were created for community and we need others around us to speak into our lives: to offer encouragement and insight.

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Just like a predator attempts to draw its prey away from the herd, our enemy tries to isolate us and lead us astray. Together we are more powerful because we can help each other. This verse makes it clear that this commandment becomes ever more pertinent as time goes by. Every day, the end draws nearer, and this world becomes more and more uncertain. Now, more than ever before, we must not neglect our brothers and sisters in the Lord. Prioritize meeting together, sharing in each other's needs and burdens. Pray, cry, laugh, love, sing, eat, and be real together.

**Who do you and your spouse meet with?
How can you encourage each other?**

All Is Possible

*"All things are possible
to him who believes."*

MARK 9:23 NASB

Understanding the context of Jesus' words is necessary for deriving his intent. He is not saying that through belief in God we can do anything we want, but that belief in God means we know that he can do whatever he wants through us. All things are possible, and Jesus is the purpose. The disciples had been unsuccessful in casting a demon out of a little boy. The scribes did not believe that Jesus' powers were that of God's, and the father of the demon-possessed boy struggled with unbelief.

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Jesus did not demand that the father feign belief, only that he be honest about where he was at and willing to receive. He begged Jesus to help him overcome his unbelief and Jesus did just that. He commanded the demon out of the boy and in doing so he saved the child, restored the father's faith, proved his deity to the skeptical scribes, taught the disciples to trust in the power of God, and demonstrated his healing power to the quickly gathering crowds! God can do all things; we only need to believe.

**What challenge are you facing right now?
Do you believe God has the power
to help you through it?**

Vow to God

*Sacrifice thank offerings to God,
fulfill your vows to the Most High,
and call on me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you will honor me.*

PSALM 50:14-15 NIV

God does not take delight in worthless sacrifices from people while there is wickedness in their hearts. It is not our actions, sacrifices, or completion of religious duties that God desires, but an outpouring of our hearts in love for him. While it is good and blessed to do works of service for our Creator, the motive behind the motions should be birthed from a desire to please God and demonstrate our gratitude and loyalty. If our motive is to somehow vindicate ourselves or attempt to appear righteous, our offerings will not be accepted by God.

It is the Lord alone who vindicates us and makes us righteous, not what we do. The sacrifices that are acceptable before him come from a pure and upright heart that puts him above every other thing. The prophet Samuel once explained to King Saul that obedience is better than sacrifice. It is better to heed God's voice than to fulfill empty religious platitudes. He is moved by a pure heart and an upright mind.

**How can you and your spouse honor God
today in what you do and say?**

Complementary Couple

The rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman because she was taken out of man."

GENESIS 2:22-23 ESV

When God created Adam, the process was defined by the Hebrew word *yi'ser* which implies shaping or molding something into existence. From Adam's own rib he formed Eve, and the term used for her creation was *banah* which means to add to something or to build it up even better. Yahweh made the two of them to complement each other and to be better together. As a couple, they were better than they were alone.

Although they were created differently, and we can observe that men and women are intrinsically different, both Adam and Eve were formed for the same purpose: to worship God and to be a blessing to each other. This union between a man and a woman was established before sin entered the world which teaches us that marriage was always part of God's perfect plan.

**How do you and your spouse complement,
serve, and build each other up?
How are you different from each other?**

Cherished Wisdom

The one who gets wisdom loves life.

The one who cherishes understanding will soon prosper.

PROVERBS 19:8 NIV

Life is already hard, but it is even harder for those who are unwise. They have no moral compass to guide them, and no timeless truth to catch them. The condition of our world underscores the value of wisdom in our daily lives. The kind of wisdom necessary for navigating this world is that which comes only from the Lord. The complexities of life daily confront us as we face a myriad of circumstances and choices that need to be addressed. Sometimes we make terrible choices or go down the wrong path when we fail to turn to the Lord for wisdom.

Obtaining wisdom greatly improves the choices we make and how we handle matters. Further, good choices naturally lead to a more fulfilled and prosperous life that extends beyond us and impacts those around us. Our spouses, other family members, friends, neighbors, and even strangers will all experience blessings because of the wise choices we make. The value of godly wisdom cannot be underestimated.

**What sort of blessings have you received
because of the wisdom of your spouse?**

AUGUST 25

Passing Through

*We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen,
since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

2 CORINTHIANS 4:18 NIV

Paul was enduring unimaginable suffering because of his faith; so incredible was it that he admitted it was almost unbearable. Still, in the face of his hardships, the words he wrote put back into perspective the realness of eternity. In faith he declared that the unseen promises of God were more real to him than the daily pain and suffering he was enduring. His body was in turmoil, but his hope was untouched. His gaze was set on the cross of Christ rather than the temporary torture he was undergoing.

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Transient trials cannot distract us from the heavenly hope hidden in our hearts. We must fix our eyes on Jesus, for he is outside of time. Briefer still than this world and its histories, are we, its human inhabitants. Our lives last for a fleeting moment in time, but God is outside of time and his reign is eternal. He has made a way for us to live forever with him in his home, and this assurance is what has captivated our hearts, minds, and attention. The world may have its way for a while, but it will one day pass away and only what is preserved with God will remain.

**How can you maintain an eternal perspective
while existing in a mortal, decaying world?**

Focus Forward

One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS 3:13-14 NIV

None of us are where we would like to be morally. We all have room to grow, but maturity and sanctification is a process. Paul admitted that he had not fully grasped the depth of the impact Christ's resurrection had, but he continued in his spiritual walk which he likened to a race. To win a race, we must be committed to training and straining. It will stretch us and, at times, leave us exhausted, but the prize is worth it, so we continue to push forward.

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In a race, turning to look back can be detrimental. Fixating on our past mistakes or comparing ourselves with other racers only slows us down and draws our attention away from the prize. Paul had many horrendous mistakes in his past, but he understood and accepted that Christ had removed the guilt of those from his record. His only objective now was to race after Christ at any cost. Having many goals will steal us away from focusing on the finish line. In life, it is not enough that Christ is our first goal, he ought to be our only goal and all other ambitions fall under submission to him.

How does having a spouse to race with you encourage you to press forward and not become distracted or fixated on the past?

Bringing Calm

*Fools give full vent to their rage,
but the wise bring calm in the end.*

PROVERBS 29:11 NIV

There are many passages in the Bible addressing anger and this one is among the clearest. It outlines the dangers associated with allowing anger to control us. Following our feelings and giving anger the right to lead our decisions undermines our ability to use sound judgment and will ultimately drive us to sin either by words or actions. Our decisions drafted in anger can cause a lot of damage to others, both people we know and love as well as strangers. Walking in wisdom and prudence means not allowing anger to overwhelm us.

As believers, we are subject to the Holy Spirit, not to our feelings. Even if the entire population surrounding us is yelling in hate, and even if the situation justifies an angry response, our job is to bring calm and clarity to the confusion and calamity. Rather than screaming threats and worsening the situation, we should humbly and rationally seek for solutions. When we feel anger building up inside of us, it is a good idea to spend time in private to lay that anger before the Lord. Allow God's Spirit to calm you and help you respond wisely in those times.

**When filled with wisdom, how can anger
help reinforce good decisions?**

Careful Words

*"By your words you will be justified,
and by your words you will be condemned."*

MATTHEW 12:37 ESV

It is necessary that we consider this verse in its true context in order to understand what Jesus was communicating. The Pharisees had just accused Jesus of using demonic power to drive out demons when he healed a demon-possessed man. The essence of this accusation betrayed the true hearts of the religious authorities since the carelessness of their logic showed how desperately they desired to condemn Jesus and find fault in him.

This passage should caution us to not be careless and flippant with our words or attitudes. We will have to give an account for every word we utter one day, and this alone should make us pause in any situation to evaluate the condition of our hearts. What do our responses reveal? Words are important to God since they not only affect others but also disclose how we feel. Through faith we pray, and God answers our prayers. Through confession we are saved. We also read in James 3:11 that fresh and salty cannot both come from the same spring, meaning we cannot praise God in one instance and use foul words in the next. We must be consistently submitted to God in our speech.

Do you speak differently around different people? What influences the words you use?

Each Has a Gift

If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.

ROMANS 12:8 NLT

We were not all designed to be replications of each other. Our Father is wonderfully creative, and he loves displaying it. Each of us have been given different gifts to use in service to one another. Any time a believer has a God-given talent or skill, the Bible makes it clear that the purpose of it is not for the elevation of the individual but the betterment of the church body.

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Using our gifts take practice and faith. It is God alone who can cause new life and growth, but we must be faithful to step out and use what he has trusted us with. If we do not use our gifts, they will rust, and he will call someone else instead. If we use our gifts to only serve our own purposes, all our gain is for naught. Sometimes recognizing our gifts take a level of self-awareness that we have not yet reached. Other people, especially our spouses who know us intimately, can help us identify our gifts and encourage us to use them properly. We also ought to encourage our spouses to embrace their gifts and support them as they learn to use them.

What gifts have you been given?
What gifts does your spouse have?

Good Steps

*Follow the steps of the good,
and stay on the paths of the righteous.
For only the godly will live in the land,
and those with integrity will remain in it.*

PROVERBS 2:20-21 NLT

In a world saturated with corruption and sensuality, it is difficult to stay on the path of the righteous. Everywhere we turn there are evil ploys endeavoring to draw us down to death. Sin is not life-giving. The enemy lies and promises happiness, but it is fleeting and leads only to death—a numbing of our conscience, a deafness to God's voice, and spiritual decay. If we do not turn from our wicked tendencies and follow the steps of the good, we will continue further down a path that is difficult to come back from.

Those who stay committed to the commandments of the Lord, who get back up and try harder when they fall, and who humbly request mercy and help from the Lord will inherit the Promised Land. When Jehovah bequeathed the Promised Land to his faithful followers, it was a literal land that also stood as a figurative future telling of his eternal kingdom. Solomon explains that maintaining our integrity is rewarded by God in the form of residency in his heavenly home. That is definitely a worthwhile reward!

**What can you do when you take
a step in the wrong direction?**

Where Wisdom Is

*"The fear of the LORD—that is wisdom,
and to shun evil is understanding."*

JOB 28:28 NIV

Unlike every other religious adherence on the planet, we have been given free grace that we did not—could not—earn. It is not dependent on our obedience or virtue. We obey the Lord because we love him and are grateful for what he has done for us. We also obey him out of reverence to his holy name.

If we truly understood even a sliver of how majestic the Lord is, it would fill us with such a holy fear that we would have an entirely new perspective and we would be overjoyed at the fact that we can serve him! This is where wisdom begins. A wise perspective recognizes that the point of all things is the Lord. When we truly understand the goodness of God and properly fear his authority, we wisely choose his way over our own. Our goodness only exists because of him.

**God explained to Job that humans are
willing to search high and low for treasures
and riches, but hardly anyone searches for
wisdom even though it is freely given.
Why do you think that is?**

September

Don't owe anything to anyone, except
your outstanding debt to continually

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love one another, for the one who learns
to love has fulfilled every requirement
of the law.

ROMANS 13:8 TPT



Job's Heart

"Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason."

JOB 2:3 NIV

The Bible tells us that we will go through hard times in our lives, and it's not always because we did something wrong or made a mistake. Satan uses these times to try and break our spirits and tear us down, but God uses them to give us a deeper relationship with him. God's power is made manifest in our weaknesses. It's how he shows us his might, and it underlines how much we need him. If we were sufficient on our own, we would have no need for God to save us, but we are sorely lacking. God allows our cup to be emptied so he can fill it with his presence and love.

Job endured sickness, poverty, and the death of his loved ones and still he glorified God even when his friends accused him of wrongdoing and his wife told him to curse God. We should all work toward having the kind of undying faith that Job exhibited amid his extreme trials.

**How do people see you react
in difficult circumstances?
Is it glorifying to God?**

SEPTEMBER 2

Facing Trouble

*The righteous person faces many troubles,
but the LORD comes to the rescue each time.*

PSALM 34:19 NLT

Sometimes things go wrong and we are left wondering why. Despite our prayers and fasting, despite our service to the Lord, we still endure troubles and are faced with disappointments like everyone else. It has often been asked why bad things happen to good people. Why does God allow it to rain on the just and the unjust alike? King David's psalm offers encouragement for these times. Even though we face difficulties and afflictions, we can trust Yahweh to deliver us no matter the depth of the issue.

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The children of God and those who have refused his grace all live together in a world full of evil. The difference, however, is with God on our side we have hope and a promise that he will always come through for us even on the tough days when it seems hope is lost. God is in charge and he will clear a path for us. It may seem like we are faced with a desperate situation, but we are not alone: the Word of God stands true for every occasion and every situation.

**What difficulty are you and your spouse
facing right now that you would like
to pray for God's deliverance from?**

Inexplicable Joy

*Though you have not seen him, you love him;
and even though you do not see him now,
you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.*

1 PETER 1:8 NIV

Peter walked with Jesus while he was on the earth. He knew him personally and had heard his words for himself. He found it noteworthy that God's elect people, who had been exiled and scattered afar, loved Jesus even though they had never seen him. Hearing his words preached and learning of his death and resurrection had filled them with inexplicable joy as they chose to put their faith in him.

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It is rare that someone would die for someone else, and almost unheard of that anyone would be willing to die for a lie. An estimated two million Christians from the first 325 years after Christ's death clung to their faith in Christ Jesus and the message he came to bring and were murdered for it. These men and women were persecuted and martyred in unthinkable ways, yet they were overcome with a glorious joy! Even though they had never seen Jesus with their eyes, they had heard his life-giving words and knew that he was God. Their faith was stronger than even death.

**How can you be sure
that Jesus' words are true?**

Difficult to Love

“Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked.”

LUKE 6:35 NLT

Human nature gravitates toward trade and reciprocity. If someone does something for you, you are expected to do something for them. If someone harms you, naturally you want to see them pay for it. In this way we tend to seek out people who benefit us, so it is a strange concept to consider when the Bible tells us to do good to people who are our enemies. These people are downright harmful to our self-interest and wellbeing. We are not inclined to cater to our own downfall, so this is not a readily received message.

Instead of justifying our exemption from this mandate, we should remember that the ways of the Lord are higher than our own, and he is worthy of our surrender. For us to be like Christ and overcome our human tendencies, we are invited to his standard of love. He is kind to both good and evil people and he gives us all the opportunity to join him in his eternal kingdom.

**Are there people in your life
who cause you harm?
How can you love them?**

The Fruit Basket

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

GALATIANS 5:22-23 NIV

After having compiled a list of natural, wicked tendencies which stem from a life of someone following their own human desires, Paul offered an alternate list of what the fruit of a life devoted to God is. When the Spirit of God moves into our hearts, the core of our pursuits change from me focused to God focused. Naturally, our lives will look different as our choices resemble the true desires of our hearts.

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The term *fruit* Paul chose to use here is not a plural term but singular. This means that all these attributes are not individual traits to be picked from, but they are to be seen as a whole: the description of a person who is redeemed and living for the Lord. There is no law against this sort of lifestyle. In fact, people with this level of devotion and these qualities tend to be recognized by the world as good, godly individuals. It is the Holy Spirit living in us and helping us that grows this fruit in our lives and helps us turn away from an otherwise sinful, deplorable existence.

What examples of the fruit of the Spirit do you see in your own life and in the life of your spouse?

Incomprehensible

Do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

ROMANS 2:4 NASB

Not a single person is without sin. We do not live by a system that is based on our good works outnumbering our bad works because anyone who is imperfect cannot go before a perfect King. Every sin separates us from God, but he offers redemption through grace. We should not become complacent because of grace, but we should also not fool ourselves into believing that we are free from punishment because of the good things we do. Every sin is detestable. If we believe we are relatively good people deserving of forgiveness, we deceive ourselves and have not experienced the incomprehensible kindness of God that has offered us our only chance at redemption.

Through the blood of Christ, we repent of our sins, accepting the kindness of our King. His patience with us, and not our own virtues, is what is needed for salvation. We ought not judge the sins of others outside of the love of Christ. His love is available to all mankind, regardless of how we view them.

If not for salvation, what is the purpose of denying sinful lusts and living a righteous life?

Unafraid

I will not be afraid, because the LORD is with me.

People can't do anything to me

PSALM 118:6 NCV

From time to time fear gets the best of us. It is an illness of the soul; it immobilizes us as it paralyzes our spirit and fills our flesh with dread. Fear can hijack our minds and drive us away from trusting God. It prompts us to rely on our own strength, forsaking the wisdom and power of the Almighty, which is why the Bible addresses it so frequently. When tragedy overtakes us or imposing threats wreak havoc on our hearts, it is easy to take our gaze off God and replace our faith with fear. This crippling mistake leaves our hearts in shambles. It also prevents us from living an effective Christian life and from reaching out to others with the good news of the Gospel.

God's Word assures us that he is always with us and we need not be fearful. We should be controlled by the Spirit of God and not a spirit of fear. Sometimes we even fear things that do not have eternal bearing instead of fearing God who is all powerful—the origin of all things everlasting. People and earthly threats can only harm us physically. Let us submit to the only one who holds our eternal lives in his loving hands.

**Do you have any fears
you need to lay before the Lord?**

SEPTEMBER 8

Replacing Ashes

*I will give them a crown to replace their ashes,
and the oil of gladness to replace their sorrow,
and clothes of praise to replace their spirit of sadness.*

ISAIAH 61:3 NCV

Although we live in a depraved world, God has given us a beautiful tool to help us along the way: his promises and the hope found therein. God has assured us that he will turn our tears into dancing, and our mourning into shouts of joy! We can rest in the fact that whatever happens, no matter how dark our surroundings become, we have a future of goodness and light waiting for us.

Our Father intends to use us to display his glory, so we can be sure that he has wonderful plans for us. God loves us very deeply and desires only good things for us, but the sad truth is that in this world we will suffer sometimes before those good things are revealed. Do not despair if you are experiencing hardships, it does not mean God has forsaken you. Hold onto the truth that he will give you a new life and that the evil of this world will pass away.

**Can you imagine a love so strong
that it can replace all your sorrow
with joy in a single moment?**

Rekindle the Flame

If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-3 NLT

Agape love is both godly and selfless. Its focus is on the needs of others rather than itself. Love is the trademark of a follower of Christ. Everything Christ did had a foundation of love; those who profess to follow him should walk just as he did. Regardless of the gifts we have been given, if they are not used with love, they are pointless. Even if we had faith strong enough to move an entire mountain, but we did not have love for other people, our good intentions would be in vain.

The purpose of the gifts we have been given are not so we can boast in them, but so God receives the glory and his love is displayed to all. This is true whether we are across the world serving the poor or at home serving our spouse. Let us grow in godly, selfless love so we can use our God-given gifts and abilities in a way that gives him all the glory.

How does God display his love through you?

Our Struggle

Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

EPHESIANS 6:12 NASB

As we consider the condition of the world, it is easy to become fixated on the enemies we can see. Those who prey on the vulnerable, who exploit others for gain, who take pleasure in the suffering of others can seem like our most impending adversaries, but they are only puppets on the hands of the devil. Our actual enemy, the ruler of darkness, is the one who influences people to sin and who works them into his own evil ploys.

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Before becoming too focused on the physical enemies we can see, we should consider the bigger picture and pray that God would open our eyes so we understand the actual battles we are confronted with. Then, in lieu of the verses before and after this accurate battle assessment, we should equip ourselves with the armor of God which is the only way to beat a demonic enemy: truth, righteousness, the Gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the Word of God.

How can you and your spouse fight spiritual forces of wickedness together?

Half Empty Cup

The Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

ACTS 17:11 NIV

Believers cannot afford to be lazy regarding the message of God. The Scriptures should excite us and motivate us to search out his character and his mysteries. Pouring over verses, studying the Scriptures, and developing a daily devotion to growing in our relationship with the Lord is paramount to every Christian's walk. There are so many false doctrines and differing beliefs these days, even just under the guise of Christendom.

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In this particular verse, we read that the people of Berea did not rely on human teaching to provide truth for them without also examining it for themselves, even the preaching of the apostle Paul. They familiarized themselves with the Word of God and used it as their lenses for determining fact from fiction. The Bible refers to them as noble for having that kind of discernment. It is a noble and wise trait to examine information presented to us because if we do not we might easily be fooled and led astray. Jesus warned us that in the last days many will abandon their faith and follow false teachings. Let's not be those people.

**Are you in the habit of checking the
Scriptures to verify appealing doctrine?**

SEPTEMBER 12

Discipline Challenge

*Discipline your children, and they will give you rest;
they will give delight to your heart.*

PROVERBS 29:17 NRSV

Every parent knows that having children will entail many sleepless nights. These can be draining and discouraging, but it is a worthwhile and eternal investment in the kingdom of God. Children are a blessing, and they are also a formidable undertaking. By righteously disciplining our children even when we do not want to, it teaches them boundaries and healthy habits. By helping our children develop self-discipline, we instill in them godly character traits that will help them tremendously throughout life.

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It brings such peace of mind to know that our children have a relationship with the Lord and have been raised in a way that they have a matured sense of right from wrong. In those days we can rest because we put the time in when they are young to love and discipline them in the ways of the Lord.

**Do you have children in your life?
How can you and your spouse help
create healthy disciplines in their lives?**

Planting Seeds

*Start children off on the way they should go
and even when they are old they will not turn from it.*

PROVERBS 22:6 NIV

Were you trained properly while you were growing up? Very few of us were. No matter. God can bless and train even the most flawed of humanity if they are convicted to repent. Any person, regardless of their upbringing, can give themselves fully to the Lord and live the life of purpose that God intends for them. That said, are you and your spouse now parents? Do you fully embrace the purpose in parenting that the Lord has laid out for us in the Bible? We have a beautiful and ponderous responsibility to introduce our children to the Creator.

We can depend upon God to teach and train us even for this task because the family is the heart of ministry. We have a responsibility to our children and to realize that their upbringing is for the purpose of leading them into the kingdom. Each life lesson, each good manner is taught with the purpose of edifying God and growing our children's hearts toward him. When we are united in our marriage to teach and train our children in the ways of God, we are fulfilling one of the most basic tasks of teaching others about Christ.

**Have you and your spouse committed
to introducing your children to the Lord?**

Always a Child

Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. "Honor your father and mother." This is the first commandment with a promise: If you honor your father and mother, "things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth."

EPHESIANS 6:1-3 NLT

The relationship between a parent and child is another fitting analogy of God's relationship with us. At times, we do not understand why God asks us to do what he does. We do not always like his rules and sometimes we wish we could wander off. Naturally, we want to do things that make us feel good, like a child wishes to eat only sweets. Like a good parent, God teaches us to have self-discipline, make wise choices, follow his leadership even when we do not have the full picture, and eat our vegetables.

In reference to the Ten Commandments, Paul notes that this is the first of God's laws that is accompanied by a promise. Not only does God bless obedience of both young and grown children when we honor our parents by being respectful toward them, but it stands to reason in the natural world that someone who has learned obedience and humility toward authority will have a much easier time in life than a defiant and egocentric person.

**How can you honor your parents
even today as an adult?
How can you respect them when you
disagree with them?**

Father of Comfort

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort.*

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3 NIV

Paul had recently gone through a distressing time of torture where he was near death, so when he wrote this praise to the church in Corinth that God is the Father of all comfort, he personally knew it to be true. His faith had not wavered in the face of persecution even though his body had. More than anything else in life, Paul knew that God was with him offering him compassion, comfort, and an everlasting hope.

Our ultimate Judge who rules with justice also extends mercy to anyone who will receive it. He hears the cries of those who mourn and is near to those who suffer. We all deserve his wrath, yet he welcomes us with open arms. In this world of striving, suffering, failing, and deception, we know that God is true. He is not absent or uncaring but involved and accessible. We can run to him for rest, peace, encouragement, acceptance, comfort, compassion, and truth.

**What sort of help do you
need to ask God for today?**

Time Marches On

Do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.

2 PETER 3:8 NIV

False teachers were claiming that Christ would not return and that there would be no Judgment Day. Their reasoning was that he had not yet returned, so why did he tarry? Peter's retort was that God is not bound by time and space. Our thinking is linear, in terms of minutes, hours, days, and years. God does not think like that since he is outside of time. His reasoning is dependable, and his plan is flawless.

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Although it may seem like he is taking too long with all the injustice and evil that has plagued this world, God's timing is perfect. He knows the optimal moment for his return because he holds all of history and can see the heart of every person. None of us know the time when Christ will return, so we can only pray and continue in obedience. We should not judge his patience or forget his promises. Everything he has ever promised he will fulfill. We can have confidence that he will come back when the time is right.

**How can you encourage your spouse
to be patient about God's timing?**

The Waiting Game

*"Love your enemies and pray
for those who persecute you."*

MATTHEW 5:44 ESV

Injustice hurts most of us deeply. To see a neighbor, family member, or even a stranger being hurt is sometimes too much. We must remember that in the end, God is the judge, and he is just. Punishment will be rendered for evil deeds. We must be careful, though, to not hate our enemies. The Bible commands us to love them.

We should pray for redemption for sinners, that they would turn from their sin and be saved. Sometimes it is hard to pray for our enemies because we would rather see them hurt or punished, but that is not what God wants for us. To harbor such bitterness is poison for our hearts. Righteous anger is sometimes warranted, but we must keep perspective and remember that the Lord is with us. He fights for us, and we should neither be afraid nor vile in return. To remain kind to your enemies is only possible through praying and communion with the Lord.

Are you harboring anger against an enemy?

Control Factor

*Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty,
and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.*

PROVERBS 16:32 ESV

The Scriptures clearly recognize self-control as a much more valiant character trait than might. Even a conquering warrior is not as impressive as a person who has conquered their own spirit and can control their reactions. They are not impulsive but calculated and wise. The Bible emphasizes the importance of being slow to anger because when we allow our anger to control us rather than having control over it, it hinders us from resembling Christ and achieving all that God wants to do through us.

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A prime example of a lack of self-restraint hindering full potential is when Moses struck the rock in the desert rather than obeying God's instructions to speak to it. Because of his actions and disobedience, he was not permitted to enter the Promised Land. A fit of anger and fury causes damage that might otherwise have been avoided. It is valuable to be able to control our innate desires and instincts; it shows a meekness that is only found in those who are guided by the Holy Spirit. Our responses to frustrating situations and circumstances should be different than those of unbelievers. We seek to please God not gratify the desires of the flesh.

**Why do you think the world celebrates brute
strength and fits of fury, but disregards
discernment and meekness?**

Personality Clashes

*If possible, so far as it depends on you,
live peaceably with all.*

ROMANS 12:18 ESV

Paul is not preaching pacifism but peace. Peace does not simply happen in a world full of divisions and selfish agendas; it requires hard work and sacrifice. To have a real relationship with depth, conflict is bound to arise. When that happens, maintaining respect and humility while sorting out the situation will help overcome personality clashes and preserve peace.

Christ was the Prince of Peace and he went to great means to bring peace to the world. The world is still torn up in war and hatred, but peace exists, and it is not situational. Our hearts can be at peace because we know Christ and we know that he is coming again to restore all that has been broken. Because the peace of God is in our hearts, it cannot be stolen from us, and it is ours to give to others. We can live peaceably with others even if it comes with a cost because our God is worth it.

**How do you actively
maintain peace in your marriage?**

SEPTEMBER 20

Getting Along

*Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy;
without holiness no one will see the Lord.*

HEBREWS 12:14 NIV

Living at peace with others requires a level of spiritual maturity. It is not distancing from other people or ignoring differences, but actually addressing and working through disagreements in a healthy and respectful manner. Learning to get along with people, especially people who think differently than us, means we must be willing to listen and learn. Our interactions with other Christians can often be the most difficult because we hold each other to a higher standard than those who are outside of the faith.

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Christian relationships are vitally important because we are children of the King. How does it appear to the world if our own family is in disarray? We should make every effort to live peacefully with others even if that means laying down some of our rights. Living holy means upholding God's commandments and the greatest of these is to love God and others. This includes keeping peace.

**Do you have an ongoing
conflict with other Christians?
How can you live at peace
when you do not agree?**

SEPTEMBER 21

Smart People

*Those with good sense are slow to anger,
and it is their glory to overlook an offense.*

PROVERBS 19:11 NRSV

It is only through wisdom that we can establish inner calmness. By slowing our anger and holding our tongues we can learn far more than otherwise. Wisdom and patience go hand in hand, just as philosophy and virtue always should. In our current world, the unangered, unperturbed person is rarely heralded as a source of truth. We look to loud showboats instead of role models of patience. The second half of the verse is equally countercultural.

What person became famous in our world because they overlooked an offense?

All too often we are inspired by what makes us feel good; doing to others what they have done to us. Yet the unsatisfying option of forgiveness is often thrown out the window. For this reason, God assigns it to be our glory to overlook transgressions. The moment we forgo our natural instincts and render supernatural forgiveness to an enemy, we become a little more like Jesus Christ. He alone had the power to overlook every transgression, and through him we can display forgiveness as well.

**How can you drown out the noise of those
screaming in anger and hear the melodical,
timeless voice of truth?**

Faithful in Prayer

*Be joyful in hope,
patient in affliction,
faithful in prayer.*

ROMANS 12:12 NIV

Paul offers three simple yet profound directives for Christians that have the power to greatly influence our lives. To be joyful in hope means to live for the hope of the age to come when we will be made new and ushered into the home of our heavenly King. This hope supersedes the scourges of this world because it is not based on anything here. The hope Christ gave us and the joy it produces is evidenced in our resilience and our perspective. When we are faced with affliction, our resolution and patience is a testimony of the promises we have believed and received. We understand that hardships are momentary, but the grace of God is eternal.

We can exercise patience in the worst of times because our hope is assured. Being faithful in prayer is necessary for a Christian because it is how we talk to God. Without God, we have no joy or hope. Without hearing his voice, we do not know which way to turn. Remaining in prayer keeps our connection to God intact and renews our joy and patience each day.

**Are you faithful to seek God in prayer for joy,
hope, and patience in the bad times as well
as the good?**

SEPTEMBER 23

Beyond the List

*"Call to me and I will answer you and tell you
great and unsearchable things you do not know."*

JEREMIAH 33:3 NIV

God tells us to call out to him and he will answer. This unchanging offer is one of the kindest acts of love our Savior offers. He does not just consider answering us, he promised he will. Considering our infinite lowliness, Christ's ineffable glory, and the chasm between us, there is no reason that our Creator would be obligated to give us his attention; yet he does. Further still, he promises that those who come to him will learn great things which cannot be learned elsewhere.

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When people of other religions open their sacred books, they only learn what humankind can do in and of themselves. The writings are only the thoughts of people. Yet here God points us to himself, saying that he can tell us unsearchable things that we don't know. Only a real God can know things outside the human realm of knowledge. There are many of these unsearchable things which God would reveal to us should we take the time to seek his Word and call to him.

**What great and mighty mysteries has God
revealed to you when you sought him?**

SEPTEMBER 24

No Fear

She laughs without fear of the future.

PROVERBS 31:25 NLT

How much does your faith dictate your behavior? Have you committed yourself daily to saturating your heart in the Word, allowing the Holy Spirit to craft and curb your personality? Can you say that this is more important to you than the way you look? Can you say that your faith is such that the future looks joyful, that you have no fear that cannot be overcome by your love for God?

So much of our path through life is mediated by our perceptions and personalities. We can hedge against the distractions that take us away from God's chosen trail by fully allowing the Scriptures to sink into our hearts and soften our manner. We can know that God is near all the time by spending time in his presence daily, hourly, with every breath. Keep your conversation with the Lord going. Talk to him as you walk along your path, giving him the voice in your life that he desires and you need. Let your love for him overcome all the interruptions so you are joyful and strong in your faith and your marriage.

**Is your dependence on God clearly
seen in your strength and dignity?**

SEPTEMBER 25

Hearts Aligned

*This is the confidence we have in approaching God:
that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.*

1 JOHN 5:14 NIV

Our hope is not in vain, neither is it just wishful optimism. The hope we have in Christ is the confidence and assurance that our sins have been forgiven and we have been accepted into the family of God. We do not have to wonder or worry because our God is faithful. Furthermore, our prayers are most certainly heard. We are not whispering to a wall or crying into an abyss. The Lord God hears us and welcomes our approach.

When our hearts are not aligned with his and our requests are amiss, obviously the Lord will not accommodate us, so it may seem like he has not answered. It is important that we truly seek God's will and learn what he desires. When we realize what God wants and it becomes our desire too, our prayers will reflect the love and devotion we have for him. We will be able to ask for God's blessings and interventions accordingly, and it will become abundantly clear that God loves to use his willing and obedient children in his redemptive plan.

**How do you and your spouse decide
what to pray for together?**

Chase After God

Seek the LORD while you can find him. Call on him now while he is near. Let the wicked change their ways and banish the very thought of doing wrong. Let them turn to the LORD that he may have mercy on them. Yes, turn to our God, for he will forgive generously.

ISAIAH 55:6-7 NLT

There are times in everyone's life when God's presence is especially close. Under the pressure of great pain and trouble, even an unbeliever's heart can become more open to the Lord's voice. This is what Isaiah wants us to notice. He wants us to lay hold of Christ when pain makes God especially near to us. The question is, will we? Will we cry out to God when he knocks on our door; will we turn to him when the pain becomes too much to bear? Otherwise, we might dismiss God. We could consider him an irrational notion, unmerciful, or unable to understand us.

These are the doubts that withhold sinners from eternal peace. Turning to God is not only meant for the righteous or noble, but also the unrighteous sinner. Even they will find compassion from God should they call to him. Anyone who seeks the Lord will be abundantly pardoned. There is no condition. God knows that we have nothing to offer, so he draws near to us and pleads that we seek him while he may be found.

**In the midst of trials, what other things
distract you from seeking God for mercy?**

SEPTEMBER 27

Run First

*Look to the LORD and his strength;
seek his face always.*

1 CHRONICLES 16:11 NIV

In everyday problems, the Lord's strength is an unusual source of help. It may seem too esoteric to rely on, yet the Word of God commands us to seek God and his strength because it is real and effective. Even before our own attempts fail, we should look to God and his ability to accomplish all things. Through this we come to see how small our problems, achievements, goals, and failures really are.

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There is no better cure for anxiety than the sight of God's infinite strength and favor. What are we struggling to do on our own? Just as we look for food in order to survive, our spirit continually needs the Lord in order to thrive. No one can do anything without seeking God's help. We may skip a time of devotion without feeling worse, like when we skip lunch, but in both cases it is the cumulative impact that wreaks havoc. The author of this verse commands us to seek God's face continually because it will make our spirits live. Anxiety, doubt, greed, and every other disease of the soul is cured by seeking him.

**What happens when you do not seek
the Lord for strength in a situation?**

SEPTEMBER 28

The Priority

Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

HEBREWS 11:6 NIV

We were not designed to be submissive servants of a god who is only interested in obedience. He carefully crafted us to display his glorious nature. He intended us to be his friends because he loves fellowship. We were given free will because God wants to be chosen; he wants our worship to be given from an adoring heart not demanded of a slave in subjection to their master.

The Lord does require obedience, but the priority is our faith. From faith will come obedience because our hearts long to serve and please him. He gave us life, and we joyfully surrender our lives back to him. He does not need to demand compliance from those who have truly experienced his love because we earnestly seek him. Without faith, it does not matter how much good we do. God is not satisfied with the deeds of those who simply go through the religious motions; what he longs for is a loving relationship.

Do you find it easier to serve your spouse because you know it will bring them joy than when you are just trying to uphold your marital duties for the sake of expectation?

Lens of Love

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

EPHESIANS 4:4-6 NIV

The church of Christ is not a building or a select group of Christians but a body of believers which includes everyone who has given their life and allegiance to Jesus Christ. Although there may be differences of opinion regarding theology or practice, the fundamental truths remain the same. God is one and we have the hope of eternity through Christ. Because we are one body of believers serving the same God, we share the same faith.

We cannot allow variance to divide us and distract us from our mandate to love each other.

In the end, it is God who judges the hearts of men and women not us. As we navigate our differences and learn from each other, we should view our brothers and sisters in Christ through a lens of love, since that is how God views us. This does not mean denying differences or falsifying feelings but recognizing that differences are an opportunity for growth.

How do you approach conversations where you have a differing opinion than your spouse?

New Mercies

*The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.*

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-23 ESV

Every morning is a fresh start and a new opportunity to love. We have been given the blessed privilege of marriage and we have the distinct responsibility of demonstrating Christ-like love to our spouses every single day. Love is not a one-time gift or agreement; it is constantly refreshed and given over and over. Just as God never ceases to pursue us and draw us to himself, we ought to continue looking for new ways to demonstrate our love to our spouses. The faithfulness of God sets a precedence for our own conduct. He has always remained true to his promises. We are his beloved bride, and he declares his adoration of us.

Similarly, we should be resolute in our commitment to our spouses. With undivided love and adherence to our vows, we uphold marriage as a symbol of the love we have been given. When we make mistakes, God is merciful and willing to help us stand back up. When we stumble, he catches us. Although we are weak, he fills us with strength and courage to maintain our resolve to follow him and stay loyal to our spouses.

**Does the Lord's faithfulness to you give you
the resolve to be faithful to your spouse?**

October

Love is large and incredibly patient. Love
is gentle and consistently kind to all.

It refuses to be jealous when blessing
comes to someone else. Love does not

brag about one's achievements nor
inflate its own importance.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4 TPT



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Clear Truth

Stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

2 THESSALONIANS 2:15-17 ESV

Paul wrote a warning to the Thessalonians to hold fast to what they had learned. He cautioned them against drifting from their love of God or becoming persuaded by false messages. Rather than outright lie to us, the enemy attempts to distort the truth and weave in lies. By causing us to doubt, he can methodically lead us away from our love of God. We need discernment and discipline in the Word to be able to thwart his schemes. By doing so, we will have the wisdom and power to stand firm for what we know and hold fast to the teachings which have been passed on to us.

Having faced intense persecution, the Thessalonians needed God's refreshing hope, comfort, and strength. Only by God's grace were they able to face every plight with confidence. Similarly, we must cling to his goodness whenever we feel hopeless, tired, or confused. All the sustenance and refreshment we need can be found in Jesus. He is our eternal comfort.

How can you and your spouse encourage each other to remain in the truth?

OCTOBER 2

Life Adventures

*How blessed is the man whose strength is in You,
In whose heart are the highways to Zion!*

PSALM 84:5 NASB

Those whose hearts are devoted to seeking God will find their strength in him. The ancient Hebraic form of writing often presented literal and figurative pictures side by side. Zion, or Jerusalem, was where the temple of God stood. People were so desperate to be in the presence of the Almighty they were willing to travel the long highway to get there. Having the highways to Zion in our hearts is symbolic of someone who is willing to go as far as it takes to be close to God.

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King David recognized that true strength was cultivated through a loving relationship with the Father, and his heart was bent on being in God's presence. So deeply in love with God are some people that it is as if the highways to Zion or the paths into God's presence are the purest motivations of their hearts. Since Christ's death, it is no longer necessary to travel to a distant temple to go before the Lord; we have the Spirit of God present with us. May we never overlook this incredible gift of grace.

**How can you and your spouse
seek the Lord fervently together?**

OCTOBER 3

Thinking of You

*God is my witness, how I long for you all
with the affection of Christ Jesus.*

PHILIPPIANS 1:8 NASB

The Philippian believers held a special place in Paul's heart. Adding emphasis to his adoration, he even called on the Almighty as a witness of the love he felt for them. During his time in Rome, he longed for them as members of his same body in Jesus Christ. The church in Philippi had been generous in their support of him and had remained faithful to his teachings even when he was imprisoned.

The love that bonds believers together is unexplainably powerful.

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First, we share a common love for God, and second, we uphold and support each other through the dark times. Wherever brotherly love is present, there is love, healing, understanding, and encouragement. Sometimes we grow apart or move far away. We lose touch with those who have impacted us and our hearts long for them. This life is short; as believers we know that one day, we will all be together again, bonded in God's kingdom, never needing to say goodbye.

Who do you miss?

How would you like to pray for them today?

OCTOBER 4

Eternal Authority

*Even from eternity I am He,
And there is none who can deliver out of My hand;
I act and who can reverse it?*

ISAIAH 43:13 NASB

How glorious it is to belong to the King! What an honor to be counted among his children, to be held secure in his hand, to be the recipients of his love and affection. We are finite beings, but the Lord Almighty is infinite. Our presence here is fixed, but he is eternal. We were created by him and for him; he is the Author and Creator of all that we know. What he has decided to do, none can dismantle. Whom he decides to save, none can sway.

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The Lord extends his hand and delivers us from our adversary, and all the enemy's schemes cannot crush his limitless power. He is from eternity, possessing all form of love and wisdom. His plan is perfect, and we are part of it. For all of time—past, present, and future—the Lord reigns with justice and mercy. We are blessed beyond measure to know and be known by him.

**Knowing that God holds you and keeps
you safe, what could you and your spouse
endeavor to do with boldness?**

OCTOBER 5

Foresight

*I know that You can do all things,
And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.*

JOB 42:2 NASB

Sitting in agony, covered in dust, boils, and tears, Job declared his faith in God. Although it seemed like his whole world had fallen apart, Job still believed that God was able to do anything. He believed in God's ability to remove his sufferings, yet he received something far greater than relief: God met Job in his pain and showed him his great mysteries. Rather than ease his suffering, he used it to open Job's eyes and grew his relationship with him even deeper! Job's faith multiplied, as did his wisdom.

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When we suffer, rather than immediately seeking an escape, we should look for how the Lord might be using the situation to richly bless our lives. Instead of making our anguish end, he may meet us in it and share the burden with us. Far more desirable than a life of ease is the experience of a true friendship with the Creator. His plans will be established across the globe because his purposes cannot be stopped. His friends are invited to participate in his mission, but it will be accompanied by many hardships and trials. But he is with us through it all.

**How can you encourage your spouse
in moments of suffering?**

OCTOBER 6

Best Friends

*A friend is always loyal,
and a brother is born to help in time of need.*

PROVERBS 17:17 NLT

True friendships are often revealed through adversity. When the excitement wears off and the trials hit, loyal friends will remain to help fight the battles. Their love is constant and not dependent on what they receive from the relationship. Friendship does not ask what is fair; it exhibits true love regardless of the cost.

Marriages will experience conflict, but a healthy marriage will rise above the argument and spouses will support each other through the best and worst of life. Christ is the perfect example of a devoted lover, a brother, and a true friend. His love is constant, never wavering and eternal. He came to earth to help those in need, not to be served, and he gave his own life to serve those he loved. In Christ, we are family. We may be friends as well, but first we are brothers and sisters in Christ, loyal to the Lord and to each other.

**Beyond partnership, do you and your spouse
enjoy a friendship together?**

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OCTOBER 7

What You Bring

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

1 PETER 2:9 NRSV

We were chosen as God's people, and the purpose for that is not our own self-preservation or glorification, but so we may proclaim his goodness and explain all the incredible wonders he has done on our behalf. Remembering where we came from helps us keep perspective on who we are; we were once lost in darkness, but God called us out of it and flooded us with his marvelous light. Now we are members of his holy family.

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Anyone willing to leave their dark pasts behind and submit themselves to Christ's calling becomes a member of his holy nation—a nation which will endure forever and not be swept away with temporal things. Regardless of where we come from or what we look like, we become one spiritual race since we share the same Father. Peter made it clear that this was not an invitation to the Israelites alone but to anyone who stumbled out of darkness and embraced living in God's light.

**What opportunities do you have
to proclaim the mighty acts of God?**

Stormy Waters

We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

ROMANS 5:3-5 NIV

Like everyone else, Christians suffer. Belonging to Christ does not exempt us from enduring difficulties. Unlike everyone else, however, our sufferings provide us with a benefit. For instance, walking through grief grows our perseverance which is a chief character trait needed to endure through life without becoming bitter or callous. Through our perseverance, we learn to cling to the hope we have in Christ. Our faith in him grows stronger, our understanding deeper, and we are more open to receive the love which the Holy Spirit longs to pour into us.

The sorrows and trials we face grow our love rather than diminish it. Those who do not know the Lord and have not received his love cannot hope for this kind of return for their suffering. They must face hardships with their own strength, and this often results in a bitter or self-reliant attitude. Pride and arrogance are the culmination of a heart unwilling to yield to its Maker's mercies.

**What stormy waters have led to the hope
you now have in God's promises?**

OCTOBER 9

Precious

Let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.

1 PETER 3:4 NASB

Turning his attention specifically to Christian wives, Peter explained that a woman's true beauty is found in her unseen character rather than her outward appearance. Women are inundated with messages about what the world deems attractive, and they are plagued with insurmountable physical standards. Instead of striving to achieve some form of impossible physique, their focus should be on cultivating a humble and quiet heart. Like so many of the Bible's lessons which were directed at a certain group of people in that time, there are spiritual insights associated with them that are applicable to anyone.

To possess a "quiet spirit" does not mean women should stay silent, but that they ought to strive to maintain a level of inner peace and contentment which is only possible through relying on the Lord. In a world which applauds impenetrable toughness and caters to the loudest voices, Christians are to follow Christ's example by remaining caring and calm. Hardening your heart does not demonstrate a tenderness before the Lord, nor does anxiety and strife reveal a person who rests in God's peace. It is your hidden godly qualities that are precious to God.

**How can you be calm
when others around you are not?**

Understanding

*As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways,
and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

ISAIAH 55:9 NKJV

We may fashion many plans and chart out our paths, but we do not possess the wisdom unique to God. It is tempting to want to take our lives into our own hands, but then we are disturbed and distraught when God turns the tables. Without keeping our priorities in check and our hearts turned toward the things of God, we often fall victim to short-sightedness and we succumb to worldly wanderings.

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God's plans all have eternal relevance, and we would be wise to seek his will first in our lives. The heavens are higher than the earth and we cannot begin to comprehend all the deep and hidden matters of the universe. In the same way, God's thoughts are so much more vast, loving, and effective than our own. It is our responsibility to plan for the future and be wise, but we should maintain adaptability and obedience, refusing to worry or stress, when God leads us down a different road.

**Have you and your spouse created
a plan for your future?**

**Are you constantly submitting it to God
and staying poised to receive his revisions?**

Hope Overflowing

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

ROMANS 15:13 NIV

Daily life is difficult, and we are easily ensnared by evils which attempt to tear us apart and distract us from what Yahweh has called us to do. He alone can offer us true hope, peace, and joy, so we must continue to trust him and block out contradictory voices. If we truly want to be upheld by his mighty hand, to be led by his Holy Spirit, and to be filled with his confident hope, then we need to put our trust solely in him.

We will see God work through our lives for the purpose of his pleasure if we are willing to use our God-given gifts to encourage and strengthen each other. In our relationships with our spouses, we ought to strive to put them before ourselves and to always put the Lord first. He is faithful to guide us and keep us, to give us strength when we have none, and to provide us with hope and peace. His Holy Spirit fills us so we can live to the full extent of the purposes he has set in place for us.

How does trust lead to joy and peace?

Living Sacrifice

I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.

ROMANS 12:1 NLT

The mercies of God surround us! Every moment of our lives is a gift we do not deserve. When we were worthy of death, he gave us forgiveness and life. He no longer demands animal sacrifices as an atonement for our sins but asks that we be fully committed to him in mind and body. Rather than the blood of goats, which served as a tangible example of the gravity and penalty of sin, he wants our full submission to him: our entire bodies, hearts, minds, and strength. The Lord desires that we live for him in all that we say, think, and do. It is an unfathomable, undeserved gift that we no longer need to atone for our sins with sacrifices and offerings since he already settled that account for us by offering himself as the ultimate sacrifice. Since he bought and paid for us, we are fully his. Even more incredible is the fact that we are what he desires! He does not want sacrifices or servanthood but mutual love and devotion. May our lives be an act of worship to him because of all he has done for us.

What does it mean to be a living and holy sacrifice to the Lord in your marriage?

Good Gifts

Who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

1 TIMOTHY 4:3-5 ESV

Gnosticism teaches that all forms of physical pleasure are inherently evil, including music and entertainment, delicious foods, and sexual enjoyment. This sort of belief was trending at the time Paul wrote to Timothy especially in Ephesus. He warned him against such notions and reminded him that everything God created was good.

We are not supposed to reject the gifts of God but thank him for them and enjoy them. He created so many things for our enjoyment because he is a good and loving God. The popular practice of Asceticism was also on the rise, which taught that by rejecting pleasures of the flesh, people could avoid corruption and somehow obtain a higher level of spirituality. Although nothing should come before God in our lives, true holy living can only be attained through spending time with God and in his Word because holiness comes from him alone. Pride and self-reliance will corrupt us far faster than enjoying God's blessings. Marriage is a gift from our Maker to be treasured and enjoyed.

**What sort of pleasures has God
given you to enjoy?**

The Great Need

*I am a friend to anyone who fears you—
anyone who obeys your commandments.*

PSALM 119:63 NLT

Mutual interest is bonding. We share a connection with those who strive for the same things we do. The fear of the Lord leads us to wisdom, and a wise person will surround themselves with other wise people. Those who fear the Lord will do their utmost to obey his commandments and their lives will reflect a desire to honor God.

When we meet people like this and our desire is also to obey his Word, our decisions will complement each other's, and a friendship will be natural. As we strive to serve the Lord, it will become evident that this is better accomplished in the company of other brothers and sisters with the same heart and mind. Camaraderie is born out of sharing a common goal—especially when that goal ties us together as family under Christ.

**How do you feel when you meet someone new
and discover they love the Lord like you do?**

OCTOBER 15

In a Crowd

*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them,
because they were harassed and helpless,
like sheep without a shepherd.*

MATTHEW 9:36 NIV

Just like a good father and a caring shepherd, when the Lord sees us lost and confused it fills him with compassion. He does not chastise us for our inadequacies but chooses to show us grace. He is not angry because we cannot find our own way; he steps in to lead us. His kind heart is full of mercy as he tirelessly pursues us. We were so desperate for salvation that he actually left heaven to come and redeem us. Since then, he continues to rescue us, often leaving the well-cared-for flock to search for each one of us who wanders off and becomes lost.

Jesus never abandons us to our hopeless wanderings but will go any length to intervene on our behalf. He mediates between heaven and earth, having lived in both, and is the only one who could bridge the gap. His is the only way that leads to eternal life! May we be instrumental in the lives of others as he uses us to extend his message of love and eternal life.

**Do you have compassion on others
who are engulfed in their sin?**

Pedestals

"Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart."

ZECARIAH 7:9-10 ESV

Children of God have no business meddling in evil affairs. Since all our provisions come from God, there is no reason for us to cheat anyone else or submit inaccurate accounts. Kindness and mercy should be the default reaction of every Christian because of the grace we have been shown, and we should devise plans to do good for one another.

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The Lord has a tender spot in his heart for the helpless and the disadvantaged. This may be someone who has lost their spouse and is reliant on one income or it could be someone who does not have the support of parents. It is perhaps a foreigner who is immersed in a culture that is not their own, or someone who feels marginalized from society. Most certainly, it includes the poor. These are the people we should run to with love and kindness. We should be quick to offer support and slow to judge.

**Who needs your support and love?
Can you and your spouse do something
together to help them?**

Burdens Lifted

*You should rather turn to forgive and comfort him,
or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.*

2 CORINTHIANS 2:7 ESV

Humans crave excess in everything they see. Kings do not build houses: they build palaces. Religious fanatics do not silence some of their natural desires: they crucify them all. This is also the way we act with condemnation. Once despised by a majority of people, a person may never be able to reconcile themselves to society. We want them to be so totally crushed by their iniquity until the absolute and infinite depth of their wrongdoing is understood by them. In contrast, Paul instructs us to forgive and comfort these people. God does not work through excess but restores balance in a world of absolutes.

Our depravity is infinite, but so is the fact that we bear the image of God. Only a perfectly just God can reconcile these contrary truths in our minds. When we cease to walk with God, the craving for extremism causes us to hurt others. We overwhelm them with more sorrow than we ourselves could withstand. In our interactions with our spouses and friends, we need God to teach us how to forgive and comfort, recognizing the condemnation we are so prone to dispense. The Lord can teach us to live mercifully.

**When someone has wronged you, do you find
it easier to hold a grudge than forgive?**

OCTOBER 18

Futile Flattery

*May the LORD cut off all flattering lips,
The tongue that speaks great things.*

PSALM 12:3 NASB

Communication between two or more individuals has great potential, because our tongue is one of our most powerful weapons. People who have spoken great things are those who believe that this weapon is their savior. For this reason, the psalmist prays for God to not only silence their arrogant, great words, but to take away their pompous source of communication. To begin with, this passage warns us of how despicable flattery and proud words are. Further, it shows that we must give an account for our words to the Lord.

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We can use our communication to build up those around us. Our spouses and parents will probably all tell us that the words we speak have a tremendous impact on them. News outlets testify that a reporter's words impact those far beyond their social circle. Imagine the incredible impact we could have if flattering lips and the tongue that speaks great things would cease to exist in the church at large. We need to pray that our voices would speak the words of Christ instead of the natural responses that are typical for this world. Use your words and your influence to speak life into the heart of a hurting world.

**Do you control your words
or does your tongue control you?**

Comfort in Suffering

If we have troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation, and if we have comfort, you also have comfort. This helps you to accept patiently the same sufferings we have. Our hope for you is strong, knowing that you share in our sufferings and also in the comfort we receive.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:6-7 NCV

The believers in Corinth were having a difficult time assessing why if Paul was truly an apostle, he would continually undergo such suffering. Wouldn't God spare him if he approved of what he was doing? What they did not yet understand was that suffering serves an important purpose. We learn a lot about Christ through suffering. We remember the importance of the Gospel message and its eternal promises, and we garner attention for our messages when we suffer.

It is not necessary that we go looking for suffering; the message of the Gospel attracts opposition naturally. We have a real enemy who attempts to thwart our plans, but when we suffer it becomes obvious to all that we sincerely believe in and will fight for the truth we live by. Believers are not exempt from suffering. What we are promised is that the Lord will always be with us to comfort and to guide us.

How has God comforted you through suffering and used it to teach you more about his abounding grace?

OCTOBER 20

Soldiers Together

*Put on every piece of God's armor so you will
be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil.
Then after the battle you will still be standing firm.*

EPHESIANS 6:13 NLT

The battle is big, but Christians are equipped. Gazing around our world today, it is easy to feel overwhelmed, angry, scared, and drowned out. So many confused voices shout misguided idioms, so much contradictory information is pushed in our faces, and self-worship abounds. When we steal away from the world and find a quiet moment to soak in the Word of God, we remember again that we are never alone.

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The Lord goes before us. He trains us and does not leave us defenseless. Everything we require for a life of victory has already been given to us. As we carefully consider each piece of armor the Lord has laid before us, it becomes apparent that it is the enemy who should cower in fear. Those who stand with God are on the winning side; we will be standing firm when the battle is finally over.

**Have you adorned yourself with each
piece of armor according to Ephesians 6?**

OCTOBER 21

Pure Ingredients

*Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ,
and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.*

ROMANS 13:14 NIV

We are no longer slaves of sin, and we have no part in the deeds of darkness. The immoral acts Paul is referring to are listed in the previous verse: carousing, drunkenness, sexual immorality, debauchery, dissension, and jealousy. All these shameful stunts exist only to satisfy the urges of the flesh. Their focus is self-gratification, not love of God and others. If we are fixated on feeling good and doing whatever we want in the moment, we are worshipping ourselves and not God.

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As children of light pulled out of the darkness, we have been instructed to clothe ourselves with Christ. This means we are to cast off the appearance of sin and darkness and take on his image. We live like he lived and think about how we can honor him. Although it is not our purpose or motivation, obedience to God is always rewarded, and it leads to far more satisfaction, contentment, and joy than a life lived in pursuit of our own agendas ever could.

**When you think about how you could
please God, what comes to mind?**

OCTOBER 22

God's Riches

"You cannot serve both God and money."

MATTHEW 6:24 NIV

The systems and mentality of the world contradict the laws of God. The former promotes seeking our own happiness and living for ourselves, whereas the latter commands that we seek to honor God and look out for the welfare of others. Money and material wealth can be used as tools in service to the Lord, but if earthly riches and fame captivate us and steal our devotion, it is displeasing to God and devastating to our souls.

The Lord will not stand as second in command, and we cannot serve him if we are serving ourselves. God desires to be our one and only master. He rules in love and all his ways are just. He has guaranteed us eternal life, peace, joy, and a family with him forever. His love for us is everlasting and unparalleled. It is foolish to throw this all aside in pursuit of any lesser master.

How do you and your spouse encourage each other to remain wise in the area of finance?

Sacrificial Love

You adulterers! Don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God.

JAMES 4:4 NLT

When it comes to the subject of submission to God, James leaves no room to question how serious a matter it is. God desires to be the first and only King in our lives. He did, after all, create us, save us, and now sustains us. We owe him everything and especially our allegiance. When we place anything above him, James likens it to someone having an affair. Once we have promised our loyalty to our spouse, breaking that bond with someone else is very damaging.

When we forsake God for anything or anyone else, it hurts his heart. He is a good and loving God who is willing to accept us back if we repent and turn away from our wicked choices, but disloyalty is never a worthwhile choice to begin with. It is a difficult road back once we start down it because sin has a way of pulling us along and alluring us toward death. It is far wiser to keep our eyes fixed on God from the start.

What are you doing in your life to fight off the snares of the devil and keep your commitments to God and your spouse?

OCTOBER 24

Price of Wealth

*Better is the little of the righteous
than the abundance of many wicked.*

PSALM 37:16 NASB

The abundance of the wicked may seem tantalizing to those of us who have very little, but meager wages earned honestly are of far greater value in terms of what truly matters. To gain wealth through evil means is worthless because the days of the wicked are numbered. Whether the Lord has blessed the righteous with great wealth or taught them to endure with limited rations, we are instructed to offer what we have to God and find contentment in his love.

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This life and its treasures will all fade away one day, so it would be foolish to trade our souls for comfortable living here and now. The Lord seeks to increase our faith. All the pleasures of this life pale in comparison to a life lived serving him; for true joy can only be found in him. He is both our purpose and our pleasure.

**What do you and your spouse have
that can be used to serve God?**

Supporting Role

*He who heeds discipline shows the way to life,
but whoever ignores correction leads others astray.*

PROVERBS 10:17 NIV

The decisions we make, whether negative or positive, affect not only us but others in our lives. Hate and love both have a multiplying effect, and the choices we make always carry repercussions. The Lord disciplines those he loves because he cares about our development and our maturity. If we are humble enough to receive his loving discipline and grow from it, we can use these lessons, and the wisdom they have taught us, to bless others.

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Having a faith that we can share is an incredible privilege. If we live contrary to God's ordinances and are unwilling to learn or yield, it is to our detriment and the detriment of others. We can be a blessing or a hinderance to our spouses, family, friends, or others we may have an influence on. This is especially true with leaders in the church, teachers, and parents. Keep other people who are susceptible or young in the faith in mind when you are choosing which course to take.

**How do you react to correction
from your spouse?**

OCTOBER 26

Finding Flaws

*"In the same way you judge others, you will be judged,
and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."*

MATTHEW 7:2 NIV

Our loving Father is quick to forgive, but we are expected to extend the same mercy to others. If we truly understand how encompassing and complete the grace God has shown us is, then we realize the foolishness of withholding forgiveness from someone else. Doing so not only reveals the selfish condition of our hearts, but the Lord also warns that he will withhold his mercy from us. To thank God for his incomparable kindness, he simply asks that we do the same for others.

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God alone is the judge; we are not worthy to assume such a role.

Only he can see a person's heart and can judge a matter accurately.

Having been forgiven our debt of death, it should be a small matter to forgive others their petty offenses. In the cases when others cause us great amounts of harm, we can find help from God to overcome the limitations of our flesh. He will fill us with grace and love so we can forgive others.

**Is there someone you need
God's help to forgive today?**

A New Worldview

Suppose someone comes into your church meeting wearing nice clothes and a gold ring. At the same time a poor person comes in wearing old, dirty clothes. You show special attention to the one wearing nice clothes and say, "Please, sit here in this good seat." But you say to the poor person, "Stand over there," or, "Sit on the floor by my feet." What are you doing? You are making some people more important than others, and with evil thoughts you are deciding that one person is better.

JAMES 2:2-4 NCV

We have a limited point of view, plus we have a self-centered disposition which must be overcome through the love of the Father. We so readily attribute value to other people based on our own perceptions and previous experiences, but God has placed a high value on every one of the people he has created. He alone can judge hearts, so our job is merely to love and support each other.

We should not be distracted from this calling by quality of clothing, color of skin, or any other social stigmas. A person's worth comes from their relationship to God, not from their appearance. Not only do we discredit someone's character when we hastily judge them, but we rob ourselves of the opportunity to hear a new worldview from someone who is different than us.

**How can you avoid partiality
in your own perceptions?**

OCTOBER 28

Submit in Love

*Submit to one another
out of reverence for Christ.*

EPHESIANS 5:21 NIV

Submission does not involve passively following what everyone else says or does. To submit within the context of its use in Scripture entails putting the needs of others above our own. We can do this because of our reverence for Christ and because we see how he put our needs before his own wellbeing. Jesus not only put our lives above his, he called us to do likewise and promised to take care of all our needs.

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We have an example to follow and an assurance that he will always be with us, ready to catch us and care for us. Within the bond of marriage, the Bible is very clear that we are to submit to each other and put the needs of our spouses above our own. This provides a clear picture of Christ's love to anyone privy to the union, and it also creates harmony and safety for both husband and wife.

**How can you choose to put
your spouse first today?**

Devoted in Love

God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

EPHESIANS 2:4-7 ESV

There is an important distinction between salvation and sanctification. The former is the work Christ did on the cross to save us from the death penalty our sins deserved. The latter is the work the Holy Spirit continues to do in us as we grow in grace and in relationship with God. The point at which we began our journey was lost and without grace. The Lord rescued us and filled us with hope and peace. It is by his merit alone that we have life everlasting!

As we engage with others who are still misguided in thinking they can achieve their own salvation, we need to remember that we are no more deserving than they of the grace our God freely bestowed upon us. Because of the kindness and love we have been shown, we can freely give the same kindness and love to those who are rude and hateful toward us. Never forget the dark place God pulled you out of or the lavish gifts he so readily blessed you with. Give love to others based on what you have received, not based on what they deserve.

**What has God specifically given you
that you can use to bless your spouse?**

Blessed by Trust

*His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse,
nor his delight in the legs of the warrior;
the LORD delights in those who fear him,
who put their hope in his unfailing love.*

PSALM 147:10-11 NIV

Our demonstrations of power and might do not impress the Lord. He wants us to learn how to trust in him and rely on his strength, rather than attempt to muscle our way through life by our own means and willpower. Humility is far more pleasing to the Lord than ability. Our skills and strength are gifts from him, and humble love is our grateful gift back to him.

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The mighty horse and the tender butterfly were both created by God and are both cared for by him. Furthermore, both animals also reflect a separate side of his character; he holds all the power in the universe, and yet also holds us gently in his embrace. Even if we feel confident and capable, we ought to fear God and continue to follow his leadership. This will be pleasing to him and will keep us out of a lot of potential trouble.

**Is God's strength the security you run to, or
do you depend on your own achievements?**

Celebrating Success

*I was constantly at his side.
I was filled with delight day after day,
rejoicing always in his presence,
rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind.*

PROVERBS 8:30-31 NIV

These are the words of Wisdom, personified, speaking about the creation of the world. Earlier in the chapter, Wisdom identified that she was the first of God's works. Why was Wisdom constantly at God's side? She was filled with delight day after day. From this passage we learn that the whole of creation was made through and interlaced with Wisdom herself. We live in a world of perfect logic. This is a cosmos, operating with seamless order and natural repeatability. Our beautiful surroundings are not chaotic, unpredictable, and unplanned. Instead we are daily witnesses to the intrinsic wisdom that entwines itself within everything.

Can we see God's wisdom around us? In the midst of our packed schedules and difficult relationships, do we recognize the order in the universe, the fact that God created our world to be good and perfect for us? Despite the fall of creation, God's fingerprint remains prominently across the earth. The question for us is whether we will join in rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind.

**How do the wonders of nature
declare the glory of God?**

November

Love does not demand its own way.

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It is not irritable, and it keeps

no record of being wronged.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:5 NLT



NOVEMBER 1

Abounding in Love

*"The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God,
slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."*

EXODUS 34:6 NIV

By describing himself, God proclaimed to Moses why he was so worthy of worship. Moses could not help but bow down following this proclamation. God displays every quality we search for in our friends and mentors. He is compassionate and gracious, yet he will by no means leave the guilty unpunished. When every virtue is found to be perfectly balanced and manifested in our God, we fall to our knees. There is no other response. Even his presence, awesome and almighty, bears testimony to his perfect power. How often do we look for God's impact on creation? How often do we search for his mark on the things around us? The fact that we can breathe is a testimony to his abounding lovingkindness. The reliability of science testifies to his truth. Even the uncompassionate, ungracious coworkers we have are bearing witness to what they should be; reflections of Christ in every way. We must, like Moses, bow down before the presence of God as it is revealed to us. Then we can come to know God.

**In what ways have you recognized God's
compassion on you this week?**

Sound Wisdom

*With him are strength and sound wisdom;
the deceived and the deceiver are his.*

JOB 12:16 ESV

Deceit runs rampant and leads many people astray. Our human wisdom will fail because there will always be someone smarter or more articulate. Our sense of right and wrong, true and false, good and bad must stem from the Scriptures and a knowledge of the Holy One. Job's friends preached that he suffered because of sin, but Job was sure of his innocence.

We do not always know what God is doing, but we can recognize truth from the lies. Suffering is not a sign of sin. When we suffer and still abstain from sinning, it pleases God's heart. None of us will be exempt from pain in this life since tragedy befalls the unjust and the just. One day, God will wipe away our tears, fill our hearts with laughter, and reward our obedience. We cannot judge his pleasure by our success, only by what his Word teaches us.

**What benefits have you seen
come out of your suffering?**

Light and Dark

*What fellowship can light
have with darkness?*

2 CORINTHIANS 6:14 NIV

When light moves into darkness, the darkness disappears. Paul is not warning us to stay away from the darkness, but he is pointing out that the two do not coexist. Darkness also cannot overcome the light. We should be careful about entering into any close relationship with someone who is not walking in the light because they will not share the same values. We are not walking the same way, nor toward the same end goal.

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To be yoked with darkness means constant tugging and tension since our directions will differ. Aside from influencing relationships, we should not avoid the darkness, but carry our light into it. The light of Christ within us is powerful enough to illuminate the most evil places. We should make sure that we are having a positive impact on the world, rather than it having a negative impact on us.

**How can you and your spouse maintain light
when you are surrounded by darkness?**

The One

*Behold, God is my salvation,
I will trust and not be afraid;
For the LORD God is my strength and my song,
And He has become my salvation.*

ISAIAH 12:2 NASB

There is something satisfied in a soul that is rescued from the brink of death. God is our salvation. He is the one who saves us from hopelessness, like a blessed vessel in a shoreless ocean. After he saves us, our soul yields all trust, forsaking earthly fear and clinging to him closely. Never have we been so safe. How can pharisaical religion result from this? What a horrific life must we be living if we pretend to love God.

It sounds strange, but most of us experience a time when religion seems boring. These times of apathy can be broken by passages like the one above. Isaiah says that the Lord God is not only our strength, but our song. Our hearts are filled with a symphony that is the Lord's love. Oh God, please help us to abandon every insincere emotion as we rejoice in your salvation.

**When your walk with God begins to feel dull,
or when your spouse's does,
how can you encourage each other
to rediscover God's goodness?**

Self-Control

*A man without self-control is like
a city broken into and left without walls.*

PROVERBS 25:28 ESV

Quiet strength is the least appreciated form of power. The spirit within each person is incredibly powerful, like a great beast of burden. Those who lose their tempers or act impulsively have let the strength of their spirit run rampant, and it feels good because they are drunk on their own power. The Bible shows that a man who doesn't control his spirit is actually displaying weakness. He has no ability to direct his strength toward a goal. This lack of mental strength is contrasted with quiet strength which knows no fame. The person who, out of self-control, withholds their temper exhibits more power than an impulsive fighter will ever have. What condition is our spirit in? If it were a city, and impulsiveness a fire, would it be burning? The next time we feel anger, greed, or lust arise within us, we must remember how much it effects our spirits if we choose to entertain those emotions. Instead, let us control ourselves so we grow stronger and become more like God.

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**How would quiet strength react
to an emotionally heated situation?**

Uprooting Bitterness

In your anger do not sin.

*Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,
and do not give the devil a foothold.*

EPHESIANS 4:26-27 ESV

Feeling angry is not in itself wrong. There were often times when God expressed anger. In fact, certain things should make us angry because they are contrary to God or harmful to people. As Christians, we should have self-control and not allow anger to drive us to sin. There are appropriate ways of dealing with anger. First, we should be in control of it and not be controlled by it. Anger is not an excuse to sin. Second, we should be resolving whatever it is that made us angry. By not letting the sun go down, Paul is saying that we shouldn't let a lot of time pass while we are angry.

Allowing anger to fester in our hearts leads to bitterness. If we become angry at our spouses, it is our responsibility to do what we can to work through the issue and resolve it quickly, actively pursuing peace. Bitterness can destroy a marriage. Unchecked anger can easily lead to sin and give the enemy an invitation to meddle. That is why it is so important to stay submitted to God and work out our issues with humility.

How do you and your spouse resolve conflict?

NOVEMBER 7

Life and Peace

*If people's thinking is controlled by the sinful self, there is death.
But if their thinking is controlled by the Spirit, there is life and peace.*

ROMANS 8:6 NCV

God is King and he does not share his crown. We may choose to serve him or serve ourselves. He has offered us a better way, a higher road, one which leads to life and peace. Being ruled by our own sinful thinking and indulgences leads to death. Sin is attractive and deceiving; it often promises things it can't deliver. The further down that road of lies we travel, the more difficult it is to redirect and walk toward the truth. Difficult—but not impossible.

It may involve some backtracking, but the Spirit of God is there to guide us. The more we dwell on goodness and the things of God, the more the Spirit helps us overcome our old mindsets and clears out the lies. The road of righteousness that leads to life is difficult but simple: we must deny ourselves and submit to God's better way.

**What do you think about most
throughout your day?**

NOVEMBER 8

Absolute Peace

*Perfect, absolute peace surrounds those
whose imaginations are consumed with you;
they confidently trust in you.*

ISAIAH 26:3 TPT

Being steadfast is not easy. It is not zeal, inspired by extreme passion. It is not a dull perseverance. It is the quality of a watchman who not only stays awake but also scans the horizon, actively employing his gaze. God calls for our minds to be steadfast, promising us peace in return. More than that, it is a perfect peace, like that hinted at in Philippians 4:7 which passes all understanding.

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In difficult occupations and responsibilities, it becomes easy to give up on active thinking and instead live on autopilot in order to escape stressful situations. Many people cope this way. God knows that resisting the urge to be complacent is difficult. He feels our burden when we seek for mental fortitude against temptation and hopelessness. He can see that we only remain steadfast by trusting in him. In light of this, Christ will bring the steadfast of mind into his perfect peace.

**When you disengage your mind,
where does your imagination go?**

Unfolding

*The unfolding of your words gives light;
it gives understanding to the simple.*

PSALM 119:130 NASB

God's words are unadulterated truth. We are so incredibly blessed to have them at our fingertips! God has not only given his words of truth to the wise, but also to the simple. This means that no assumed measure of intelligence is an excuse for rejecting God's knowledge. The absolute truth of Scripture shines like a light into every issue. It radiates true meaning onto the situations we struggle with.

By using the term light, the psalmist points to God's absolutes in creation. There is no possible mixture of light and darkness, wet and dry, or good and evil, for absolute opposites are unable to be anything else. Our world is filled with spiritual relativism that denies this. The world around us does not base itself in God's Word, so people accept the idea that diametrically opposed ideas can all be right. Once we open our hearts to the light of God's Word, all these murky ideas flee, and our minds are renewed by real understanding.

**How does reading the Bible bring
clarity to everyday occurrences?**

NOVEMBER 10

Preserved

*Love the LORD, all you his saints!
The LORD preserves the faithful
but abundantly repays the one who acts in pride.*

PSALM 31:23 ESV

The Lord is faithful to a standard of morality. If you remain faithful to God, he will preserve you as his own. Simultaneously, the pride of a seeming philanthropist will not be overlooked by the Almighty. He must consider every deed and every thought. We cannot be one of his saints by our own deeds, but by Christ's deeds we may be counted as his own and thus preserved from wrath. It would be far worse if our God were arbitrary in his judgment.

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The psalmist may have known some subjective rulers and the unpredictable, inconsistent judgments they pass. With full praise we rejoice because our God has promised to preserve the faithful and also to abundantly repay the one who acts in pride. If we know that Christ has washed us clean, there is no fear that God will condemn us. Once we have become his godly ones, we are unequivocally preserved.

Why does God hate pride?

What does a proud person actually believe?

Comfort Zone

As He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

MARK 1:16-18 NASB

Simon (called Peter) and Andrew had already met Jesus before this encounter. In fact, he had already proven that he had great power, so his invitation for them to follow him was not completely unexpected. They knew who he was and what he was asking them to do. That is why, with faith, they could confidently leave their business and their homes to follow their Rabbi's call.

The Lord may call us to do unprecedented, inconvenient, unpredictable things, but he does not leave us unprepared. Like he did with the disciples from their first day of ministry until their deaths, he teaches us and prepares us for whatever lies ahead. He may ask us to take a leap of faith, but he has already proven that he is faithful to catch us and do wondrous things through us. The disciples started out as uneducated fishermen, but by the end of their lives they had written parts of the New Testament, stood before councils and crowds, performed miracles, and amazed people with their wisdom and courage. That is what can happen when we answer the call of God.

**How has God called you to step out
of your comfort zone and follow him?**

Safe and Sound

*When you lie down, you will not be afraid;
When you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.*

*Do not be afraid of sudden fear
Nor of the onslaught of the wicked when it comes.*

PROVERBS 3:24-25 NASB

When our conscience is guilt-free, it is far easier to sleep at night. We also know that our safety comes from God and we can find rest in that promise. Peter slept soundly in prison, even though he was supposed to be executed the following morning, because he trusted the Lord with his soul. It is simple rational that by avoiding sin, we also avoid the consequences of sin.

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Following God is not a backdoor escape from all trouble, but it does stand to reason that we forgo a lot of unnecessary headaches and hardships when we decide to trust God and do what he says. Those who follow God are still subject to a lot of evil in this world, but we do not need to fear because even if our bodies are destroyed, our souls are safe and sound with our Savior. It is the wicked who should fear because they must answer a righteous God for their life decisions.

**Do you sleep peacefully at night,
or do your actions haunt you?**

Heart at Rest

*God is your confidence in times of crisis,
keeping your heart at rest in every situation.*

PROVERBS 3:26 TPT

We do not live as the rest of the world lives. When crisis hits, we remain unshaken because our confidence comes from God. If our confidence was in our own strength, we could be overthrown. If it was in another human, we would be met with disappointment. If we are trusting in the systems erected in this world, we will soon discover that we are out of place in this world because we live for an eternal kingdom.

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We must place our assurance and find our rest in God and him alone because that is the only firm foundation. No catastrophe or crippling condition can cause us to lose heart when it is God who holds us together. In every horrifying situation, we will stand in contrast to the crowd because our hearts are at rest. We will not act in fear because our minds are at peace. We know the Lord will guide us and keep us safe. He is more than just a King; he is also an involved and loving Father who covers us with his peace and fills us with confidence.

**In the midst of crisis, what truths
can you remind yourself of?**

Joined Together

*"What God has joined together,
let no one separate."*

MARK 10:9 NIV

Knowing the Mosaic law well, some Pharisees attempted to stump Jesus by asking what he thought of divorce. Rather than play into their hand and legalistically outline exact parameters for divorce, he went straight for the heart of the issue and explained why it was that God hates divorce. When a man and woman come together in holy matrimony, it is as if they become one flesh. The level of intimacy and trust shared between them is one of the strongest pictures of love that God designed.

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Unfortunately, we live in a broken world and not all marriages last. When the union falls apart, it is as if one body is torn into two. It is now a picture of a broken covenant and unkept promises—two things God is never guilty of. The Pharisees wanted Jesus to outline the occasions in which divorce would be permitted, but Jesus wanted them instead to simply consider the heart of God. Passionately and purposefully love your spouse because you love God. Do not let bitterness get a foothold and avoid the snares of sensual temptation at all costs.

**What can you intentionally do today
to strengthen your marriage?**

NOVEMBER 15

Enduring Love

*Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.*

PSALM 118:1 NIV

Some truths are profoundly simple. Due to their simplicity or perhaps their repetitious rhetoric, we may forget them because we heard about them so often. Alternatively, we could stop and consider and remember that each time can bring new value to our lives. The sun rising each morning, our lungs working each second, our loved ones continuing to live; everything relies on God's goodwill.

We might as well yield our hearts to thanksgiving, no matter how simple God's goodness seems to be. In the end, it will be seen to be more profound than we ever considered. Not only is the Lord good, his lovingkindness lasts forever. We are favored by a loving person who controls all things. For this reason, our fate is much better than if we were blessed by a senseless, beneficial force like the wind. God's lovingkindness, particular to each person and everlasting, is more than enough reason to rise with thanksgiving every morning.

How does being married remind you each morning to give thanks to the Lord?

NOVEMBER 16

Benefits of Generosity

*He brought me to the banqueting house,
and his banner over me was love.*

SONG OF SOLOMON 2:4 ESV

Marching soldiers would raise banners over their armies with the names of their kings or leaders written on them. When King Solomon wrote that the banner flying over him was the Lord's and on it was inscribed "Love," he was declaring two things: that he was a soldier in the army of the Lord, and that God was love. He wanted his readers to know without any doubt that his allegiance was to the God of love.

God is more than just loving; he is love himself. Love originated with him; he is the author of it. The love we share in marriage is a glimmer of the love the Father feels for us. The more we learn about his incredible love, the deeper we can feel love and the wider we are able to share it. To truly love our spouses the best we possibly can, we must first get to know Love himself.

**If your allegiance is to God, how will
that be evident to others who know you
including your spouse?**

NOVEMBER 17

Trusting Together

*Those who know the LORD trust him,
because he will not leave those who come to him.*

PSALM 9:10 NCV

The people this psalm eludes to have gained spiritual experience. They know the name of the Lord and have seen the value of putting their trust in him. God has proven himself faithful time and time again, refusing to forsake anyone who knows his name. Experiencing the unchanging nature of God will prove to us that there is never a time when we should doubt his character. He remains faithful from millennia to millennia.

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For some reason, there remains an internal struggle to trust God. We have known his faithfulness, we have sought him, we have trusted him, have never been let down by him, yet the world continually tempts us away from him and our own humanity makes us susceptible to doubt and confusion. Why do we question the faithfulness of God? Anything that sides itself against God's character is irrational, no matter how pleasing. Each day we must remember that God has never forsaken us, nor broken the trust of those who know his name.

**How do you encourage your spouse
to continue trusting the Lord?**

Giving Cheerfully

You must each decide in your heart how much to give.

And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure.

"For God loves a person who gives cheerfully."

2 CORINTHIANS 9:7 NLT

God is not lacking in resources; he has all the power and wealth in the universe. It is our honor to be able to give back to him what he has entrusted to us. Our whole lives ought to be subject to his rule, but when we give from our finances, we declare that money is not where we find our security. We also demonstrate compassion and unity with other members of the body of Christ, whether we are giving to the church, a missionary, or someone in need.

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There are other ways we can give too. We can offer our time, talents, wisdom, or possessions. Whatever we decide to give, it should be an individual choice determined by what God has laid on our hearts. Giving is such a blessed act of faith, it should fill us with joy and cheer! The Lord does not want begrudging gifts or excess earnings, he wants our hearts and full surrender. He can grow amazing wonders out of the small seeds we offer him.

**How do you and your spouse decide together
what to give and to whom?**

Sharing Difficulties

*May the righteous be glad and rejoice before God;
may they be happy and joyful.*

PSALM 68:3 NIV

Are we worried about nothing? Are we redeemed, yet still under the weight of regret? Maybe our life is simply boring or inundated with temporal concerns. Psalm 68 insists that the righteous ought to be glad. There is no other posture in times of peace. It is strange that we can be righteous before God, purchased by the Son's blood, yet neglect to find joy in our lives. What else could be more rewarding or more desirable?

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We are righteous before God, redeemed and free, given the command to rejoice. If any of Christ's commands were light and easy, it is this one. Insincere happiness is a heavy burden. God hopes for us to rejoice with gladness of heart, not just out of obligation. God's character is conducive to our enjoyment, and to our exultation, which makes this command all the more rational. In light of what Christ has done, we can allow the realization of his incredible salvation to fill us with joy.

**How do you and your spouse
practice being joyful?**

NOVEMBER 20

Right Jealousy

*I am jealous for you with the jealousy of God himself.
I promised you as a pure bride to one husband—Christ.*

2 CORINTHIANS 11:2 NLT

In the days of Paul, engagement and marriage were enacted quite differently than they are today. A father would betroth his daughter to her future husband months and sometimes years in advance, and then he would have a personal responsibility to protect his daughter's purity until the union was made. Paul used this understood cultural practice as an analogy for how he felt regarding the church in Corinth. Since Paul founded, grew, and taught the church, he felt like he was a spiritual father to it. His heart was invested in its well-being and he cared about the people deeply.

The early Christians, like us today, had been promised to Christ. They were his beloved even though they were not yet with him in his heavenly home. False teachers had begun to creep up, proclaiming a different message and drawing the Corinthian Christians away from following Jesus. Understandably, Paul was concerned for their loyalty and was committed to helping them stay on the right path. His jealousy pursued them for the sake of Christ and for their own salvation.

**If you are betrothed to Christ,
how should you be acting?**

NOVEMBER 21

Acceptable Words

*Let the words of my mouth
and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.*

PSALM 19:14 ESV

The Scriptures are full of depictions of what our speech should be like. We should always speak the truth in love, encourage one another, know how to answer each other but also have grace, and we should use psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to praise God. The sentiment goes much deeper than mere words, as King David understood.

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The words that come out of our mouths are influenced by the motives which are hidden in our hearts. What we focus our time on will be what flows in our conversation. We ought to remember the Lord who authored our creation, salvation, and preservation. It is he alone who redeemed us through his death and resurrection, and it is he alone who sustains us by his power and might. He is our rock and the desire of our hearts, and our words ought to exemplify this understanding.

**As you meditate and consider the nature
of God, what words of praise come to mind?**

NOVEMBER 22

Cultivate Thankfulness

*Be thankful in all circumstances,
for this is God's will for you
who belong to Christ Jesus.*

1 THESSALONIANS 5:18 NLT

We always have more than enough reasons to be thankful for what our heavenly Father has done for us. Even our trials are supposed to bring us joy because of what they can produce in our lives. Whatever circumstances come our way, we hold fast to the promises of God and remember that nothing can separate us from his love. The Lord's grace is sufficient to carry us through, and if we trust him with the hardships we are confronted with, he can even use those for our good and his glory.

No matter how bleak things may seem, we can conclude that we still are loved, upheld, and vindicated, and everything will work to our benefit and blessing if we can simply trust God with the outcome. Maintain an eternal outlook, trust the Lord to lead you, and remember to always rejoice and give thanks. This is God's will for us.

**How can you and your spouse
cultivate a thankful mindset when
circumstances appear to be bad?**

NOVEMBER 23

Directing Hearts

*May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God
and to the steadfastness of Christ.*

2 THESSALONIANS 3:5 ESV

When Paul prayed that God would direct the hearts of the Thessalonians, he chose the Greek word *kateuthynai* to describe his intent. The word implies removing all obstacles or anything which would hold someone back. As we obediently allow the Lord to direct our hearts rather than be swayed by the pressures of this world, our lives will display the difference. Our stress levels will decrease, our marriages will be blessed, and we will have a deeper relationship with our heavenly Father. Learning to walk in the steadfast love of Christ will teach us how to also be steadfast in other areas of our life.

Marriages cannot continue on the basis of early infatuation; a healthy and intimate union requires perseverance, intentionality, and sacrifice. We are given the opportunity to display steadfast love to our spouses the same way Christ Jesus demonstrated it for us. Allow your hearts to be guided by him, and cling to his steadfast love.

**Are there obstacles in your life hindering you
from walking in close relationship with God
or enjoying a thriving marriage?**

Olive Branch

*How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!*

PSALM 133:1 NIV

One single thought begins this psalm. David was concerned with the unity of a group of men who were close enough to be called brothers. Even though ties can run deeply in a group of people, division is always possible. This reduces the strength of a group, like an ant colony of individuals. Nevertheless, David was more concerned with the benefits of unity rather than the evils of disunity. He points to the pleasant bonds that exist in those who can live together with friendship.

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It is sad that so few people truly know what unity feels like even within the church. This can probably be traced to the carelessness of actions that precludes division. The efforts needed to maintain unity are monumental with the reward being equal if not greater. Today, take time to ask God to give you eyes to see where unity is at risk, wisdom to mend it, and strength to encourage it.

**What actions can you take to fight for unity
in your marriage, in your community,
and in your country?**

NOVEMBER 25

Times of Separation

*I long to see you again, for I remember your tears as we parted.
And I will be filled with joy when we are together again.*

2 TIMOTHY 1:4 NLT

Although Paul was like a mentor to Timothy, the two of them had a very special bond. Paul referred to Timothy as a brother, a son, and as beloved and faithful. He recognized that Timothy was distraught at Paul's imprisonment and even encouraged him to come visit. Deep friendships, such as the one shared between these two ministry partners, can bring an incredible sense of joy, encouragement, and love. The Creator intended us to be together not alone.

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When we are separated from someone we care about, it can hurt. In marriage, we are blessed to be able to share our life, our home, and our ministry. That kind of bond is a gift that should be recognized for the remarkable blessing it is. With regard to close friends who are distanced from us, we should still encourage them and remind them of how much they mean to the Lord and to us. Paul wrote letters while in prison. Whatever our location or means of communication, it is important to stay connected to those who fill us with the joy of the Lord.

**Who are you separated from right now
that inspires you to draw closer to God?
How can you encourage them?**

NOVEMBER 26

Glad for Today

*This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

PSALM 118:24 ESV

Every single day of our lives is an opportunity to rejoice and be glad. If God made it, it is good. He created time, with each day representing a testimony to his goodness. The psalmist is among the smartest of people if he knew that God was worthy of praise for his works. Every morning we wake up, we can look outside and see the sky. We can feel the wind, the ground beneath our feet, and watch the sun as it describes the course of the day.

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Every aspect of our day is created by the same Creator. We are surrounded by his awesome works including the existence of each day. For this reason there is always a source of gladness, whether it is a time of celebration or of mourning. Once the clouds pass and a mourning period ends, the Lord greets us with a new day to rejoice and be glad in. The joy and gladness of the Lord runs deeper than the cares and trials of the world.

**How can you commit this day, along with
your heart and mind, to the Lord?**

NOVEMBER 27

Thankful for You

*How can we thank God enough for you in return
for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?*

1 THESSALONIANS 3:9 NIV

Paul sent Timothy to check on the church in Thessalonica. What Timothy reported was that the Thessalonian believers were holding fast to the faith despite enduring the persecutions Paul predicted would befall them. They were filled with the love of Christ for each other and for others. This brought Paul immense joy through the trials he was facing. He knew better than to take credit for their spiritual wellbeing, however, because only God could change hearts and cause growth.

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Paul may have fathered the church and watered them with Christ's words, but only God can cause the increase. How reassuring and refreshing it must have been for Paul to hear good news of the church he had invested so much of his time and heart in! Although the book of John had not been written yet, Paul's life was a true example of the words found in John 15:16 which says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last."

**As you watch someone you've
taught grow in God's grace,
how does it make you feel?**

Faithfulness

*As for me, I shall sing of your strength;
Yes, I shall joyfully sing of your lovingkindness in the morning,
for you have been my stronghold
and a refuge in the day of my distress.*

PSALM 59:16 NASB

The strength of our God is most obvious in the middle of our salvation, for it seems impossible to forget him when we hear a song of forgiveness for the first time. Sadly, time dulls every memory. Just as a steadfast watchman keeps his eyes on the things to come, we must remain vigilant in remembering what has come to pass. The psalmist is crying out, "You have been my stronghold and a refuge in the day of my distress." Those days must not be forgotten but cherished in their proper place.

The days of our distress are special to us, never to be recreated. God has given us special memories of deliverance. If we have never run for cover under the refuge that is our Savior, this is the day for us to create our first memory of deliverance.

**What encourages you in the morning
and prepares you for the day?**

NOVEMBER 29

Blessing of Hospitality

*Whenever we have the opportunity,
we should do good to everyone—
especially to those in the family of faith.*

GALATIANS 6:10 NLT

How believable is our message of good news if our actions and attitudes are not good? If we have truly encountered the grace and love of God, our lifestyles will show it. It will culminate in us an attitude of gratitude and compassion. Whenever we are given the opportunity to do good for someone else, we would strive to take it because of the good that was done for us.

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Everything good we have is from our Father, out of appreciation we extend our blessings to others. This should be especially true within the family of faith because family is supposed to take care of each other. Consider the outside world looking in: they can see how we treat each other. Why would anyone want to be part of a dysfunctional family with no unity or loyalty? Our first responsibility is to members of our own body, then to the onlooking outsiders who need love and grace as well.

Why does it seem harder to do good and show love to Christians at times than to the lost?

Showing Mercy

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a
living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading,
kept in heaven for you.*

1 PETER 1:3-4 ESV

God fully equips us for the tasks he has called us to do, and Peter believed it was important that the exiled Christians to whom he was writing understood this. Since none of us were born with the capacity to love sacrificially and live righteously, we can attribute it to God bestowing these characteristics on us. We did not earn godly aptitude but received all that we require by knowing him personally and answering his call.

It is by God's power alone that we have the ability to lead a godly life; however, we still must decide to use the gifts he has given us. We have been brought from death into life and have been given an eternal inheritance with Christ. Our response in the life we have been entrusted with should be to offer our obedience, loyalty, and love to the one who saved us and gave us such an incredible hope!

How do you and your spouse encourage each other regarding your eternal inheritance?

December

Above all, constantly echo God's intense

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love for one another, for love will be

a canopy over a multitude of sins.

1 PETER 4:8 TPT



Rest in Love

The LORD your God is with you;

The mighty One will save you.

He will rejoice over you.

You will rest in his love;

He will sing and be joyful about you.

ZEPHANIAH 3:17 NCV

The prophet Zephaniah speaks lucidly of restoration. Out of our deeply ingrained fear, the condemnations and doubts, the brokenness and arrogance, God takes us as victorious warriors, bringing us into joyful relationship with him. Somehow, he does more than bail us out from mistakes and insufficient efforts: He rejoices over us. He turns away his judgments, being quiet in his love.

Our depravity and weakness are not enough to drive our compassionate, powerful Savior away. We remain forever in the quarry of his love. Our marriages should reflect this love between God and his people. We should rejoice over each other with shouts of joy and endeavor to pursue each other with a conviction so strong only God could provide it. This will be our witness to the brokenhearted and unsaved. What kind of apathy can overcome the unfading love of God?

How do you rest in God's love?

Honored

*"Honor your father and mother.
Love your neighbor as yourself."*

MATTHEW 19:19 NLT

Through the laws of God, we can learn what his character is like and what he is passionate about. These two commandments speak to God's compassion for every person and what they stand for. Our parents reflect the fatherly relationship God has with us whether wonderfully or terribly. By honoring them the best we can, we testify to the relationship that they mimicked imperfectly. By cursing our parents, we only perpetuate a broken relationship. Honoring them shows that we love what God loves; namely, the relationship that should exist between guardian and child.

In the same way, we love our neighbors because Christ loved every one of them so much he let them crucify him for their own sake. The Jews and Romans were not acting neighborly, but the Lord Jesus Christ chose to love his unworthy neighbors anyway. Do we wait for our neighbors' or parents' love before we love and respect them? Did Christ wait for your love before offering his?

**How can you and your spouse show honor
to your parents or neighbors today?**

The Team

*We are both God's workers.
And you are God's field,
God's building.*

1 CORINTHIANS 3:9 ESV

Rather than arguing over how ministry should be completed, Paul urged the Corinthian Christians to work together and model themselves after the example of Christ. Just like laborers in a field, some need to weed, some till, some plant, some water, and some harvest. These are all necessary yet different tasks. We will all do ministry differently. As the Spirit of God leads us and the Word of God directs us, we will engage in his work according to how he created us. We should not compare ourselves to others because each of us were made unique.

In the end, only God can cause plants to grow; only he can bring an increase. The field is big, and we cannot tend to it all ourselves. Rather than criticizing the way someone else does ministry, we should be praying that the Lord sends more people to help. We need to stop attempting to control ministers and ministry methods and start humbly working for God. We are a team, a family, and he is in control.

How difficult is it for you to accept other people doing things differently than you?

Best Consultant

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and do not lean on your own understanding.*

PROVERBS 3:5 NASB

The point of King Solomon's message was not to promote ignorance or discourage sound reasoning but to caution us that even the most intelligent of human understanding is fallible and subject to bias. Any of us can be misled because we do not have the full picture the way God does. Blind faith does not require us to stumble forward in the dark, uncertain of whether God will catch us or not. We can with certainty trust the Lord because he has given us more than substantial evidence that he is faithful and worthy of our confidence. His track record is flawless.

Leaning on God is much safer than leaning on our own understanding. At times he may ask us to do unorthodox things, but we know that his way is better than ours; his perspective is full while ours is partial, and his promises are sure even if ours are not. When God's call contradicts what we think we know, it is always best to trust him.

**What do you have a difficult time
trusting God with?**

The Best Promise

*"If I go and prepare a place for you,
I will come back and take you to be with me
that you also may be where I am."*

JOHN 14:3 NIV

This world is not our ultimate destination, so our investments here should consider their eternal worth. We do not exist for this life alone but for the hope of an eternal home with Jesus. Although our intention may be to live intentionally and offer praise to God while here on earth, it is easy to succumb to the temptations and distractions we are constantly inundated with.

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We must regularly remind ourselves of our true nature and calling. As children of the King, we were created for his kingdom and not simply this temporary dominion. Our treasures are not found here, for they are securely reserved with the Father. Even our hopes and dreams should not be wasted on present passing pleasures, for our eyes are focused forward to that wondrous moment when Christ returns for us. On that day, every eternal investment will be realized, and all other pursuits will perish.

**How can you help remind your spouse
of their true nature and calling?**

Brook of Bliss

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

PSALM 23:1-3 ESV

As a former shepherd, King David understood the importance of a shepherd to the life of a sheep. Without a shepherd, sheep are vulnerable to all the elements and dangers of the wild. Even finding food and water would be a struggle without a kind and knowledgeable leader. A good shepherd offers protection, refreshment, and direction. David confidently declared that God was like a good shepherd and he lacked nothing under God's watchful care.

We choose to walk in righteousness, but God establishes our paths and helps us every step of the way. When we stumble, he brings restoration. When we get lost, he comes and finds us again. In his care, we are safe from all threats of danger. We find peace and contentment when we follow him and submit ourselves to his watchful gaze.

What happens to your peace and contentment when you start to pursue other pleasures in life at the expense of your relationship with God?

Covenant of Love

Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.

DEUTERONOMY 7:9 NIV

Vulnerability can be scary because it requires that we open our hearts to the possibility of getting hurt or rejected. But in being vulnerable, we also open our hearts to love and be loved. When we get married, we open our hearts and lives and pray that our vulnerability is protected not abused. There will always be times when we disappoint each other, and we have to continue to learn how to love from God.

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With our heavenly Father, we never need to be afraid of vulnerability. He won't let us down, he will not abandon us, and he cherishes our efforts of obedience. His covenant of love is assured. Our hearts are safe trusting in him because he will always be faithful. He rewards obedience with blessings and pours out his love on us. He does not owe us anything, and still he binds himself in a love covenant with us.

**Do you have an honest and vulnerable
relationship with your spouse?**

Never Alone

*Lord, even when your path takes me through
the valley of deepest darkness,
fear will never conquer me, for you already have!
You remain close to me and lead me through it all the way.
Your authority is my strength and my peace.
The comfort of your love takes away my fear.
I'll never be lonely, for you are near.*

PSALM 23:4 TPT

An unstoppable sort of boldness springs forth in our hearts when we remember that evil no longer has a hold on us. God defeated sin and set us free. We are reminded to never be afraid when evil rises against us because although it may appear to be a daunting foe, it is powerless to cause us harm. The Holy Spirit lives in us and has ordained our steps.

When we place our trust completely in God, our lives are forever changed, and the alteration in how we live testifies clearly to others who know us. Let us be a witness to those who are afraid and lost that there is freedom in Jesus Christ. Submitting ourselves and our ways to his perfect plan guides us away from sin and darkness and into safety. We are no longer subject to anything but the Lord, for he is our protector.

**When you are gripped with fear,
what promises can you cling to?**

Shield of Salvation

*You have also given me the shield of Your salvation;
Your gentleness has made me great.*

2 SAMUEL 22:36 NKJV

The word *gentleness* used in this verse comes from the Greek word *gnanvah* which is also commonly translated as *meekness*. It seems outlandish that meekness could make someone great, yet that is exactly what David claimed in this song he wrote after God rescued him from being murdered by King Saul. No matter what hardships David faced, he had faith that God would sustain him. He knew his best defense was not his strength, his sword, or even his sling; his protection came from the Almighty whose salvation was like a shield all around him.

As we pursue the Lord, it quickly becomes obvious that we have not chosen a life of ease. God will help us overcome, and he will even make us great if we learn to trust his gentle hand. He is our shield and our refuge, our defender and our ultimate judge. It is better to be in his watchful care than to erect every earthly security we can imagine.

**What is greatness in regard
to the kingdom of God?**

DECEMBER 10

Undivided

*Teach me your way, LORD,
that I may rely on your faithfulness;
give me an undivided heart,
that I may fear your name.*

PSALM 86:11 NIV

Reliance on God's goodness and a reverent fear of his power leads to a proper understanding of who he is. His ways are superior to ours, and it is to our detriment to forsake his laws in favor of our own self interests. Instead of depending on ourselves—our limited strength and flawed logic—we turn to the tried and true faithfulness of God. Our hearts should be undivided, otherwise we will be torn in different directions as we ineffectively attempt to serve two masters.

We must decide to follow either ourselves or God. Since he has proven to be far more dependable than we are, it would be foolish to give our allegiance to anyone or anything other than him. With undivided hearts and reverent fear, our own desires are cast aside and become less attractive over time. In exchange, we find unbroken faithfulness, timeless promises, love that supersedes everything, and a committed Father. Although we stumble, he is there to catch us and help us make the right decisions.

**How can you and your spouse be undivided
in your allegiance to God and still successful
in your tasks on earth?**

Temple Work

"Be strong and courageous, and do the work.

Don't be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD God, my God, is with you.

He will not fail you or forsake you.

He will see to it that all work related to the Temple of the Lord is finished."

1 CHRONICLES 28:20 NLT

Just as David reminded his chosen workers not to become discouraged as they were doing the work of the Lord, we need to remember who we work for and find encouragement in that. On difficult, draining days when we have worked all day for our families with nothing tangible to show for it, we can remember that it is ultimately for the Lord that we labor. God no longer resides in a temple, but in the hearts of his faithful followers.

Whether we are serving our spouse, teaching our children, helping a friend, or obeying a boss, we are serving the Lord first. Whatever task God has given us to do, we can rest assured knowing that he has given us all the tools necessary to succeed: all the strength, patience, wisdom, and valor that is required. It is his work that he has invited us into, and he will see it to completion. Take courage; remember that God is with you and do the work!

**What has the Lord tasked you with?
How are you working
to build up your marriage?**

Rooted in Christ

Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD.

*For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters,
which spreads out its roots by the river,
and will not fear when heat comes;*

*But its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought,
nor will cease from yielding fruit.*

JEREMIAH 17:7-8 NKJV

It is wiser to put our hope in the Lord than to search for security in anything which perishes. Although it may be tempting to try and feel secure in a relationship, a house, or with a steady income, these things are all temporal and subject to change. Even a committed marriage is not guaranteed to always last. Sometimes we even try to find security by controlling our environment.

Placing our hope in anything other than the capable hands of God is like building a house on shifting sand. By having faith in the Lord and trusting his words, we find true refuge. When everything else is being shaken, we will not be because our roots go deep into his promises and he upholds us. The winds of change can never destroy us if we build ourselves on the rock of Christ rather than the tumultuous, unpredictable platforms of the world.

When everything in life seems to be going wrong, how can you and your spouse encourage each other to run to God first?

Everlasting and Unfailing

*"I have loved you with an everlasting love;
I have drawn you with unfailing kindness."*

JEREMIAH 31:3 NIV

The Israelites often forsook God and ran after other idols or chose to serve themselves. They would be struck with persecution again and go running back home to the Lord. Time and time again, he received them back. Usually there were consequences for their poor decisions, but God never turns aside a contrite heart.

Our true repentance should not present only when we need help, but the Lord understands the weakness of humans and he continues to welcome us back into his arms. His unfailing kindness pursues us and saves us from ourselves. Like a loving and protective father, he cares about his wayward children and will do whatever it takes to bring them into the safety of his home. Even when our faith is weak, he will accept us if we humbly ask him to. He helps us to mature in faith and gives us ample amounts of grace. His love is everlasting and his compassion is certain.

**Do you sometimes feel unworthy
to go to God after you have sinned?**

Pursued by Love

Why would I fear the future?

For your goodness and love pursue me all the days of my life.

Then afterward, when my life is through,

I'll return to your glorious presence to be forever with you!

PSALM 23:6 TPT

Every day of our lives, God has had his hand on us. Even now his love surrounds and protects us. He is dependable, consistent, and loving, and that will never change. We do not need to fear the future because we have seen the way the Almighty has cared for his people in the past, and we have heard his promises to care for his people in the future. His character is both trustworthy and constant, so our faith is sure.

Even after our lives end, God continues to take care of us and has prepared an eternal home for us within his kingdom. If the whole world was in turmoil, and everything we knew to be static was suddenly shaken, still he would remain immovable because he is greater than any force in the universe. All things good and loving originate with him. Our home and our rest are found in him because being in his arms is the safest place we know. We truly have nothing to fear.

**How can you and your spouse rest
in God's immovable character?**

Sharpening Iron

*Iron sharpens iron,
so one man sharpens another.*

PROVERBS 27:17 NASB

Rarely does the Lord lead his children to isolation. Under normal conditions, he intends our spiritual growth to be a communal affair and offers numerous examples throughout the Scriptures to portray this. We need each other to work through the weaknesses in our faith. Without trusted friends to provide us with advice, encouragement, and warnings, we are left to our own interpretations and perspectives. Our spouses can offer us valuable wisdom because they sometimes see what we cannot. They are gifts from God, and the more we embrace this gift with humility the more we will benefit from it.

It is important that we exercise persistence to stick with our friends through good and bad times so we can experience true friendship rather than casual friendliness. When this proverb was written, the ancient way of sharpening iron was a lengthy, arduous process. The labor was not quickly completed, nor are true friendships rapidly formed. Surround yourself with friends who are willing to go the distance with you. Commit to growing together with your spouse and other friends in honesty, kindness, and love.

**How do you and your spouse regularly
support and encourage each other?**

Prayer of Blessing

*He took them in His arms and began blessing them,
laying His hands on them.*

MARK 10:16 NASB

Jesus made it very clear that all were welcome to come to him; Jews, Gentiles, sinners, sick, and even children. He was not playing the part of an esteemed celebrity, but a caring healer whose arms were open. When the disciples tried to stop children from bothering Jesus, he instead called them to him. The word *blessing* comes from the Greek word *eulogeo*, which means either to celebrate or consecrate.

Whether we are parents ourselves or we have other children in our lives, we can easily become preoccupied with labeling things childish nonsense, yet Jesus tells us to be more like children. Instead of negating their whimsical innocence, we should celebrate it and learn from it. Jesus celebrated the young ones just the way they were. It is vital to our spiritual growth that we put aside our pride, learn from the children God has put in our lives, and go before God in a similar, unassuming, fully dependent way. Children are not a burden but a blessing that should be embraced.

**What children in your life have you
and your spouse been blessed by?
What have you learned from them?**

Important Things

*The important thing is faith—
the kind of faith that works through love.*

GALATIANS 5:6 NCV

Ever since the world began, God has proven his faithfulness to us. His goodness has never wavered, and his character is unchanging. We can confidently place our faith in him because he has always been and always will be faithful and true. In the moments we waver in our convictions to him, he still accepts and uses what little faith we have to offer.

With faith as small as a seed, he can move mountains. With the most meager offerings of obedience, he can conquer nations. There are ample examples in the Bible of weak, broken people who he used to bring about his purposes. Being usable has nothing to do with our strength and everything to do with our surrender. Even though we cannot see what is coming in the future, we know we can trust our good God.

**How can you and your spouse encourage
each other in your levels of faith?**

Unlimited Forgiveness

*"He arose and came to his father.
But when he was still a great way off,
his father saw him and had compassion,
and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him."*

LUKE 15:20 NKJV

We are God's children; his beloved creation. Although we fall short, he extends compassion. His kindness is beyond our comprehension and he upholds his faithfulness even when we do not. His love is not dependent on our virtue; he loves because that is his character and he has chosen us to be the recipients.

When we fail to represent our Father and we wander off his path, he continues to call us and leads us back with immeasurable patience. In times when we squander his gifts and act out rebelliously, he waits with anticipation for us to return. We are never too far or too late for our Father's love to reach us. If we go to him in repentance, he promises to receive us with open arms and celebration. Our mistakes do not intimidate him, for his love is bigger than our sin.

**Is there someone you need to forgive?
Is there something you need
to ask God's forgiveness for?**

Gentle Rain

*Let my teaching fall on you like rain;
let my speech settle like dew.
Let my words fall like rain on tender grass,
like gentle showers on young plants.*

DEUTERONOMY 32:2 NLT

We may ask why God does not simply fix us immediately and why he allows us and others to continue to err, but that would be to misunderstand our Father's longsuffering and grace. He does not drown us with his lessons or allow his mysteries to pummel us like waves. True to his kind nature, he patiently leads us in understanding, saturates us with his truth, and allows us to drink in his teachings like a cool, gentle rain. He shows grace for our ignorance and demonstrates patience for our growth.

God's expectation is not that we comprehend everything instantly but that we follow him into maturity. His words are refreshing to our thirsty hearts; they are like a drink of cool water when we are weary. His revelations offer us hope through the hard times like morning dew on the grass. It is by his words that we mature and through his lessons that we grow stronger.

Which of the Lord's lessons have you been grappling with lately?

Fixed Thoughts

*Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable,
and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable.*

Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.

PHILIPPIANS 4:8 NLT

Daily we are inundated with bad news, naysayers, and evil deeds. We can catch the rip tide that draws us under the water, and it is so easy to drown in the negativity of life. But Jesus brought good news! He is the living water and refreshment our souls desperately crave. Fixing our eyes on him offers much needed clarity and brings respite from the world's worries and hate. His wonder and beauty are all around us; we consider his righteousness and find limitless joy. We see exquisiteness in nature and all creation, and there is a calm which takes up residence in our souls.

Recognizing God's truth amidst the lies of the enemy gives us profound peace. Purity in the world offers glimpses of eternity. Nothing can destroy what we know to be good, true, honorable, and worthy when our eyes are on Jesus. Further still, when our gaze is set on him, we see even more heavenly beauty, truth, righteousness, goodness, and purity. He is so worthy of our praise and full attention.

**What distractions draw your mind to things
contrary to the list provided in Philippians 4:8?**

Important Instructions

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

2 TIMOTHY 3:16 NKJV

It is easy to occasionally slip into a habit of reading the Bible for the sake of the action itself and without expecting to be moved by the experience. We start to view the Scriptures as just another book rather than the living Word which feeds our souls and leads us through life's most treacherous patches. The truth is that when our hearts are open to receive the wisdom found in the Bible, God intends to show up and change us from the inside out. Even with our small faith as a starting point, he can transform our minds and our hearts to receive his truth with renewed vigor.

When we are unwittingly closed to gathering new insights, God is still faithful to break through our immaturity and shape us into the kind of people who learn to go before him expectantly. When we learn to turn to the Scriptures for every matter, and we recognize the treasure this tool is, we find ourselves filled with thankfulness and an unquenchable desire to grow closer to God.

**Have you and your spouse
prioritized time to read the Bible?**

Hidden Word

*Your word I have hidden in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.*

PSALM 119:11 NKJV

Living a godly life hinges on knowing the Word of God. How can we obey and follow God if we do not know what he has said? Debatable theology and disunifying views are rampant within Christendom, and they cause great confusion and division among its members. As the Biblical lines blur throughout our culture, it becomes clearer and clearer how imperative it is that we hide God's Word in our hearts. The Bible is God's will and plan, recorded so that we would understand how God expects us to live. We will experience an unmatched joy and fulfillment when we do what we are intended to do, but we can only learn what that is through prayer and reading the Scriptures.

Those who know God and are familiar with his words decrease their chances of sinning in error or of becoming confused by false teaching. The risks diminish greatly because they are wise to the Word and cannot be easily fooled. It is important to read the Scriptures and take them to heart so we remember them when making moral decisions.

**What Scriptures can you and your spouse
memorize together?**

Contrary Living

*I will sacrifice to You
With the voice of thanksgiving.
That which I have vowed I will pay.
Salvation is from the LORD.*

JONAH 2:9 NASB

There will be, and possibly have been, times in our life when we have to choose God over a normal existence. Offering thanks to the Lord, declaring that salvation is through him alone, and speaking the Word of truth is not typical. This passage is one of a man who had abandoned God's path because it seemed absurd to him. Now he returns to his God with the words, "I will sacrifice to you with the voice of thanksgiving."

We may find ourselves far from God in certain seasons of our lives. At other times, our sin nature will rise up from within. In both these situations we have to decide: do we make the atypical choice and act like Jesus, or do we live as the world around us lives? At the crossroads of God's way and the way of the world, our hearts must know that salvation is from the Lord, and all other ways lead us astray.

**Once you make a wrong decision,
how can you turn around and get back
on track without continuing to let that
decision lead you down a dark road?**

DECEMBER 24

The Messiah

*"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you;
he is the Messiah, the Lord."*

LUKE 2:11 NIV

The Lord Almighty did not owe us salvation. There was no requirement for him to take on humanity, subject himself to the miseries of life and death, and become the perfect atonement for our sins. Not only was he willing to undergo all of this, but he did so with great joy because he knew that the outcome would be our freedom. His love for us is beyond measure!

The manner in which he was born, lived, and died each demonstrated the greatest humility a King could ever possess, and a deeper love than any human has ever known. He came to overthrow death, erase the stains of sin, and set free the captives, but he also made friends, healed the sick, and communed with his people. There is no way to fathom or explain a love like this; we can only choose to gratefully accept it and pronounce him Lord and Messiah.

**Why did Jesus come as a baby?
Why did he come first to Bethlehem?**

As a Baby

*To us a child is born,
To us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

ISAIAH 9:6 ESV

Our Lord and Savior was the embodiment of the eternal message sent to earth from heaven. He did not arrive with a sword proclaiming justice and striking down his enemies but came as a baby to teach the weak how to love and win his enemies over with grace. The self-righteous cried out for the blood of heathens without understanding what the consequences of that would be.

The brokenhearted who Christ came to heal soaked in his words and were moved to repentance by his presence. He came into this world in the most approachable, attainable way possible. Jesus came as a leader but also a friend because his desire was to be with his people. He leads fairly and lovingly, and by his example he counsels us in the way we should go. He fills us with power to do what is right and he brings peace to our anxious hearts.

**What did Jesus have to teach us
by coming to earth as a baby?**

Perfect Faithfulness

*LORD, you are my God;
I will exalt you and praise your name,
for in perfect faithfulness you have done wonderful things,
things planned long ago.*

ISAIAH 25:1 NIV

Upon first encounter, this verse seems uplifting and straightforward. Although it is that, there are several other layers to it as well. It holds a clear testimony of who God is and what he has done for us. The important aspects of praise and adoration are professed. It clearly acknowledges that God is our Creator and the source of everything which exists. We, like Isaiah, acknowledge his reign over us and all that concerns us, and we accept his infinite love and care for us.

Praise from a thankful heart is what God desires, so when we go to him this is exactly the kind of attitude we should bring. As the sheep of his pasture, let us worship and bow down before him. Let us bring our praise, our hurts, and our questions to him for he desires to be all things for us. God has done many wonderful miracles; things he had planned long before even the creation of the world. We are indeed loved.

**What is something wonderful God
has done for you that you would like
to thank him for today?**

The Sword

The word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

HEBREWS 4:12 NIV

The Bible was never intended to be viewed simply as a historic document that we arbitrarily read and study for the sake of obedience only. Its message is alive and plays an active role in how we conduct ourselves. God's Word provides a guideline for us to evaluate all other agendas, and it offers answers to so many questions. We need to live and breathe it, committing it to our hearts, not haphazardly thumbing through its pages for a last-resort reply or quick answers. When we have truly invested ourselves in it, and we know it, live by it, and take it to heart, our attitude changes and our minds begin to clear.

Only God's Word can discern all things, see deep into our souls, and distinguish righteousness from lawlessness. Without the Bible to guide us, we would be like little lost lambs, confused and vulnerable. Praise God he guards and guides us, entrusting us with both his Scriptures and his Spirit. We have been given all that we need for a life of godliness and purpose.

How is God's Word like a sharp sword?

Consider the Creator

*When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have ordained,
what is man that You are mindful of him,
and the son of man that You visit him?*

PSALM 8:3-4 NKJV

We experience such exhilaration while exploring the wonders of nature, yet often disregard the Creator from whose imagination every natural wonder originated. We fail to give him credit and forsake any exploratory notions of realizing him. Like any of us, God wants to be known and desires a relationship with us. He is neither drab nor boring, but creative and powerful. The mountains and the oceans were his idea, as were the clouds and the stars.

Mesmerized humans will even misdirect worship toward the heavens, falling short of the one who rules them from his heavenly throne. Far more brilliant, majestic, and exciting than any of the wonders we have witnessed in the world is he who fashioned them all. Even more incredible is the realization that he created it to share with us, and that he has chosen us to be the recipients of earth and the inheritors of heaven!

When you consider your marriage and how wonderful it is, do you consider the one who created it and brought you together?

Rule Followers

*Joyful are people of integrity,
who follow the instructions of the LORD.
Joyful are those who obey his laws
and search for him with all their hearts.*

PSALM 119:1-2 NLT

From our earthly vantage point, it may appear that pursuing a lifestyle contrary to what God has instructed us will offer more excitement and satisfaction, but it is a lie intended to deceive and destroy. Our hearts were crafted with a purpose: to worship the Creator. When we are faced with a choice between immediate gratification and difficult obedience, we can know for certain that following the voice of God will be the option that gives us true joy and fulfillment.

We embrace our purpose when we decide to honor God rather than be swept away by our own whims and ambitions. Integrous individuals can be recognized by their honesty, dependability, and self-control. They are not enticed by their own worldly desires or pressures they receive from their culture; they have devoted themselves to God's service which gives them a framework to follow. Their joy comes from knowing they will one day be with God, and it thrills them to serve him with their whole hearts.

**How can you and your spouse steer
each other away from temptation
that offers immediate gratification?**

Foundation

*"From the beginning I told you what would happen in the end.
A long time ago I told you things that have not yet happened.
When I plan something, it happens. What I want to do, I will do."*

ISAIAH 46:10 NCV

Blind faith does not mean that we robotically trust a source that we are unsure of, or that forgoing the urge to question our faith is somehow praiseworthy. In fact, God encourages us to question and test all things which we have been taught because he knows he will pass every test. Following our Maker means that we can confidently march into an unknown future and obey his directions even when they do not make sense to us because we know that he is faithful and good.

Although there are many mysteries which have not been revealed to us, from the beginning of time God has explained what his ultimate plan is. He has not withheld his intentions from us; he invites us to be active participants in its unfolding. Our hope is sure, and our faith is secure because God has made himself known to us. One day we will be with him in glory, just as he has told us from the very beginning.

**What do you think was God's purpose
in revealing his plan to his children?**

Led by God

I praise the LORD because he advises me.

Even at night, I feel his leading.

I keep the LORD before me always.

Because he is close by my side,

I will not be hurt.

PSALM 16:7-8 NCV

It is difficult to live without direction, without purpose, and without instruction. Like a ship on the ocean without any control, we would be hopelessly lost without God's Word to guide us. If we did not have the counsel of the Scriptures to save us from the devil's schemes and the world's wickedness, we would veer off in the wrong direction and be dashed upon the rocks.

This psalm offers reassurance that if we keep steady with the Lord we will not be overcome when the waves begin to crash. It is certain that trouble will come into our lives, but we can also be certain that God will be with us in those moments, and we will have nothing to fear if we keep him before us. Holding fast to him is the safest place we can be, especially in a world that is uncertain and confused. Without God, there is much to be feared. With God, we have eternal security, unbreakable confidence, and unending love.

**As you and your spouse prepare
for this coming year, have you asked God
to go before you?
Do you trust him to lead you
and take care of you?**

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