



28 DAYS OF DEVOTION

WEEK 3 (October 31 - November 6) Revealed Through Prayer

Day 15: Blessed to Be a Blessing

*"I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing." (Genesis 12:2 NIV)*

It was during an official ceremony at the Balad Air Base, Iraq, in 2011, that I remember singing "God Bless America," thinking to myself how fortunate I was to live in "the land of the free and the home of the brave." I found myself standing a little taller, my chest swelling with pride knowing that that evening I would have a comfortable place to sleep and a bountiful buffet of food waiting for my next meal at the DFAC (dining facility). Waiting for my return back in Arkansas were a devoted wife and a very supportive church. I was not alone that day in feeling blessed. This was not the case, however, with everyone in attendance at that ceremony. There were those who had left their finances in a mess, those who had left a relationship in shambles, and still others who were struggling with issues of loneliness.

Try to imagine what would happen if the "blessed" of this world took seriously God's announcement to Abraham that they were to pass along his blessings. Prayerful willingness is the starting point. Abraham said yes and the world was changed. Saying yes might mean the "blessed" help take on the burdens of the homeless, the hungry, and those who have fallen on hard times. The apostle Paul wrote to the Roman church, "Those ... strong and able in the faith need to step in and lend a hand to those who falter" (Romans 15:1 MSG). How much effort would it take to lift the spirits of the downtrodden? What would a blessing look like to those who feel alienated from society?

~Chaplain (Colonel) Walter L. Smith, USAF (Ret.)

Reflection

Surely there has been a time in your life when you thought, "I'm so blessed." Do you remember the feeling that overcame you? Was it in response to an unexpected gift or a second chance? Is God calling you to be a blessing? Will you say yes?

Challenge

Go to your list of blessings in your journal. Pray for guidance and ask, “Is there a way that one or two of my blessings could be used by God as a blessing for others?” In your journal, write about what need in your community or in your church you might help with because of your blessings.

From A Generous Life: 28 Days of Devotion. Copyright © 2019 Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

Day 16: Sleepless Nights

When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus. (Matthew 1:24-25 ESV)

Have you ever had a restless night in the midst of trying to make a significant decision? I can remember many sleepless nights tossing and turning seeking peace—praying, weeping and often getting up walking the floor. Some of those restless nights revolved around financial issues: the purchase of a home or car, new career opportunities, or how generous I should be to the church or other great ministries. During those hours I would pray and pray and pray even more seeking peace. My preacher dad would often say, “Pray the night through until you find peace!”

Generosity is a decision and should be rooted deeply in prayer. My grandmother would say, “What is in the well comes up in the bucket.” Prayer deepens our well of generosity. Giving comes from deep within us. Praying enables us to connect with God and listen for God’s will.

Joseph was seeking peace about his relationship with Mary. His fiancée, whom he greatly loved, was with child, and he was not the father. Deciding what to do was a life-changing decision and required much prayer. In stressful exhaustion he fell asleep, and an angel (a messenger from God) gave him a path forward. Joseph’s decision had become one of obedience to God.

Generosity begins as a response to God. This response is most often an act of faith. In the end, Joseph acted on faith and because of his faithful response to the call of God, the world was forever changed. The call to generosity begins with prayer and moves through faith. In the end, we are forever changed and, just maybe, the world is too.

~Tom Melzoni

Reflection

Do you remember a decision about generosity in your life? Did the decision require obedience to God’s call? How did God speak to you?

Challenge

Pray: “God, how much should I keep of your generous blessings in my life?” This is a different kind of prayer. Respond by giving what you don’t keep to impact a life, a church, and a world.

From A Generous Life: 28 Days of Devotion. Copyright © 2019 Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

Day 17: Wrestling with God

Then he said, "Your name won't be Jacob any longer, but Israel, because you struggled with God and with men and won." (Genesis 32:28 CEB)

Prayer is not always easy!

Nancy was eagerly anticipating her retirement as an elementary school teacher when her pastor asked if she would consider developing a Sunday morning program for special needs children. Her first thought was, naturally, "This isn't how I imagined spending my first year of retirement." Reluctantly, she agreed to pray. Nancy prayed, wrestling with God, and in the end, instead of spending her first year traveling, gardening, and doing all of the things she had long dreamed of, she spent her time pulling together a curriculum for families and their special needs children. She continually asked herself why she agreed to do this.

On the Sunday of the program's launch six families and their special needs children attended the first class. Three months later, all six families joined the church, and the children were baptized. Nancy sat in the back pew, a smile lighting her face. She hadn't traveled much, and her garden still had weeds, but she wouldn't change a thing.

Like Jacob, the willingness to struggle in prayer and step out in faith transformed Nancy's life.

Transformation defines us as followers of Jesus. Usually, as with Nancy and Jacob, transformation comes with struggle. We wrestle with God, sometimes through the wee hours of the night and always through prayer, and this prayerful wrestling changes us.

Faithful giving and generosity are not always what we naturally do. Faithful giving and generosity are prayerful struggles that define who we are, or rather, who God calls us to be. Prayerfully wrestling with God about who God wants us to be changes everything about us.

~R. Craig Miller

Reflection

Have you ever felt God asking you to change? When are times that you have struggled with God? Who serves as an example for you when you resist God?

Challenge

Search your heart and find where you are currently struggling with God (if it isn't obvious). Spend an hour with no distractions in "prayerful wrestling."

From A Generous Life: 28 Days of Devotion. Copyright © 2019 Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

Day 18: Praying It Through

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them. (Luke 6:12-13 NIV)

A close friend of mine has an adult child who spent several years running from God. It wasn't a series of short sprints either, but more like a marathon. Alcohol and recreational drugs were an easy trap for someone with addictive tendencies and family history. New relationships always turned into broken relationships, and her two boys were pulled through the pain. She bounced in and out of rehab programs while her family kept encouraging her, loving her, and praying for her. For almost a decade, they wept through every setback, they scooped up the kids for time with the rest of the family, they kept believing that God wanted her to be free from the bondage, and they kept praying.

Because I am one who has trouble remembering to pray for things for more than about a week, I can't even wrap my head around "praying it through" for almost ten years. Maybe that's why I usually only see God make the impossible become possible through the prayers of others. You guessed it—my friend's daughter is a new creation. She has new purpose and direction in her life. She is chasing after God and expressing God's love back to those who stayed beside her, fought for her, and refused to stop praying.

Whenever I read these verses in Luke 6, I wonder about the mystery of prayer and what I might be missing. This is Jesus, the Son of God. Seems like he was well equipped to select the twelve apostles from among his disciples, on his own, right? Instead, he waited for this moment when he had spent the whole night praying to God.

~Richard L. Rogers

Reflection

Why do you think Jesus spent so much time praying? Is there a major decision or situation that you should be praying about? Is there someone who desperately needs you to be praying for them?

Challenge

Take a picture of something that represents who or what you need to be praying for as if someone's depending on it. Then make that picture the lockscreen image on your phone to remind you.

From A Generous Life: 28 Days of Devotion. Copyright © 2019 Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

Day 19: The Journey of Prayer

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." (Luke 11:9 NIV)

Most of us are good at the first baby step of prayer. It is easy to ask God to do something! Unfortunately, after the asking, we think that we are finished; we think that since we have already asked, we are expected to do nothing more.

The first step in any journey is critical. We do need to ask in order to receive. But asking is just the first step. It takes many more steps to continue a real journey of prayer.

Jesus offers his disciples a model for such a prayer journey. Ask—yes, of course! But then seek. And finally, knock on the doors that you find.

Seeking God's will is much more work than simply asking; seeking takes time, attention, listening, looking, searching. That journey of prayer will lead us far past asking, deep into new paths of seeking God's way for our lives. Along those paths we will discover doorways—places where choices and decisions must be made. Do we have the courage and commitment to knock on those doors? And when those new doorways are opened, will we step into a new way of life?

Simply asking demands little of us. Seeking means searching for God's will in our lives, and such seeking will undoubtedly change us—redirecting us in God's way. Knocking on the doors that God would open to us may well lead us down paths that we never imagined! We do not know what God has in store for us when we begin such a journey, but one thing is certain: such a journey of prayer will change our lives. After all, changing us has always been the real power of prayer.

~Mick Tune

Reflection

Are you seeking God's will? Have you asked God to lead you down God's paths and open doors?

Challenge

During your prayer time, write down in your journal what you are asking and what you are given, what you are seeking and what you are finding, what doors you knock upon and what is opened to you.

From A Generous Life: 28 Days of Devotion. Copyright © 2019 Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

Day 20: Rerouting

The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see. The act of faith is what distinguished our ancestors, set them above the crowd.

By faith, we see the world called into existence by God's word, what we see created by what we don't see. (Hebrews 11:1-3 MSG)

A few years ago, while traveling in Long Island, I found myself in downtown New York City at 10:00 at night with the gas gauge below a quarter of a tank. I had missed the exit I was supposed to take, and the GPS kept saying the words I hear so often—rerouting-rerouting-rerouting. I kept turning, kept on following, and went through some areas that probably weren't the best places to get stuck. Sometimes the GPS would say to turn, and the road would be closed for construction—rerouting-rerouting-rerouting.

As I was traveling down an alley, I looked up, and lo and behold I was right beneath the Brooklyn Bridge! Finally, the GPS had gotten me safely to my hotel. Needless to say, I offered prayers of thanksgiving.

Sounds a lot like life for some of us, doesn't it? Maybe you have made similar mistakes in life, some choices that were not the best. Maybe you have felt lost and in a "bad place." Maybe you know where you want to go or should go, but you just don't have a clue how to get there. And all the

while God is saying to each of us, “You may not know the way, but I do. I know exactly where you are, and I will lead you home.” You may get sidetracked, you may take a wrong turn, and you may get completely lost, but God always knows exactly where you are and will lead you home.

~Scott McKenzie

Reflection

Are you pounding the steering wheel of life in frustration because you are not headed where you want to go? Right now, are you looking around and saying, “This isn’t where I want to be”?

Challenge

Pray for God’s guidance. Ask God to help you trust in him. Beware, God may say, “rerouting-rerouting-rerouting.”

From A Generous Life: 28 Days of Devotion. Copyright © 2019 Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.

Day 21: Let It Be

And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:38 ESV)

Mary received the angel’s message and had to make a life-changing decision. Imagine the courage and faith it took for Mary to choose to “let it be.” Her decision would release her into a new direction and change her life, and ours, forever.

Often we are called to make difficult and life-changing decisions. Seeking God’s wisdom may result in a change in direction or giving up on dreams and plans we have made. For Mary, her decision to “let it be” created challenges for her socially, culturally, religiously, and personally. If she chose to live according to God’s will, her life would be changed forever. Despite all the challenges, Mary made the choice to “let it be” according to the call of God.

Repeating a phrase in prayer may make it live within us. It’s like a favorite piece of music that we can play over and over again in our head. It soon becomes part of us. “I am the servant of the Lord” was such a phrase for Mary, spoken first at one of the biggest moments in her life. In times of prayer, a sentence like that can occupy mind and heart and raise us closer to God. For example:

*There will be an answer, let it be ...
Whisper words of wisdom, let it be ...*

Allow these words, keeping in mind Mary’s words to the angel, to play repeatedly in your head and become a part of you. Like Mary, choose to become a servant of the Lord, and “let it be.”

~Tom Melzoni

Reflection

What does God have in mind for you? In what way, like Mary, are you to bear good news to others and be empowered by the Holy Spirit?

Challenge

Find your phrase and pray to seek God's will for you. If you say "Yes!" the work of God will be brought forward. Like Mary, say, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Let your gift be a response to God's messenger in your life.

From A Generous Life: 28 Days of Devotion. Copyright © 2019 Abingdon Press. All rights reserved.