

# APPLES OF GOLD

365

DEVOTIONS  
FOR LEADERS



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## APPLES OF GOLD

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HE SHEPHERDED THEM  
WITH A PURE HEART  
AND GUIDED THEM  
WITH HIS SKILLFUL HANDS.

PSALM 78:72 CSB

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## INTRODUCTION

Being a good leader isn't easy. It requires courage, humility, integrity, and compassion. Jesus spoke of true leadership as having the ability to be a remarkable servant.

To be a successful leader, you must determine to follow the example of Christ no matter how difficult. There will be a cost. You may be scrutinized, wrongly accused, and pushed toward exhaustion, but take heart; there is a reward waiting for you if you do not give up. And it will be worth it.

*Apples of Gold* is a daily devotional for leaders like you. As you read these inspiring meditations, Scriptures, and prayers, be encouraged that God is for you, and he will give you everything you need to face the challenges you encounter each day.

Rest for a moment in his presence and let his grace and peace wash over you. Out of the abundance of his love and wisdom, you will find the strength to persevere in your service to others.

# JANUARY



“in everything, therefore,  
treat people the same way you want them to treat you,  
for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

MATTHEW 7:12 NASB

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## A GOOD LEADER

“Select from all the people some capable, honest men who fear God and hate bribes. Appoint them as leaders over groups of one thousand, one hundred, fifty, and ten.”

EXODUS 18:21 NLT

Of all the characteristics that make a good leader, integrity is second to none. It runs alongside the ability to enjoy who we are and to protect the character that makes us unique. Also, a strong leader fears God, humbly recognizing the importance of seeking continuous help, and of growing in understanding. We must also keep ourselves unstained by the ambivalence of indecision, marginal behavior, and self-indulgence which marks the impulsive and the weak.

As you begin this year, continue to posture yourself at the feet of Christ. The Holy Spirit gives wisdom, and in waiting on him you will form the insight that is gained through practiced listening and perpetual learning. This will help you lead others and provide inspiration that only he can give. Know that you have been selected by God and be encouraged that you have started this year seeking first his kingdom. Remember the words of Christ then, that in seeking his kingdom first, other things will be added in due time.

*Who has appointed you to lead, and who should lead you?*

## BEING PURPOSEFUL

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

EPHESIANS 1:11-12 NIV

Jesus resolved to save us and completed his task when he suffered, was killed, buried, and then resurrected. He did not relent in pursuing his goal. As a child, he sought his Father in the temple. As an adult, he purposefully suffered to the point of death. Now, as the resurrected Savior, he continues in prayer for us. When he does return as the warrior King, he will complete his goal by restoring creation to the Godhead.

When you see a person committed to his goal like Jesus was (and still is), it is worthy of admiration. As you think about this year and what you choose to purposefully do as Jesus did, be fervent in what you set your heart toward. As you do, you will naturally lead others, and may it be according to the plan of him who works to conform you to Christ for his praise and glory.

*How can you encourage others to pursue Christ?*

## PUT TOGETHER

An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, skillful in teaching, not overindulging in wine, not a bully but gentle, not contentious, free from the love of money,

1 TIMOTHY 3:2-3 NASB

Wow, what a person these verses describe—so collected and put together! No one can say a bad word about them. This leader is controlled, wise, and honored by others. They open their wallets willingly, forgive those who do harm, and seek to help others live in peace. They have no vices but are filled with the Spirit of Christ.

If our friends were to be like this person, what would that do for us? We would feel secure in our friendships with them, for sure. We would be inspired and enjoy being with them. Our key purpose as leaders is to not focus on being free from the love of money or wine, but rather to employ these attributes and to encourage those we lead to be more like this. Our takeaway is to increasingly pursue the Holy Spirit in our lives and to demonstrate this in our leadership of others.

*Can you perfect yourself?*

## LIFEGIVING TRUST

“Just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life,  
so also the Son gives life to those he wants to.”

JOHN 5:21 NCV

When people follow, they do so for a reason. Some seek guidance or purpose, but many just want to have someone tell them what to do so they can work and pay their bills. It may be surprising, but a large number of people do not want to lead. It is a challenge and a burden which many do not want to bear. That alone tells you that you are called to leadership for a reason. You have a vision, a purpose, and the sort of gifts that are intended to be shared with those around you.

When you think about those who follow you, what do you provide? What can you realistically do for them outside your natural gifts? Remember this: the Father has chosen you, and just as he equipped his Son, he will enable you to give beyond what you yourself are capable of. Trust him and reside daily in the knowledge that he cares more about those you lead than you do. Allow him to give you energy and life to share with others because Jesus is a trustworthy leader of leaders.

*When you look at those who follow your leadership, what do they need from you?*

## BUILDING TOGETHER

Do not neglect your gift... Be diligent in these matters;  
give yourself wholly to them,  
so that everyone may see your progress.

1 TIMOTHY 4:14-15 NIV

At one point in time, mankind gathered together to build a tower to heaven. So God intervened. Though we don't know the full scope of what was occurring at that time, it makes us wonder: what limits are there in humanity when we are inspired, unified, committed, hardworking, and industrious?

When we pause to think about those we lead and how we can inspire them, we must allow ourselves time to imagine what we can all accomplish together. As leaders, we need to encourage development and help others realize their potential individually as well as in a group. It is why we lead—to motivate personal growth and group productivity! Think about this: you can inspire others to come together and use their gifts to do things they could not realize on their own. It is your diligent thoughtfulness and planning that will lead others to progress.

*How can you inspire unity and purpose in your teams?*

JANUARY 6

## ONE CRITERION

“The Father gives me the people who are mine.  
Every one of them will come to me,  
and I will always accept them.”

JOHN 6:37 NCV

Jesus' acceptance of each one of his people is based on one criterion: faith. In our world, acceptance has become more like tolerance. We now agree to put up with beliefs and behaviors with which we don't agree. But Jesus makes it clear that he will accept anyone who comes to him. Herein lies the difference between our tolerant world and our acceptance of Christ: no one comes to Jesus without a battle. There is a cost to be received by him. When we truly allow for self-introspection, we recognize our brokenness and shame. We come to understand our true state especially as it is reflected in a holy God. His acceptance of us is unequivocal and final because to come to him means we know what we truly are like and what we honestly need.

You know your issues, and God knows them too. But you also rejoice in this, because though your sins are like scarlet, he washes you daily until you are as white as snow.

*Can you take time before this busy day to rejoice in God's forgiveness and to be ready to share that forgiveness with those you lead?*

JANUARY 7

## RICHES OF GOODNESS

Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

ROMANS 2:4 NKJV

The riches of God's goodness are found in the offering of Jesus who bore our sins. Because of this sacrifice, God is patient with us. He suffers willingly to wait for the end of all things. He is not pleased about our continual tendency toward sin, but in his kindness, he allows for our repentance. None of us are without sin. We fail every day in the standard he has set for us. When we recognize his mercy, we can turn to him and find grace and forgiveness. His goodness leads us to repentance.

In a similar manner, you may care for and tolerate the failures in those you lead. This allows for growth and maturity. Hopefully in this place of grace, people will find the ability to rise to a new level of personal understanding and vocational strength.

*In your walk as a leader and an influencer, how can you be mindful of the goodness and patience which God has for you and therefore allow that to help you make your decisions when dealing with others?*

## GOOD CHARACTER

This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.

REVELATION 14:12 NIV

To become a person of good character is a noble quest. It takes sacrifice, determination, and practice. It is composed of many traits such as trustworthiness, compassion, responsibility, and respect. Good character is formed over time; it is not purchased or coerced into our personhood. It is fashioned through difficulty, much like diamonds are created through pressure and pearls grow because of an irritant. A good character develops as we allow trouble and tribulation to work patiently on our broken, immature selves.

We do not have to look far to find trials in life. We are bombarded with ethical issues, relational disruptions, and personal temptations. We are allowing good character to form by submitting to Christ in the ways we face our troubles. However, proper examples within our society are lacking. We are now the most indebted, medicated, addicted, and overweight population in known history. This is not a society learning good character. Rather, we are running deeper into godlessness and immaturity. Our good characters stand as a foil to our culture because of Jesus.

*What opportunities do you have in leadership to demonstrate a true fortitude for the good character which Christ has established in you?*

## TENSION RELIEF

One thing I ask from the LORD,  
this only do I seek:  
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD  
all the days of my life,  
to gaze on the beauty of the LORD  
and to seek him in his temple.

PSALM 27:4 NIV

One of the difficulties of being in leadership is the constant pressure to rely on your resources. Whether you need to call in people or make use of something you own, your mind is probably consumed with whatever you have available at this time. But your challenges and your resources have already been brought to this moment by God. David, in his brokenness, cried out to his heavenly Father for help to abide with him. He knew the value of being in God's presence so he would have everything available to him that he would need to get through the trials he was facing in that moment.

Our comfort with today's verse is in recognizing that our brokenness is foreshadowed in the person of David. It seems that God allows us these difficulties, so we continue to fight our own natures yet always long for him. Our joys and accomplishments in this lifetime are unparalleled by the beauty and perfection that is reserved for us in eternity.

*How can you fight the good fight as David did?*

## MORAL EXCELLENCE

“He who committed no sin,  
nor was any deceit found in his mouth.”

1 PETER 2:22 NASB

A virtue is a quality that has good merit and morality; a characteristic that exudes moral excellence. The virtue of truthfulness, for example, is that it demonstrates integrity, honesty, and forthrightness. Our lives can be full of trickery and deceit. Mostly we do it to ourselves, fooling our conscience into small decisions of depravity and allowing false narratives to entertain and sidetrack our minds. We ask ourselves how else we are to get by in a world that demands so much and gives so little in return. We are supposed to excel, compete well, be strong, look attractive, and be great. Yet we are typically not very great, so we make things up, bend the truth, or tell little lies.

Despite Jesus having these same struggles in his humanity while he walked on earth, because he's also God he was full of virtue. His character was unstained by any need to perform. He was content with his position in life and grounded by his relationship with his Father. This is what enabled him to be righteous and incorruptible. You can also make the Father your foundation and walk with the goal of showing others the same integrity that Jesus had as a human.

*How do you lay everything at Christ's feet and allow him to guide your decisions through his Spirit?*

## SPORTS CAPTAIN

“Thomas, now that you’ve seen me, you believe. But there are those who have never seen me with their eyes but have believed in me with their hearts, and they will be blessed even more!”

JOHN 20:29 TPT

Being given the title of captain of a sports team is an honor. Sometimes coaches pick the least expected player for such roles, and when they do, teammates wonder about the thinking behind such a decision. What is it about that player that made them good enough to be a captain?

Empowering someone is not always about recognizing leadership ability that is already evident. Rather, it is about identifying attributes that could potentially make a great leader. After all, leaders are made, not born. A good coach can see what a team needs and equip specific people on the team who are capable of becoming that leader. Often teams have more than one captain. Some people lead well because of their attributes, and some are empowered to lead because a coach sees future abilities and wants to encourage them. Jesus has appointed you to lead.

*You may recognize some of the gifts God has given you. Do you think he has more for you to find and develop in this position of leadership?*

## CHOOSE TODAY

“If you refuse to serve the LORD, then choose today whom you will serve. But as for me and my family, we will serve the LORD.”

JOSHUA 24:15 NLT

There is something inspirational about a decisive person; they proactively and confidently make decisions and take responsibility for their domain. The impetuous are foolish and make rash decisions while reacting, but those who are decisive with wisdom are admired. This is not a matter of semantics, but rather about the ability to weigh a situation and employ experience and wisdom. The impulsive person does not think before they act. The decisive one considers their way and takes action. This is what makes a leader stand out.

However, our decisiveness can be paralyzed by fear of failure. We can allow our minds to start comparing and worrying about the consequences. We can start to dread the ridicule with results with a wrong decision, especially as leaders. These fears and doubts are relieved when we surrender our decisions to Christ and recognize that our hope lays in him and his final word over us. Ultimately, when we serve the Lord, our choices are committed to him. We serve him and him first, and by submitting our hearts to him we can trust the Holy Spirit to help us in our decisiveness.

*Can you trust his Spirit to lead you in your current position?*

JANUARY 13

## HOPE SUPPLY

“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.”

JOHN 11:25-26 NIV

There is something incredible about hope and placing our beliefs in something that gives us strength in the moment. We see people around us demoralized, confused, and uncertain, and yet we have the answers so many people are looking for. We have the certainty that we will be resurrected one day and that our lives are in the hands of a completely faithful leader. His promises are certain, and his Word has never failed.

Your leadership position can also give others hope and that can feel overwhelming at times. It is a weight that not all people can bear. But you can because you rely on the greatest leader. Jesus is the one who will strengthen you and as you lean into him you can remind yourself of the promises of his Word. The courage you receive from his truth enables you to equip others with that beautiful hope.

*How does your understanding of his promises help you share his hope with others?*

## WELL PLEASED

When Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

MATTHEW 3:16-17 ESV

When you consider the life of Jesus, you start to realize that he did not spend energy working to please anyone. He even suffered bad opinions about himself willingly and with admirable strength. We typically don't suffer well unless it gains us something; one of those "somethings" is the approval of others. We work long hours and boast about our achievements as we seek the adulation of others.

Oh, how hard we work to gain approval! Everyone does it. We may attempt to be approved by some in authority, peers, family members, friends, or social groups. There is a lot of approval to be earned out there, so we must work hard to get it. Our desire for approval is not all bad; it is in us to drive us toward Christ. Ultimately, and what will satisfy us completely and properly, is to know his approval of us. And he does approve of us as we seek to do his will. He loves the fact that you are seeking him now and enjoys the time you spend in his presence.

*What makes you valuable to God?*

JANUARY 15

## A SATISFIED LIFE

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.

PHILIPPIANS 4:12 NIV

Leadership carries the weight of needing to ensure that those you serve are content. It is troubling at times to have followers who are upset, especially if it happens frequently. We all know this ends in attrition. But teaching contentment is not all on us as leaders because we can only influence those we lead. We do not ultimately own the responsibility for the attitudes of others.

Our best efforts for the positive influence of others comes in how we exemplify a satisfied life in Christ. Contentment forms when we recognize that God is our everything and our spirit is awakened to that need. We know who the provider of all that we truly need is! We look to him alone as our source. But understanding that premise and knowing it at a heart level are two different things! Discipline yourself to depend on God. If you struggle with dependence on God, try fasting as that can provoke our spirits toward God and learned contentment. Be encouraged to take time to learn the secret of a hidden life in Christ, the abstained satisfied soul.

*Does your team look at you and see that you are content?*

JANUARY 16

## PRIVATE GENEROSITY

Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD,  
and he will repay him for his deed.

PROVERBS 19:17 ESV

When you are in leadership, you have to make decisions that, at times, no one else takes part in and no one else may notice. These are not bad decisions; they are just what need to be done. You may make good decisions that no one gives you credit for or even notices.

Take comfort in the fact that God notices both your thoughts and your actions. He sees those moments when you give beyond your own capabilities or make choices that can impact the bottom line for the betterment of others. God's greatest concern is not money but in how you use money to affect the lives of others. He loves integrity in his people and observing the decisions you make as you seek him first in all things. Continue to allow his Spirit to lead you and listen for those quiet directions which he wants to give you. Know that in time, he will reward you greatly for your private and purposeful obedience.

*To whom specifically does God want you to be generous?*

## STRENGTH TO CHANGE

He gives more grace. Therefore it says,  
“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

JAMES 4:6 ESV

A hard heart can form quickly through repeated emotional trauma. This trauma can come from many sources, but it's often most painfully experienced at the hands of the members of our families. We learn so much early on in our lives and it can be hard to soften our hearts so that we can hear God as we get older if we remain in a place of pain.

God is gracious, and his patience allows us to change slowly over time if we learn humility and grace. He will lift up those who are bowed down. He is kind. He loves unconditionally because he is love. His grace empowers us in our weaknesses, for that is what grace does: it allows weakness to exist so we can be strengthened by it. Grace gives us the strength we need to change. Let us become leaders who demonstrate, from the inside out, the goodness of God's graciousness.

*When you are upset how do you remain gracious to others?*

## SWEET RESPITE

You are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life.

ROMANS 6:22 NLT

Have you pondered what life would be like without sin? Sin is not just a state of being it is also a causal effect. We live in a sinful world and sin dwells within man which results in sinful man making sinful choices. It is not escapable in this lifetime. Jesus came and defeated sin and its power over us. Its power was death which is produced in us from inception. As followers of Jesus, we are no longer slaves to sin and therefore we can and do choose righteousness. It is a beautiful thing!

However, every day we still battle against sin. Imagine no longer fighting the propensity to sin. What a great relief that will be! It is unfathomable. We have an eternity with God and without sin. Every choice we will make will be the right one, not in defiance to God but in alignment with him. What sweet respite that will be. Add to this the beauty of being a new creation with healed and whole bodies, enjoying our relationships forevermore. We can truly get excited at our prospects for eternal life!

*What excites you most about being freed from the power of sin?*

## SOURCE OF ALL

O God in Zion, to you even silence is praise!  
You who answers prayer,  
all of humanity comes before you with their requests.

PSALM 65:1-2 TPT

You can imagine the trouble your life would become if all the world approached you with their problems. It is trouble enough leading a small organization or even a family! When we become overwhelmed with issues in leadership, we can quickly dismiss what we deem as smaller matters, but then we are also dismissing the people who bring those matters to light. It is important for us to be approachable to all people if we want to keep a pulse on what is happening in our organizations. The larger the group we lead, the greater the help we need.

Even so, notice in this verse that God needs no help. He can handle all the requests and all the problems. He is the source of life for all of mankind. He is also your source. You can go to him with confidence. As a chosen leader, you are an instrument to others as a source of God's strength.

*How can you trust that God will equip you to remain approachable? Can you rely on him to give you the necessary wisdom to deal with whatever comes your way?*