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31 Day Identity in Christ Devotional

The *Loved* Bible Project

The Loved Bible Project

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Welcome

Welcome to The Loved Bible Project "Identity in Christ" devotional.

"My Identity is in Christ, not in my sin, my past, my mistakes or bad decisions. Not in myself, not in what people say that I am. Not in what I think of myself. My identity is in who Christ says I am. I am enough because HE is ENOUGH." ~Unknown

Thank you for joining me in the journey as we are transformed by His Word, I'm praying for you – I know life is busy, it's hard to find time for ourselves, not to mention to love and serve others. This project was my way to commit to both during this season of my life with 5 kids under 10 running around.

I love how Timothy Keller describes our identity as if we are in the courtroom in his book "The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness". I highly recommend this short book that talks about our identity.

"Every single day, we are on trial. That is the way that everyone's identity works. In the courtroom, you have the prosecution and the defense. And everything we do is providing evidence for the prosecution or evidence for the defense. Some days we feel we are winning the trial and other days we feel we are losing it. But the trial is over. We are out of the courtroom. It is gone. It is over. Because the ultimate verdict is in.

Do you realize that it is only in the gospel of Jesus Christ that you get the verdict before the performance? The atheist might say that they get their self-image from being a good person. They are a good person and they hope that eventually they will get a verdict that confirms that they are a good person. Performance leads to the verdict. For the Buddhist too, performance leads to the verdict. If you are a Muslim, performance leads to the verdict. All this means that every day, you are in the courtroom, every day you are on trial. In Christianity, the verdict leads to performance.

You see, the verdict is in. And now I perform on the basis of the verdict. Because He loves me and He accepts me, I do not have to do things just to build up my resume. I do not have to do things to make me look good. I can do things for the joy of doing them. I can help people to help people – not so I can feel better about myself, not so I can fill up the emptiness." (Paraphrased from Tim Keller).

I pray that we are not too busy to see the opportunities God puts in front of us to be a blessing in others lives. I pray that you think about your gifts – not your inadequacies. Do not think 'I am not creative', 'I am not well versed in the Bible', 'I am not _____'. Pray to the Holy Spirit to help you, to help you use your unique gifts to pour into a Bible for someone else. I pray that through this project, we experience a time of stillness and we are refreshed. I pray it rejuvenates our time in the Word and draws us into knowing our Lord and lets us recognize His voice more clearly. I pray we spend time talking to Him, journaling, and writing down our thoughts. And I pray that we learn who we are because God loves us and because He loves us so much that He sent His one and only son to stand trial for us. The verdict is over. Jesus Christ went to trial for us. He died and rose again. He is alive and in Him we are free.

You are His child, you are no longer condemned, you have purpose and you are free. Thank you for joining me in the journey as we are transformed by His Word and learn who we are when our identity is in Christ.

About The Loved Bible Project

Have you ever seen a Bible that has been loved? I saw my 91 year old grandmother's Bible and it was a beautiful testament of His love for us. Imagine – to love and pray over a Bible - then give it away to those that may feel unloved. What a gift that would be.

That is what we are doing with The Loved Bible Project. We are loving and praying over small compact Bibles through highlighting, writing notes, and drawing to be shared as an encouraging gift.

After spending time with the homeless in Pittsburgh, I found we are more the same than we are different. We are all searching, fighting to stay free, weary and maybe we are reaching a point where we just want to shut down. But my friends under the bridge taught me God is working in every moment of our life for the life He designed. With our trust in Him, He promises us we have a purpose. I deliver Bibles to my friends under the bridge and pray His Word gives them shelter from the storm. Since The Loved Bible Project started, many have used it as a tool to love on Bibles and give as graduation gifts, gifts to friends, family and also share with those without homes, survivors of human trafficking, pregnancy care centers, foster care families, prison ministries and more.

The mission of this project is to transform lives to find hope in God's Word and while doing this, be transformed. God's Word refreshes the soul, gives wisdom, gives joy to the heart, enlightens the eyes and endures forever (Psalm 19: 7-9).

To participate in The Loved Bible Project, please go to the website for a full description or to the public Facebook page for daily inspiration.

Some Last Thoughts

During a baby dedication, the below statement was made by the parents. It really struck me because understanding our own identity in Christ is important, but even more so, if you are a parent, knowing yourself is the first step to guiding your children to know who they are in Christ.

A letter to a baby:

"Our lives are blessed and better everyday we have you as our son.

As your parents, God has charged us with showing you what it means to walk with and in Jesus Christ. We commit to foster in you a faith of your own and to invite you into our faith by praying with you, teaching you God's Word, modeling God's love to you and prioritizing your faith commitments.

We pray that you will come to know Jesus as your Lord and Savior at a young age and that your life will be filled with the adventure of following God.

We hope that our dedication of you to God in our church today marks the beginning of you coming to learn of your identity in Christ.

We hope that you would not just worship, but that you would be a worshipper of God.

We pray that you would not just obey Christ, but that you would be a servant of God.

May you grow up into the kind, courageous, joyful man God has destined you to be and may your life be defined by the things that matter most to God – things that will last forever.

And may you never settle for our dreams for your life, but always pursue God's. All our Love and God's Grace, Mommy and Daddy"

Anne Marie
The Loved Bible Project

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You Belong - A Loved Bible Testimony

I've recently become part of a group that journals and prays over bibles for a specific period of time. Once the bible has been prayed over and "loved" it is taken to someone in need. This could be someone without a home, someone affected by trafficked, someone in prison, someone directly affected by domestic violence or abuse, etc.

I immediately fell in love with this project because it doesn't take a complete change in your day to do this. I have begun incorporating it into my morning bible study and prayer. I was all about being able to make a difference in the life of someone who I may or may not be able to meet.

I would be part of providing them with food for their soul.

This would be something that could transform their life and put them on a greater path that God has set for them. I could be part of God's plan in such a bigger way.

I wanted to change someone's life.

What I didn't know was that God wanted to change mine.

Just over the last 7 days I have started to recognize that I was the one needing this extended time in God's word. I needed to spend a "little more" time in prayer for God to speak to my heart. I have been asking God what I needed to pray for when it comes to those who will receive these bibles. As the words come to mind I realize these are areas I could also use a little help in or areas I should be praying for those I love. Family members and friends.

God's started showing me that at the core of who we are, we all need the same thing. Those who we look at as "the least of these" are just the same as we are. Their life circumstances may look a little different, but who they are isn't.

They are a child of God. (John 1:12)

They were created in His image. (Genesis 1:27)

They are the reason Jesus died on the cross. (John 3:16) They

are sons and daughters of the most High King. (1 John 3:1)

They have been fearfully and wonderfully made. (Psalm 139:14)

They are not alone. (Hebrews 13:5)

They have been rescued into God's family. (Colossians 1:13)

They have access to the Father. (Ephesians 2:18)

They have been justified. (Romans 5:1)

They are no longer lost, but found. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

They are a friend of Jesus. (John 15:15)

They have been adopted into his family. (Ephesians 1:5) We are one. (Galatians 3:26-28)

And, as I started to write down the areas I believed I needed to pray for them, they started to connect us all as well.

Pray for:

Healing

Restoration

Strength

Hope

Peace

Provision

Clarity

Identity

Guidance

Refueling

Balance

Wisdom

Faith

Redemption

Mercy

Grace

And, the list could go on and on.

As I read this I find that there are people in my life (and me!) who need this on an almost daily basis. I need to be reminded that:

God's mercies are new every morning.

God's grace is sufficient for me.

God is my refuel when I feel weary.

God's guidance and the path He wants me to take are far greater than any other.

God's Wisdom is so much greater than the "knowledge" we all claim to have.

God's healing for my soul, body and mind surpass anything any doctor could ever prescribe. He is the Great Physician.

If you are in a place today where you feel you are lost, broken or in need of a recharge. I encourage you to pray these things over your life. And, know that I am standing in agreement with you!

You belong to the Father.

Amanda Massingill
<https://mandismakings.wordpress.com>

Day 1: I am Fearfully and Wonderfully made

Psalm 139:14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

I encourage you to read the entire Psalm 139 today. The word "Fearfully" also means "To stand in awe". I am awesomely made.

Our God is an awesome God, He reigns in heaven above, with wisdom, power and love, Our God is an awesome God.

Do you ever feel like you are not awesomely and wonderfully made? Do you feel unloved, are you are lonely, do you feel trapped by mistakes or bad past decisions?

I am on my knees for you. Stay in His Word for the next 30 day - you are LOVED, you are NOT ALONE, and you are FREE.

Repeat this: Nothing is bigger or more powerful than God. Nothing. Psalm 139 reminds us that He formed our inward parts and knitted us together in our mother's womb. He KNOWS us and His presence is throughout the universe. He is an awesome God - stand in awe of Him. And this God, who determines the number of the stars and calls them by name (Psalm 147:4), also KNOWS YOU by name.

Psalm 139:14 Psalm 139 Psalm 147:4

Anne Marie
The Loved Bible Project

Day 2: I have been justified

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Christ, I am made right with God. Justification. "Just as if I never sinned."

A speaker was talking about justifying grace and said: "justification: just as if I never sinned." And it hit me in a way I'd not really thought of before. I know the justifying grace and love of Christ, without it I would be nothing, but the true wiping away of it, as if it never happened once I honestly and vulnerably approach and take it to Him. Whoa. And the same is free and available for you, my friend.

He died. He was tortured. He was beaten. Scientifically, He should have already been dead before He really died. All for us. So that He could love us and forgive us and show us the most amazing grace. The grace that casts our sins from the east to the west. The grace that completely forgives. The grace that completely, unashamedly loves. And tonight, in that grace, I pray we find rest and peace. "He himself bore our sins on His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds, you have been healed." --1 Peter 2:24"

And tonight, in that grace, I pray we find rest and peace.

Romans 5:1 1 Peter 2:24

Friend of The Loved Bible Project

Day 3: I am not alone

Hebrews 13:5b God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

I love when I find something I copied from a friend next to a scripture in my Bible. "Even in my darkest...He never left. Even when I was cranky and crying and tired and complaining and grumbling and angry at Him...He never left. No one else puts up with that, your friends will leave, your family may leave, but our God is constant. He stays, He listens, He comforts, He loves.

How awesome is that?! He is so good to me."

God says, I will NEVER leave you.

Romans 8:38-39 Nothing will separate us from His Love.

John 10:28-29 No one will steal His Sheep.

This is LOVE and as His follower, we get His Love EVEN when we are unlovable. Now that is a good reminder of who we are in Him.

You are not alone. I pray we see you again tomorrow.

Romans 5:13

Hebrews 13:5

John 14:16

Romans 8:38-39

John 10:28-29

Anne Marie
The Loved Bible Project

Day 4: I am delivered

Colossians 1:13-14 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

More than any one concern that I see, hear, and feel, is that we are not enough. We don't believe we are enough for our friends, our spouses, our co-workers, our parents, or our kids. Shame and guilt for all we have done, should have done, but didn't, and what has been done to us rages inside our hearts and our minds. Catchy sayings, inspirational books, and even well meaning Christians (like me), aim to ease us of the discomfort of being not enough. Stacks of trophies, awards, and plaques remind us of all the "good" things we have accomplished. We work terribly hard at proving to anyone and everyone that we are enough, and yet, it is never good enough, high enough, or true enough.

And the truth of the matter is – it will never be enough. It can't be, you can't be. This is not a popular sentiment, but it is true, you are not enough. I am not enough. We are not enough. God has known that from the very beginning, and He and Jesus decided that we were still worth creating. Follow the story of creation, to where man and woman sin for the first time, to the set up of a system of sacrifices, and you will see that every single person who attempted to live up to God's expectations, failed. Every. Single. One. No matter what the circumstances, in their own power they were not enough.

As men and women continue to try and make themselves right with God by living well enough, sacrificing enough, and being enough, they continue to fail. From the beginning of our lives, we have failed. And no matter how desperately we seek to be good, do good, and be enough, we continue to fail. So while we may be able to convince ourselves for a little while with a catchy phrase or the encouragement of a friend, we ultimately never believe we are enough – because we aren't. Until we can accept that we are not enough, we can never understand our need for Jesus. We might decide that we believe we have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and therefore accept Jesus as our Savior, but we will continue to try to be enough until we accept that it is never going to happen.

I struggled with this part for years and years and years. I wanted to love Jesus – but be enough on my own. I wanted to be good, and wanted, and valued, and enough. Finally, it hit me that everything I was trying to achieve on my own, had already been accomplished. By Jesus, the only being capable of making me good, and wanted, and valued, and enough. And the very idea that He would come and die for me on a cross, meant that I was loved beyond measure. It's a hard thing to decide that you are never going to measure up. You are never going to be enough. But when you do, when you realize you are fighting a losing battle, you can surrender it all to Him and you are free. He is enough in our stead. And He makes us enough. "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

The only decision we ever have to make to be enough is to believe that we aren't – but He is. Jesus is the Son of God who came down from Heaven as a baby, lived a perfect life, and then died on a cross to pay for our sins. When He arose from the grave, we had the option of believing in Him and knowing with a peace that passes all understanding that we can join Him in Heaven if we believe in Him. Our only chance at being enough – is being in Him.

This is one of those verses whose impact cannot be overstated. We have gone from doomed to delivered, from darkness to light, from a sinner who deserves death, to a beloved Child of God, and from a slave, bound by our sins, into freedom.

Kelli Moore

All Your Heart Ministries, <http://www.allyourheartministries.com>

Day 5: I am not helpless

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

I like to call today's verse – a t-shirt verse. We see verses like this on display everywhere, offering encouragement and inspiration – "I can do all things!"

But it is not about ME doing all things. It's about Christ, who died for us, so that through him, we can do all things because He is our strength.

We are in final chapter of a letter written by Paul (a church planter) and he is writing to the people in Philippi. The book of Philippians is about the maturing believer – after we have surrendered to the Lord, what does life look like? How do we know Him and walk more passionately with Him.

When I narrow in on a verse like this, at the very least you must understand the context of the surrounding verses, and eventually the entire book and how it fits into God's Story (which is the Bible). Read through Acts 16 (where the church started) and come here to where Paul is addressing those believers with serious love and affection. Before we get to our key verse, Paul says "I have learned"

What did Paul learn?

He learned in all situations to be content. He learned that our circumstances do not matter or define us. He had to learn this – it does not come naturally. But if you learn more about Paul – you will see he learned this. He learned it by living it.

It does not matter. That is what Paul is trying to tell the readers. When he was living in a house of abundance, he learned to live for Christ in wealth. How to I apply this lesson? Use your wealth to push the kingdom forward, glorify Christ and serve Him completely. Do not hold tightly to it or make it your God.

But Paul also lived imprisoned and he did not give into despair. He rejoiced and was praying and singing hymns to God while by tortured. Rejoice in suffering.

Whether you are wealthy or poor, healthy or sick, whether the world loves you or hates you, Paul is telling us to learn to be content in everything.

Life is lived FOR Him, TO Him, WITH Him, All About HIM. HE is STRONG enough, LOVELY enough, SUSTAINING enough, BIG enough, and BEAUTIFUL enough. HE is Enough and when He is in us, then we are enough.

So it's not about me. It not about me doing all things. It's about Christ, who died for us, so that through him, we can do all things because He is our strength.

Day 6: I have access to the Father

Ephesians 2:18 For through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father

Read Ephesians 2:13 and 2:18. "You have been brought near to Him (2:13). This helped make a connection for why this verse shows our Identity in Christ.

Not only do I have access to the King of Kings, I have been brought near to Him. His people, and the Gentiles, we're both reconciled to Him through Christ's death. Praise God!! But now, not only do I get to go to Heaven too – but I have been granted access to His throne room. I am brought near to the lover of my soul. I am brought near to my Good, Good, Father. Not only do I have access to Him as a guide, and a granter of wisdom, I have been brought near to the one who loves me most. Because of what Christ did, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, I do not worship some far away being. I get to come close, lie at His feet, soak in His presence, and be intimately loved by Him.

That thrills my heart. I can go to Him at any time. I don't have to ask permission and hope He will make time to see me. I am near to Him all the time.

Kelli Moore
All Your Heart Ministries
<http://www.allyourheartministries.com>

Coffee Break: Wrestling

Did you think Day 6 was a little confusing?

I really wrestled with it. Definition of wrestle: to work hard to do something difficult. The verse was confusing for me and I had trouble connecting it to "Who am I"?

There are going to be days like this for you. But it's days like this where God shows me the wonders of His Word. When I have to dig into His Word for myself. When there are no commentaries or stories readily available, just me, Him and His Word.

Start off by pray. Pray that the Holy Spirit help me. I prayed to not approach this as another things on my to-do list and to prayed to Him to help me understand who He is and who I am in Him.

As Kelli Moore from All Your Heart Ministires said, "Sometimes we have to wrestle with Scripture. Sometimes it isn't easy and God doesn't reveal anything of dire importance at the first reading. Sometimes, He wants us to think it through, ask the questions, and use our resources. The more time it takes to figure out what God means for you to understand about Him, the longer you are spending time with Him and the deeper the verse will be etched into your being. And He always, always, wants us to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to us.

We believe that spending daily time in His word and learning to understand it, is crucial to your relationship with Him. Day 6 was a great illustration of that fact. I wrestled and fought and prayed and now I have a verse that is precious to me, rather than a verse that was "just in there." Now I have that reminder from God that He is always with me, that He wants me to know it. Now, I have a blessing."

Anne Marie
The Loved Bible Project

Day 7: I have peace

Ephesians 2:14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility

It was Christmas Eve and there were probably hundreds of people around but I don't remember anyone else. I was kneeling. The room was dimmed, but there was light coming in from the outside. Maybe the moon reflecting off of snow. I don't know. I was at a church. I was at an altar. I was crying and begging for God to take away the constant buzzing in my head. It had been there for years and I couldn't make it go away.

I was so tired of it. Just tired period. Lost, directionless, burdened. Walking around like I had a weighted hoodie over my head and body.
more

I didn't know what was wrong with me. I do now.

I didn't know why my brain was constant chaos and confusion. My thoughts were always telling me "something's wrong" all day long, it was always playing like background music. I woke up sad and went to bed sad and in between I was overwhelmed, exhausted, short fused, and always searching. All the time.

I had three little children to take care of. I took care of them better than I took care of myself but it took everything in me and I had a very limited supply of patience or understanding, while my brain was buzzing and humming and making noise all day. While I was weighed down. While my thoughts would never stop telling me: Something. Is. Wrong.

I was sure I was the only person in the world with a brain like that.

Why couldn't I stop it.

I'm one of the most strong-willed people I've ever met but this "thing" was stronger than my will. I could out-think bulimia and make the Dean's List every semester and face my fear of flying and learn how to drive a stick shift. But I couldn't stop this "thing" in my brain. This thing told me that I could make myself do plenty of stuff - like the aforementioned list - but there was NO WAY I could share the powerful, passionate, pressing dreams and goals I had inside. Or make sense of myself, the world, and other people.

NO way.
I could barely make it through the day let alone do any of that.

So I drove with the humming in my head and I went on vacation at the beach which is my favorite place on earth with the humming in my head and posed and smiled for family portraits with the humming in my head. I tried to focus on my children sounding out words and reading me books with the humming in my head. I tried to relax and have coffee with girlfriends with the humming in my head.

I never told a single person about it.

Some of the people who knew me during that time might be reading this now and thinking "well that explains a lot..."

I grew up going to church and always felt close to God but had drifted away in my 20's. I was about

39 when I knelt down at that altar.

One day in my mid 30's, after the jumble of confusion inside my head had been whirling around for several years, it hit me: God was what I needed. It was like that "I should've had a V-8" commercial where they knock themselves in the forehead when they realize they didn't do the most logical and obviously best thing ever.

I knew about God, so why in fact it hadn't occurred to me that He was what I should've been centering myself in, I have no idea. Well actually I do - partially because I thought God was about "being good" and I was already "good," and partially because of something Christians call "spiritual warfare." But I suddenly saw that God was the unifying, certain, sense-making source for my constantly swirling brain. For my life in a world that pretty much made zero sense.

I realized that some people who called themselves Christians seemed to understand things that I just didn't get, and that THAT was where the answer to my internal tempest would be found. I started going back to church but that humming and buzzing and confusion were always there. After a few years I started going to Bible studies and hearing some Christians say similar concepts and words. The ones who said those words seemed to be the ones with the clarity, peace, and lightness in their faces that I so didn't have but wanted. After awhile I could start repeating some of the words and concepts but I really didn't know what they meant.

A lot of times when people would talk about the Bible or quote scripture, it was like they were an a.m. radio station that was mostly static with a few clear words coming through every now and then. It was like something made their words sound like a foreign language to me so I'd zone out a lot.

Then there was that Christmas Eve. I remember going to our car after the church service when I begged God to take the buzzing away and I realized the buzzing was gone.

I remember where our car - a navy blue Honda Odyssey - was parked and what I was wearing - a navy blue skirt and navy blue coat. (Apparently I like navy blue, but I digress...) I tried not to think too much about the buzzing being gone, or to listen for it, because I knew it would come back if I did. But it's 13 years later and it's still gone.

Little by little, with a quieter head, I started to be able to think clearer. I could "hear" scripture and focus on Bible studies.

A little bit of actual JOY and HOPE and LIGHTNESS and ENERGY started entering in my bones... But I

still knew that every time people talked about these certain things --

GRACE

SALVATION

MERCY

JUSTIFICATION

SEPARATION even

SIN

-- they were still foreign language words. I didn't get it. It always felt like I would hit a ceiling when people started talking about this stuff. I could tell they were already above that ceiling.

Then one day... I read this: **"Sin is a fundamental relationship— it is not wrong doing, but wrong being— it is deliberate and determined independence from God.... Other faiths deal with sins— the Bible alone deals with sin. The first thing Jesus Christ confronted in people was the heredity of sin.."** (My Utmost for His Highest, Oswald Chambers).

And that was it.

I finally understood.

I had been in wrong being. Separated from God. Flailing about. Confused. It didn't help me to do just "good stuff" as much as possible because my entire person was still separate from God. It wasn't about which religion had the right set of rules to follow. If those rules didn't re-connect me with the God who made me and everything else here, things were still not going to make sense inside and outside of me.

I cried and claimed Jesus' sacrifice for me and my heredity of sin.

Everything has changed since then. Inside and outside. From my mental & physical health to my relationships to how I spend my time (i.e. not watching the world pass me by anymore).

Not immediately, but steadily.

Because I'm still human I'll be imperfect and messing up the rest of my life, but because of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit in my salvation, I can constantly be made newer and stronger and wiser.

He has given me peace. I am whole. Because I'm reconnected to the part of me that was missing: God.

**"He came and preached peace to you who were far off and to those who were near."
(Ephesians 2:14)**

I have terrifying moments and incredibly stressful days. But inside at my core being - I have peace.

How about you? Are you joined with the God who made you?

**The Bible talks about peace in all areas of life - peace with God, with ourselves, with other people, and in our circumstances - in which area(s) do you have the most and least peace?
How can you let Christ's peace rule there?**

Debbie
Making Peace with Myself
www.imgoingthedistance.com

Day 8: I am a light to others

Ephesians 5:8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light

(Written after the tragic events with shootings the week of July 3, 2016). With

humility and love, we must not be silent and be light.

My heart was overwhelmed when I woke up this morning and spent time in the Word with a heaviness of the events this week and news breaking this morning. The header in my Bible for today's verse says "WALK IN LOVE". A part of me is at a loss, heartbroken on what even to do and say. But maybe we underestimate what God can do through us. Be light.

From Benjamin Watson, "Under our Skin"

"The problem of race in America is a spiritual problem at the heart of America. Individually we may feel as if there's not much we can do. But maybe we underestimate what God can do through us. I believe it is essential for us to pray for America. I know there are some who hear that and think it's a soft solution to a hard racial problem. On the contrary - prayer is one of the most powerful and pragmatic actions we can take to overcome racism in America.

Prayer has often ignited revival. Spiritual awakenings have exploded out of prayer meetings where even a few people have dedicated themselves to pray for their families, communities, and nation. It has happened before. It can happen again.

So, I urge everyone to pray.

Pray for the families of the victims and the perpetrators. Pray for

our communities and cities, that tensions will cease.

Pray for the people we think are at fault and the ones we know are at fault.

Pray for direction - that God would specifically guide you into action.

Pray for wisdom for those who make decisions and laws.

Pray for the safety of law enforcement officers and the eradication of the lawlessness they are commissioned to fight.

Pray that we all will be keenly aware of our thoughts and reactions and will be bold enough to apologize when we should.

Pray for the courage to stand up against racism wherever it's found - and especially when it is expressed by friends and family.

Pray for courage to call wrong wrong and right right.

Pray for God's healing hand on America"

Day 9: I am no longer condemned

Romans 8:1-2 says "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death."

You are loved. You are enough. You are free.

Therefore – As believers, we are set free from the law because Jesus shed his blood on the cross to cover all our sins. We are released from the law and free from whatever held us captive (Romans 7:6). In Christ we are made new, and the standards of the world no longer define us.

Now – Today. Tomorrow. Next year. God is here with us. He sent the Holy Spirit to be our helper (John 14:26) and He will be with us until the end of the world (Matthew 28:20). God is with you always – in your moments of redemption. In your moments of sin. In the deepest valleys and the highest mountain tops, He is with you. And he loves you. He accepts you. He wants you.

No Condemnation – Condemnation is a statement or expression of very strong and definite criticism or disapproval. There is **none** of this for God's people.

Free – Not physically held by something. Not held by death. Not held by sin. Not held by shame. There is therefore no condemnation. Can we just let that sink in for a minute, friends? Because God sent his only son to die on a cross for **you** and for me, we are free from the law. We are no longer bound by sin and death. We are set free right now, at this very moment.

- Free from feeling inadequate
- Free from our past mistakes
- Free from the mistakes of others that affect us
- Free from the lies of Satan that tell us we are not enough
- Free from the pressure to be anything that we are not
- Free from expectations
- Free from overwhelming fear.
- Free from sin.
- Free from shame.

Your mistakes do not define you – **Jesus** defines you. As a believer in the one true God, nothing you do can separate you from the freedom that comes in Christ. Nothing you do can separate you from the love, mercy, grace, and redemption of Christ.

You are overwhelmingly loved.
In Christ you are enough.
And through Him you are set free.

Jessica
You Are Free
<https://oursimplyabundantlife.wordpress.com>

Day 10: I am forgiven

Colossians 1:14 In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

A few months back, my husband and I received an anonymous card in the mail. It was mailed to the both of us and read something like this, "to one of the nicest, most thoughtful families I know. Thank you for all that you do". I can't remember the exact words, but you understand. Enclosed with the thoughtful, handwritten card was a very generous gift card to a nice, family restaurant in a nearby town. We were blown away at this person's kindness, and humbled, too.

A couple of weeks later, my oldest teenage son got into some trouble at school. Immediately, I began to punish myself for his horseplay behavior that resulted in a suspension from school. Instantly, I felt eyes glaring at me and judging ME for HIS actions. And just like that, I beat myself up emotionally. I wondered if what my son had done would get back to the nice people that sent such a thoughtful card and gift just a couple weeks before. I wished I knew who had sent it, so that I could return it. I hung my head in shame. If they only knew what kind of rotten, filthy parent I was, they wouldn't have sent that.

I had extended full forgiveness and pardon to my son, but not to myself. His sin, I remembered no more. Instead, I took it full on, on my own shoulders. It was a tough burden to carry.

Read the same Colossians verse in the Message version of the Bible and add verse 13 in as well. "God rescued us from dead-end alleys and dark dungeons. He's set us up in the Kingdom of the Son he loves so much, the Son who got us out of the pit we were in, got rid of the sins we were doomed to keep repeating."

Jesus didn't die on that Cross at Calvary for us to walk around beating ourselves up for what He came to set us free from. As humans, we get caught up (with Satan's help, no doubt) in punishing ourselves and we put ourselves in our own prisons of shame and guilt. Just as a mother runs in to rescue her child from the flames, Jesus died on the Cross and rescued us from ourselves, and from this fallen world.

The word redemption means "the action of saving or being saved from sin, error, or evil". Christ redeemed us by His own death and resurrection. Just as I couldn't return the thoughtful note and gift card, we can't return His great love for us when we feel guilty. Just as I did nothing on my own merit to deserve my anonymous thanks, we can't do anything to earn His love for us. His love is perfect, and when we truly accept the gift, we live in freedom. And living in freedom, is exactly what He wants you to do.

Molly Dixon
Redemption
<https://dixonkidsmom.wordpress.com>

Day 11: I have purpose

Ephesians 1:9 he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ

"What is my purpose? Do you ever find yourself asking this question? I sure do! I've always been a, "Jack of all trades, master of none," sort of gal. Years ago, when I was out in the workforce, folks would come to me with some odd goings on and ask for help. There were many things I'd come across and battled through and fixed! Well, they knew it and trusted I would dig in and uncover the answer to get them through it to too, even to the detriment of my own deadlines. I felt compelled to fulfill the needs of others; little did I know how I would utilize this ability in the years to come.

This was during a time in my life where I didn't know the Lord like I do now. Oh, I knew OF Him, but I lacked a personal relationship. I was walking through life seeking... Seeking happiness, acceptance, love, trust, honor, support; I was seeking Jesus and didn't know it. I had unknowingly been seeking Him most of my life.

Care to walk a bit farther down memory lane with me for a moment?

I always yearned for children. From the time I was very young, I knew I was to be a Mom; I saw myself as having 3 or 4 by the time I was 30. I married young and believed my life was following the path I had created in my mind.

I couldn't have been more wrong.

My husband hid a drug addiction from me for years. When it was revealed to me, my life turned upside down. He became abusive and unemotional. His behavior and treatment of me had me believing our situation was entirely my fault. Entirely. Fast forward a few years to the time I finally left. I felt such a failure. I was active in the Catholic church where we married and divorce wasn't in their vocabulary. I had let God down. Where was the purpose in that?

Many years passed and I found myself broken yet again and crying out to God. I dedicated my life to Jesus...and met the father of my daughter. Life was great! We had a whirlwind courtship and married quickly. Immediately, my life changed again. I was abused in every way a woman can be abused. I got pregnant and was effectively trapped. I remember crying out to God again, how could this happen, hadn't I been through enough?!

I leaned on Him. I trusted Him. I waited on Him. I loved Him and I praised Him.

He made me a fighter. He made me wiser. He made me a survivor. He's making me into a thriving overcomer. He's making me into an advocate. For Him. And for the abused.

What is my purpose?

To trust. To praise. To listen. To love. To see. To teach.

My perfect Heavenly Father has taken all of the horrendous pain of my past and formed it into beauty. My purpose isn't earth shattering or anything for the history books, my purpose is in Him. As is yours.

Trust Him and move into your future. Go in love."

Dawn

(Note from The Loved Bible Project – everyone's situation is different when it comes to relationships – please seek help locally through a church, pastor or counselor. This story is shared to reflect how the writer found her purpose trusting in her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, but is not intended to give advice to those currently in similar situations.)

Moment of Grace: Your story. God's story.

Max Lucado: You are part of God's story

Here are some quotes from the book "God's Story, Your Story"

- "Everything changes when you know the rest of your story"
- "We need to know where we came from. Knowing connects us, links us, bonds us to something greater than we are."
- "Knowing reminds us that we aren't floating on isolated ponds but on a grand river. That's why God wants you to know his story...And we are part of it"
- "To not know the story of God is to travel on a plane and not know the itinerary. The peanuts may be nice, but the bewilderment is unsettling. The big news of the Bible is this: this plane has a destination and a reliable pilot"
- "If we don't know our destination, how can we thrive on the journey?"

God left us with His story - He made it known. It is not a mystery, the story - the big picture in life. "In the same way it helps a long distance runner know the layout of the track..."

We have a purpose and there is a plan and we fit into that grand plan. And your view of everything changes when you know the rest of your story.

His mercies are new every morning - embrace the knowledge that you have purpose, you are part of His story and wake up tomorrow and rejoice!

Day 12: I can be strong

Ephesians 6:10 Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

We're fighting, friends. I think we can all agree on that.

We're divided and we're standing in darkness, but I don't think we're fighting the battle that we think we are... See, wars have been waged. Wars on drugs, terrorism, guns, race, marriage, and on and on and on... but the war we're fighting takes place in the heart of man.

That sounds daunting to me- too big. How do I fight what I can't see? But there is hope! For all the darkness and evil in our world, we can be STRONG! He has equipped us with the weapons we need! There is an armor we can use to battle the darkness:

Truth.
Righteousness.
Peace.
Faith.
Salvation.
God's Word.

We already have all the tools we need to show up to battle! But here's the even better news: He doesn't just equip his servants with weapons we can't use- we're already made STRONG in the One who can- and already has- overcome darkness!

Be encouraged in that today, guys!

Chelsea Ahlgrim,
Everyday Light
<http://www.chelseaahlgrim.com>

Day 12 Bonus: Be strong

Ephesians 6:10 Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

What does it mean to "Be strong"? How does the world define strong? Like any good truth seeker - ask Siri or Google it...

---"I think being strong means never giving up the fight to survive no matter how weak, hopeless, or completely powerless you feel. Being strong means that you fight until there is absolutely nothing left. And after there is absolutely nothing left, you find something else to go on." Signed, Nothing left and searching

---"I think having inner strength means having the capacity to face challenges. It means having enough energy that when you are faced with a tough situation that drains you, you still manage to find a little more to get through it and to act. It's what keeps us going." Sincerely, Endless Energy, (never had kids or a job or a life)

Where does this strength come from? How do we know when we are strong enough to face whatever is facing us?

We make the mistake at just stopping at Be Strong. But what does God say? The emphasis is "IN the Lord and in HIS mighty power". IN - means "In-a primary preposition denoting (fixed) position (in place, time or state)." She commented that "That it leads me to believe that the only way to be strong is be in a fixed position with Jesus where we don't move!"

To prepare for war, to prepare for the spiritual battle Paul shares with us in the following verses of Ephesians 6, we need to "Be Strong IN the Lord". Our own strength, our own mental fortitude, our own endless energy and inner will, our fight, capacity to face challenge, our ability to not be drained.... will NEVER be enough to oppose Satan. But when we are strong IN the Lord and in the strength of His might... we can and will win any battle. It is not about how much strength is enough - it is about the source of that strength.

Anne Marie
The Loved Bible Project

Day 13: I am alive with Christ

Ephesians 2:4-5 But 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

But God...

Two of the most incredible words in the Bible, in my opinion.

It is something that I have tried to fully understand as I walk this faith journey. The idea that God loved me so much that in spite of my many, MANY failings, He wanted LIFE for me and so He sent His Son to die as payment for all my sins.

I was dead in my sins. But God.

Because of His incredible gift, I now have life and freedom. I should be on-my-knees grateful each and every day. In spite of this reminder, I often find myself irritated and ungrateful and self-righteous to name a few. Life gets tough and the whiny "why-me" comes out.

But then in my preparation of this post I was reading a little more into the background of the book of Ephesians. And was struck by a probably well known fact about the author Paul...this letter was written when he was in prison. Here was a man who, after his conversion, served God in a fervent way. And in doing so he was persecuted and thrown in prison, not just once but several times. And what was his response? To some of the hardest trials I could even imagine facing, Paul's response was to write a letter to encourage other believers.

Paul obviously understood, in a deep way, the immense grace that only God could give and he wanted us to understand it as well.

It is easy for me to shout God's praises when life is going my way. But in all honesty, in my most difficult trials (and there have been many), my response has often been "Why God?!" And yet, once again, I am reminded that even knowing my normal response to trials, God STILL wanted more for me.

This grace-gift that I have been given, it's undeserved. I haven't yet and won't ever be able to be good enough to earn God's grace.

But God, knowing I couldn't do it myself, sent One in my place.

His grace is abundant and rich in mercy and it is available for each of us.

I don't know if you have struggled with this grace-gift like I have? Or maybe you have spent your life working really hard at being as good as you can be so that you can earn God's love?

It is exhausting and impossible and not what God wants for us.

Take a moment right now and pause, won't you?

Open your hands and receive this free gift that He offers. Stop running on the hamster wheel and rest in the freedom that life with Christ offers.

You don't have to be perfect – you are perfected because of Him.

You don't have to earn His grace – it was yours long before you even knew you needed it.

You are chosen and loved, yesterday, today and tomorrow.

And in those moments, when life feels like too much, those times you have failed or don't feel like enough, just remember two simple but powerful words...

But God.

Kristin, But God, <http://therichesofhislove.com>

Day 13: Bonus material

Ephesians 2:4-5 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

You are alive in Christ. Because He loves you. Incredible love. Immense, vast, huge, boundless, immeasurable compassion and love. And it is by GRACE you have been saved. You did nothing to earn it or deserve it, it was free, unmerited favor of God to make you alive by shedding the blood of Christ.

"This is one of those verses I can remember being told over and over again growing up. None of us are worthy of what God gave us, but because He loves us so much, He saved us through the blood of His Son on the Cross.

I do not know about you, but that makes me feel pretty crappy to know I wait LOOONNNGGG lengths of time to forgive people.

I mean....I am just giving them time to think about what they have done! Or, they do not even know what they did, so since they cannot see what they have done, I cannot bring myself to forgive them yet.

Somebody? Anybody?

BUT, God couldn't stand to not forgive us. He sent His ONLY SON to die for our sins.

The Message bible says: **Instead, immense in mercy and with an incredible love, he embraced us. He took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from us! Then he picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah." (Ephesians 2:4-6)**

And, after the amazing gift God gave us for sending His Son to die on a cross so we could have our sins forgiven, He doesn't stop there. He goes farther to take us from where we are and place us in "highest heaven" right alongside Jesus.

The Messiah. Who knew no sin.

He puts us in the same category as Jesus. He calls us sons and daughters.

Have you ever been at a point in your life where you thought, "That's it. I've messed it up bad this time. There's no fixing this."?

I have. And, that is where God wants to meet us.

Our broken pieces were never meant to be left where they fell.

He wants to take us and our broken pieces. But, He doesn't want to throw away those pieces. He wants to paint each piece into something beautiful and put them back together piece by piece until the puzzle it creates become a reflection of Him and His Kingdom."

Day 14: I am His disciple

John 13:15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

The identity statements in the devotional thus far are primarily encouragers...I am fearfully and wonderfully made, justified, not alone, rescued, not helpless, access to the Father, peace, light, no longer condemned, forgiven, with purpose, strong, alive. This one is too. We are His followers and students. But it also carries weight and responsibility and response. I am His disciple.

And Jesus shows us how... I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you (John 13:15)

In the book of John up until this point Jesus has done the extraordinary. To name a few... He is

described as with God from the beginning...God in the flesh entering the world.

He turns water into wine.

He teaches to the reaction of amazement and wonder.

He heals all forms of diseases.

He feeds thousands from practically nothing.

He calms the sea.

He raises the dead.

Now that's an example I can get behind! My two kids have type 1 diabetes and my sweet nephew has cerebral palsy. I often dream of having the touch of healing. If I'm honest though, I couldn't handle it. I would be full of pride and prone to think I was a great healer, not allowing God to do His perfect work in me and others.

But this isn't the examples He is speaking of. On his last night with the disciples, He demonstrates the example of how they should live by getting up from the table, wrapping a towel around His waist, and one by one washing the dirty, dusty feet of His disciples. Even the feet of Judas who John tells us the devil had already prompted to betray Jesus.

Washing the feet of those He is leading. The job of the lowest servant. A job none of them got up to do and one that I would certainly not be first in line to sign up for.

Out of everything He has done, why washing feet as an example? For one, it is something we can all do. But it is more than that.

Serving & Leading in Humility. It's that big of a deal.

In Jesus' powerful acts and miracles among adoring crowds, Jesus showed humility. In

dying for our sins, Jesus showed humility.

In the act of washing His students' feet, Jesus shows humility. In

the extraordinary and in the ordinary, God is glorified.

How do we do this? We know we can't be humble just by telling ourselves to be humble, or even by grudgingly doing "menial" tasks. Leading up to this verse I think we find the key to His ability to serve in all ways with humility.

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so... [he washes his disciples' feet]. John 13:3

The key is to do whatever task is before us – big or small in the eyes of the world – knowing whose we are. It is an inside out thing. It overflows from our heart. A desire to glorify God and not ourselves. Genuinely considering others more important than ourselves. And it takes practice for us who are prone to sin.

Our initial inclination might be to assume that only those in high positions of power, leading big ministries, followed by adoring crowds, securing big contracts, working in prominent places have to check their humility. Certainly pride, self-sufficiency, self-satisfaction, ambition have a tendency to creep in and push God out in these circumstances.

If I had healing power, I would start to think I shouldn't be spending my time doing things like feet washing, having the extra cup of coffee with a grieving friend, picking up the trash after church, making a meal for my neighbor whose husband is deployed. No, I would think I needed to be out healing and using this special gift God gave me. But Jesus is showing us it isn't either/or.

And Jesus certainly understood that these men at the table with Him were going to be the leaders of this new movement. They will be in places and positions of honor. He wants them to see humility as the example of how to be a leader when their time comes.

But the need for humility is equally important when we are doing the feet washing rather than the leading. Instead of glorifying God when we are in a season of doing a lot of the ordinary "dirty" work, we sometimes do it with a grumbling heart, with self-pity, with a feeling that it below us and just not fair that we are stuck doing these things. That is not an example of humility. It is another form of pride.

We aren't humble because we are doing "humble" work. Humility comes from our heart and desire to glorify God – wherever He places us – and not ourselves. We serve to genuinely love our neighbors and put others before ourselves, because Jesus put us before Himself when he suffered to bear our sins. The greatest example of humility and service in history. We humbly serve in the big and small because we love God and we want people to see Him in us and love Him too.

We can only do it, not by looking down at the feet we are washing, but by looking up at the one who loves us and is the giver of EVERY good and perfect gift. The one whose plans and purposes are beyond our wildest imaginations.

With our eyes focused upward, we can say I am His disciple. One who has come to serve and not be served. One who glorifies God and not myself. Let us strive to be joyful foot washers in all things. So joyful that others want to follow our example of following Jesus' example and get up from the table, grab a towel, and wash feet with us.

Joani Ross

Day 14; Pause

Today is important. We are almost half way through the challenge understand who we are in Christ. We should be encouraged; we are immeasurably loved, forgiven and wonderfully made with purpose.

But how do we live out our purpose as a follower of Jesus?

That is what it means to be a disciple. A disciple is a follower. As you read scripture each day, the one question I look for - who was Jesus and how do I follow his example?

And as I learn more and more about who Jesus was, I am thankful to follow His lead.

Day 15: I have hope

Ephesians 1:11-12 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.

I don't know about you, but I tend to get caught up in the "stuff" of this world a little too easily. This "stuff" for me looks like frustration, anger, jealousy, feeling helpless...it can also look like shopping, facebooking (is that a word?), decorating, impressing people, or striving so hard to make a difference that it becomes about me seeking worth in the wrong places. Sometimes (gulp) it can even be overeating or over indulging in alcohol to escape all the "stuff" in this world that's bothering me.

All this "stuff" causes me to get distracted from the HOPE I have. This HOPE is in Jesus and the knowledge that through Him I am saved. This HOPE lies in remembering that God sent his son, Jesus, to pay the ultimate price and die for us and that by believing in him, the "stuff" of this world becomes much less important because there's a whole eternity waiting for us. When I remember that the two most important things in this world are God and Souls then I am able to put the "stuff" into proper perspective.

This world is just a short camping expedition...a blip on the radar compared to what is waiting for us in eternity. The "stuff" here is small when you look at the big picture.

Ephesians 1:11-12

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.

Do you see it?

Do you see that there is a predestined plan for you according to His purpose and that we have HOPE through Christ?

I picture myself throwing off all the "stuff" – I'm running hard and losing the weights, capes, and masks that hold me back. Running hard after God is how I keep my HOPE in tact. Studying his word and then doing my best to live it each day.

I challenge you to let go and run towards the HOPE we have in God. Only through Him can we overcome the "stuff" of this world.

Where's your HOPE?

Bethany Clemenson
<https://bethanyclemenson.wordpress.com>

Day 16: I can understand what God's will is

Ephesians 5:17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

A pastor spoke one time about how many times we hear "I just wish I knew God's will for my life" and how he personally longed for this. But he later realized it was a misguided way of thinking. Instead, he suggested we focus on our response to the Holy Spirit's leading today, in this very moment, and it will impact the decision we make in the future.

These 4 keys below have been my guiding posts as I make decisions. For major decisions in my life, where I feel the presence of the Holy Spirit giving direction, I journal. I write down the 'problem' or decision, my prayers, the ideas and thoughts during my time with Him, and the future outcome. You'll be surprised how just experiencing this clarity one time will change your life in the way you approach decisions. There have been specific times where I have felt urgings from God's spirit to act in ways I feared the plan, I feared the outcome as I received it.

But God's outcome was far beyond what I could have planned myself and has taught me to trust His plan.

- Walk with God by developing a relationship with Him (not a 'religion or inserting in God when you want). You grow to KNOW Him by spending time in the Word, prayer and Bible Study.
- SURRENDER your will to God: Commit to do whatever it is He desires for you to do. (I also consider counsel from fellow believers and godly mentors that spend consistent time in the Word and in prayer. I also see the patterns of persons providing worldly vs godly advice).
- Gifts: Pay attention to how God has wired you. God has gifted everyone of us to perform a special mission for which we alone were chosen
- LISTEN: Listen to what God might have to say. Ask "What is the next step in _____?" God's will often floods my heart with ideas and information on those questions. This has personally be truly life changing and brought clarity.

Lessons from Chris Russell 8 Keys to Knowing God's Will For Your Life

Anne Marie
The Loved Bible Project

Day 17: I am healed from sin

1 Peter 2:24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

The cross... it reveals God's love and His perfect justice, all in one.

Anytime scripture brings me to meditate on the meaning of the cross, I get overwhelmed and my heart physically feels a heaviness of a mix of grief and gratitude to the One who bore so much on my behalf.

I feel like there has been so much happening around me, in my life and family, in my community, in our nation, and in our world. Amidst the joys, there have been prayers for depression, anger, anxiety, forgiveness, purpose, illness, tragedy, death, suffering, and fear. I am comforted meditating on the cross, where all the wounds of sin are healed and there is peace bought by Jesus' substitution on the cross. But for those who do not believe this, that cannot find peace, the reality literally brings me to my knees.

Sometimes we highlight the person of Jesus as the example (back up to verse 21), but the power comes when we acknowledge the atonement, the bearing of our sins. When we diminish the work of Jesus on the cross, we magnify our human ability to do good and earn our forgiveness. Let us know our identity in Christ by His suffering and find our return to our Shepherd by the power and justice served by 'his body on the tree.'

Our healing returns us into fellowship with God, the chasm that divides us and God, has been overcome. God loves those who are hurting, those who are under the penalty and power of sin. Be delivered and healed from sin. He took our sins. He bore their guilt. He bore their condemnation. And turn to God, return to Him and experience a new enjoyment of peace with Him.

Anne Marie
The Loved Bible Project

Day 17: Bonus

1 Peter 2:24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

Think of a time when you have felt defeated, angry, worn out by the world, lonely or overwhelmed...we have all had times when we have felt at least one of these emotions...thankfully, our father has promised us in His word that we can have VICTORY over everything in this world. Psalm 60:12 tells us: "With God we will gain the victory..." all we have to do is believe it, claim it and then live in that victory.

No matter the situation in which you find yourself, God will walk through it with you toward the victory He has promised, but only IF you allow Him to. He is a God of restoration. He comforts us in disappointment. He is gentle when we feel an angry mess. He is quiet strength when frustration threatens to overwhelm us. He disarms our best defenses with His persistent grace. He confronts our human pride with His perfect love. He looks for hopeless situations to flood us with His hope. He gives us the grace to be like Him. He allows us to overcome our challenges with strength and joy.

We often worship in the good times but quit when the going gets tough. When we worship God as a good God even when our circumstances aren't, we bring glory to Him. Our perspective is corrected His peace floods our hearts. His presence lets us know that He is with us. He is faithful. He is trustworthy. And He is always in control.

Today, allow His spirit to begin a work of restoration in you. Maybe you need emotional or physical healing? Maybe you need Him to heal a broken relationship or expectation? Maybe you need to offer forgiveness that is long overdue? Let Him do it. Ask Him to heal you. He will. Determine to stand on the promise that He WILL restore beauty to brokenness. He is waiting for you to trust Him enough to take that first step toward the victory that His word repeatedly promises. Really, it is your choice...do you choose to be a VICTIM to the circumstances of this world or will you choose to be a VICTOR for God's glory? We can be free from our sin and rise up from the scars that those sins leave in their wake. Take the step toward freedom and healing. Miracles await. Reach out and claim yours."

Tracy Gibson

Day 18: I am victorious

1 Corinthians 15:56-57 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Victory in Jesus is one of my absolute favorite hymns. Every single time I sing it, a love for Him wells up within my heart and my soul, and I worship Him wholeheartedly. Jesus earned our victory with the greatest sacrifice anyone could ever make. For such a long period of my life, I did not claim that victory, I did not live as a person whose victory has been assured. Now that I know I am victorious through Christ, my heart soars at the mention of our gain from His sacrifice.

I did not claim victory in Jesus, because I did not have an understanding of what victory meant. For far too long I lived as a victim. I have not always been safe. Though I have always been loved by God, always been watched over by Him, I have been put in situations that were not safe. In fact, they were abusive. As I grew older, I continued that pattern by putting myself into situations that were not safe, because I knew no other way. I longed to know that I was worth more, that I was loved for more than being used. I knew well the power of sin, and the consequences it brought with it. In the summer of 1995, I sat in my car and cried out to God, "If you are really there God, rescue me. Get me out of my mess!"

And He did exactly that – He rescued me from the consequences of the sins others had committed and the sins I had committed. He sent me to work at a place that was completely new to me and far away from the mess I had created. He began to show me through His word, who I was in Him, who He was, and what promises I could claim. He taught me that shame no longer had a place in my life because Jesus had washed my sins away with His blood.

He has worked in my heart from that moment on, He has not stopped. He continues to show me how Jesus' sacrifice has won me the victory. I have struggled through the years with anger, bitterness, sadness, and resentment. I have had to work through these feelings and fight to remember that Jesus wins. Each and every time I have worked through another hard layer of healing, He has been there. I have felt His presence, His love, and His power. I claim this verse as a promise. I am victorious because He was victorious and that will never, ever change.

His offer of victory is open to anyone who believes in Him. And though there are still times of hurting, of hardship, and of deep pain, His victory is eternal, and nothing can ever destroy that. Those who believe in Him need not wallow in shame, self-pity, or fear. Rather, we can stand strong, because our God has already won the victory.

Kelli Moore,
All Your Heart Ministries
<http://www.allyourheartministries.com>

Day 19: I am safe

I John 5:18 We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe and the evil one cannot harm them.

Many years ago I heard a pastor preach on our home being a sanctuary. He said our homes should be a place of refuge for our children. Our children should know that when they are home they are loved and protected from the noise and pressures of this world. They should feel safe. God our Father wants the same for you. Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called children of God! (I John 3:1). If you have given your life to Jesus, you are His child. He loves you. He has adopted you. He will protect you. The evil one cannot harm you. You are safe.

In the book of I John, the church appears to be having an identity crisis. There are false teachers teaching odd things and John wants to make sure these young Christians remain strong and united. He arms them with truth and reassurance.

John had to remind the Church of what they already knew. Jesus came in the flesh. Jesus is God. Jesus died and rose again. If you hear anything different, it is false. He repeatedly spoke truth to them, over and over again, so that when they heard false teaching they would recognize it and not be led astray. He also had to give them reassurance. He reminds them of what they know, where they've been, what they've seen and most importantly whose they are. It is no different with us. Daily we hear and see things that cause our hearts to grow weary, confused, afraid, anxious and unworthy. These are enemy tactics. Fill your hearts and mind with truth so that when the enemy tries to feed you lies, you won't believe them and you won't be led astray. The truth is your sanctuary.

These are some truths that John shared about our identity in Christ.

Your sins are forgiven (2:12)

You know him who is from the beginning (2:13)

You have overcome the evil one (2:13)

You know the Father (2:13)

You are strong (2:14)

The word of God lives in you (2:14)

You are anointed by the Holy Spirit (2:20)

You know the truth (2:21)

You have eternal life (2:25)

You are loved (3:1)

You are a child of God (3:1)

He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. (4:4) You

are born of God (4:7)

You have His Spirit. (4:13) You

are an overcomer (5:4-5) You

have victory (5:4)

You have life in His Son (5:11)

You can ask anything in His name and He hears you. (5:15) You

are Safe. (5:18)

The wicked one can not touch you (5:18)

Your actions and behaviors are a reflection of what you believe. Stop trying to fix yourself. Stop listening to the lies of the enemy. Fix your eyes on Jesus. Know your identity in Christ. He has given you the victory.

"In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear." I John 4:16

I am safe.

Herminia Esqueda

Day 19: Bonus: Protection Plan

I John 5:18 We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe and the evil one cannot harm them.

By definition "protection" is the act of preventing someone or something from suffering harm or injury.

When we think of protection in our society, we think about large iron clad gates and security systems. These are the things we put our hope and trust in to keep us safe.

1 John 5:18 – "We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them."

But, when we talk about being protected in Christ it's more than heavy gates and security alarms. When we commit our life to God and put our hope and trust in Jesus, we get something far greater.

The "protection plan" we are under allows us to let go of hurts, anger, resentment, fear, frustration, anxiety, stress.

It's not just a protection that stands guard and waits for bad things to happen and fight them off. It's a protection that moves forward and removes barriers so things that could have happened won't.

Think of situations that have happened in your life, where you could clearly see that God "went before you" and made a way. Now think about this...there are obstacles that satan had in place for you to bear, but when we surrendered our life to God and placed our hope and trust in Him, He removed obstacles so we wouldn't have to endure them.

I don't know about you, but I am very familiar what it costs to put a high tech security system in your home. It's not cheap.

But, the cost of that plan is nothing compared to the cost of the protection plan we have in Christ.

Jesus gave His life so we could be "God-protected".

And with His protection on our lives, Satan cannot lay a hand on us.

Amanda Massingill
<https://mandismakings.wordpress.com>

Day 20: I am protected

John 10:28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of My hand

Today's devotional is from the heart of Alyssa. Take time to stop and think today about this verse with the help of Alyssa's words and ask the Holy Spirit to be your help as you study God's Word. What does it mean to have eternal life? To never perish? To be protected and safe?

"This weekend, we went to a waterpark. My 4 kids, 2 nephews, mother-in-law, and I all spent a glorious day enjoying various sorts of water-related fun. This particular waterpark, like many others, has a central "river" running through it connecting the rides and a "wave pool" idea. But THIS waterpark combined the two so that part of the river was full of exciting waves pitching you to and fro. It was such fun, until my 6-year-old decided he needed to get OUT of the float to experience these waves firsthand. Of course, he was wearing a life jacket and I was right there, but when that first big wave came, the water crashed over his head. I grabbed him as hard as I could so he would not get carried away. That was all the wave he needed and back in the float he went to enjoy the waves again!

As I read this verse, I remember holding him. The power in my grasp, the determination to not let go, the fear in his eyes, the comfort knowing I was there. These last few weeks have seen waves of heartache, terror, brokenness, and ugliness threaten to drown our nation and our world. Terror attacks, police brutality, violence against the police, racism, and a nasty political climate among other things have tossed me to and fro inside. Where do I stand? How can I help? What kind of world will this be for my kids? Will it ever get better? How much longer, Jesus? I begin to sink.

But then the powerful, nail-scarred hand of my Savior appears. He wraps His mighty right hand around me and pulls me up. He hides me in the shelter of His secret place. He will place my feet upon a rock and my head will be exalted above the enemies that surround me. Nothing can separate me from His love. He is my shepherd. Whatever dark place, whatever valley I must walk through, I need not fear. The staff He carries can keep me on the right path. He is with me, He will not forsake me. He will strengthen me, He will uphold me. Through seasons of marital strife, financial difficulties, sleepless nights with fussy babies, medical problems, depression, He has held me. He has not let me drown. He has not let my foot slip.

And sister, through whatever challenges come at you to submerge you under their crushing waves of worry, and fear, and guilt, and shame? He is holding you. He's got you. He has written your name on His hands (Isaiah 49:16). He will not let you go. You can trust Him. Even when you cannot see Him, He is there.

If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31-39)

Alyssa Molina

Day 21: I can forgive others

Ephesians 4:32 – “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

Matthew 6:14 – “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you,”

The list of scriptures in the Bible related to forgiving others is a long list. Longer than I would really like it to be. If I'm being honest, one scripture related to forgiving others is enough for me. Often times when we think about forgiving others for what they have done to us, we tend to weigh the offense. Some are not as hard to forgive as others. Some offenses, once talked through, can be forgiven quickly and forgotten almost as easily.

Luke 6:37 – “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven;”

But, then there are others.

There are those that cut deep. Wrongs that have been done by people who we thought would never hurt us. Those are the ones we can't forgive. Those are the ones we replay in our mind. And, we wonder why would God, who loves us, want us to forgive someone who did something so hurtful? Because we've been forgiven.

Ephesians 4:32 – “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

When we think about forgiving those who have hurt us, we sometimes forget what we've been forgiven for.

God sent His Son to die on a cross for ALL of our sins so we could spend eternity with Him. If most of us are being honest, there are sins we have been forgiven for that we don't even want our closest friends to know about. Hearing people talk about God being all-seeing and all-knowing frightens us a little bit because we know the deep dark areas we try to hide.

But you're forgiven. When we remember what we've been forgiven for and who has forgiven us, it should make forgiving others a little easier.

Matthew 18:21-22 – “Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.”

See, we are created in the image of God. We are image-bearers. If God is a God of forgiveness, as his children we should show God's love by forgiving others. We know this world will hurt us. We know people we love will cause us pain. But, we know above this, that there is a God in Heaven who loves us greater than any love on earth and any hurt we will bear. We forgive others not because we want to make them feel better.

We forgive because we've been forgiven. Forgiveness doesn't make us weak. It makes us stronger in Christ.

Amanda Massingill,
<https://mandismakings.wordpress.com>

Day 22: I am promised eternal life

John 6:47 I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life.

God's word is full of promises for His people. When the reality of life is heavy and weighing on our spirits, it is comforting to be reminded of these promises. No matter what is happening in our lives, we can hold tight to the promises of God. Hebrews 10:23 assures us, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful."

We also need to be reminded that every single one of His promises requires action on our part. In this passage from John 6:47 Jesus tells us "I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life." The promise is everlasting life. The only requirement is that we believe. That seems simple enough and it is, but it's not always easy is it?

Believing that God is always good can be hard when there is so much happening that is bad. For me, the only way to combat the enemy, see past the lies, and uncover the truth is by spending time in the word and in prayer. Each word that you read and each prayer that is spoken will remind you of God's love for His people. It will remind you of His love for YOU!

When you are constantly filling your mind with the word and lifting your prayers to the Lord, you are always being reminded of who He is and of who you are in Him. Believing is a natural result of your choice to stay in the word and communicate with the Father through prayer.

It may seem difficult to find the time or the energy to study the word. We have so much going on, so many commitments, so many responsibilities, so many obstacles. I can promise you that as difficult as it may seem to make that commitment, nothing is more difficult than trying to navigate life without it.

When we don't spend time in the word, we are leaving ourselves vulnerable to the enemy. We can either choose to spend time in God's word and accept the truth of who He says we are or we can choose to leave ourselves open to the attacks of the enemy who will fill our minds with lies. The choice is ours to make. I pray that you will choose to allow God to define who you are.

Let's close out with a word of prayer.

"Heavenly Father, we just want to thank you and praise you for who you are. We thank you for your promises and for your love. Help us Lord to make a commitment to spend time in your word and in prayer. Holy Spirit, lead us and teach us what you want us to understand. God we thank you for the promise of eternal life. What an amazing gift! Please help us to remember that we belong to you and help us to be a light in the darkness. In the name of Jesus. Amen!"

Tracy McGee
All Your Heart Ministries
<http://www.allyourheartministries.com>

Day 22: Can we take a walk?

John 6:47 Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life.

If we were neighbors, I would ask you to walk and talk with me. And I'd share with you my heart. I went through some difficult times when I first started "The Loved Bible Project". This project was just a project for me - I saw it as a personal stress reliever and way to serve the homeless as a 'triple booked calendar' hot mess of a mom with 5 littles under 10 years old. I was not adequately covered in prayer and I was left open for attacks by the enemy. I was feeling my family attacked, my passions, my time, my energy - one by one and there were many times I just wanted to stop.

But God used this trial for my good. I learned I could not do this alone, I needed Him and others and then I prayed and they prayed for me. Every day, I committed to prayer and I committed to being into the Word. I felt God's direction and heard His voice.... but I was still overwhelmed. I thought - "God, I am doing as you say, I am in your Word, I am praying. I acknowledge the good, I see your plan, I get it now. Why are the attacks still happening and I do not have the energy. Where is the strength and the rest for the weary you promised??"

Then my 2 year old daughter had an almost tragic accident and I had this overwhelming feeling that she was going to be taken from me. The images are seared in my mind of her dropping out of consciousness and visions consumed my mind of her not waking up. But then I said to God "Thy will be done." And my thoughts were flooded with scripture from the previous weeks. He literally pulled me out of a mind storm of anxiety and defeat, with His very Word that I read just weeks before.

I didn't know I needed those Words so badly. And at the moment I read them, it felt like a to do. I knew I needed to do it, but more as a task, a challenge. But now... after seeing how He provided His Word to literally save me from the attacks to my mind, I cannot imagine not arming myself every single day.

There are days I feel so busy, so tired, and prayer and reading God's Word will simply not wash the pile of dishes in my sink.

My 2 year old frustrates me and I forget that day. The power of remembering... can I beg you - don't wait. You just do not know what is going to happen tonight. Tomorrow, next week. It literally pains me to think that you might go through a potentially tragic incident with a loved one and not be prepared. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you, to help you constantly fill your mind with His Word and lift your prayers to Him. And as difficult as it seems to make time or to learn how, God didn't leave us defenseless. Don't let these powerful weapons collect dust.

I am praying for you friend. And if this is a struggle for you and you want me to pray for you by name, please email lovedbible at gmail.com

Anne Marie
The Loved Bible Project

Day 23: I can give thanks for everything

Ephesians 5:20 ...giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ

Let's do a pull-back and put this verse in context:

"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Eph.15-20)

We can now see that this verse is stuck towards the end of a something that looks like a list. At the beginning of this list, I see the word "therefore." I've learned that whenever you spot the word "therefore" in the Bible, you need to look before it to see what it's "there for." When we do that, we see God telling us to be careful how we live. To not live as those who are unwise.

To make the best use of our time, because time is short. I think that's how a lot of us crave to live. We don't want to waste our lives. We want to be sure we're using our time for the right things. We don't want to waste this. But we're scared because we don't know exactly how. That's why it's so helpful that we're provided with these instructions. I'll let you read through that whole passage and glean from it, but for now I'm going to zoom in on verse 20, where it talks about giving thanks.

Giving thanks. Do you think that's an odd thing to be on a list about how to be wise and not waste your time? At first it may seem that way, but really, thankfulness is to our soul like oxygen to our lungs. It keeps us spiritually healthy and alive! Sometimes we get caught up in what we're doing for God that we forget to give thanks to Him. Or we view it as lesser than serving Him in another way. But be sure of this, God commands thankfulness, He delights in thankfulness, and He is glorified in thankfulness. Thankfulness in the hard things; in the happy things. In the mundane things. In the exciting things. In the scary things. All the time. For everything. This can be done as simply as stopping and saying a quick prayer of thanks for a specific thing or way you saw God work. It can be singing a song of thanks, or creating any piece of artwork for that matter. Mostly, it's a posture of our hearts.

So today I urge you to remember--You want to make the most of your time? Take time for thankfulness unto the Lord!!!

A Friend of the Loved Bible Project

Day 24: I have not been given a spirit of fear

2 Timothy 1:7 For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

Full disclosure: I was full of fear when I hit submit and volunteered to write this piece for the Loved Bible Project. I questioned my decision at every turn. You know, those questions that rule you when you let fear and anxiety take control? Like popcorn, they kept coming up over and over: Who am I to write? What do I have to say that is going to be helpful to anyone? Why do I think I know enough about God to share Him with others?

Then, I sat down and spent time with God and the verse prompt for today. And, I listened. I listened and was reminded that who I am is a child of God. That I don't have to have the right words to be helpful. I don't have to know enough about God. The Bible already has all of that, and more.

The questions I began with are questions of identity. This verse establishes our identity as followers of Christ. So, whether or not I think so, I have power. I can do the things that God wants me to do, not through my own strength, but through the power His Spirit gives me. I have love. With the help of the Holy Spirit, I am able to look at others the way Christ does and I have a longing and desire to help them. I have self-discipline. God gives me the perseverance to see through to the end the tasks He has given me.

In the end, the only real question is this: From where do we get our identity? Do we subscribe to the flawed vision that we get from ourselves? Or, do we read today's verse and trust that God will do what He says He will do? If we are to truly call ourselves followers of Christ, we have to trust that God will make perfect His strength in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9), that His word does not return to Him useless (Isaiah 55:11) and that there is power in the Gospel message (Romans 1:16). Fundamentally, all of my questions are questions of Trust. And, when I trust in God, He answers the questions.

Thought for reflection: When I trust God's promises, His Spirit helps me cast aside my human limitations and do His work with His strength

Staci Wilson

Day 25: I am assured that all things work together for good

Romans 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose

Read that verse through a few times and then ask yourself a really hard question: "Do I really believe that God is at work for my good?"

Sometimes when we find ourselves in a really difficult situation we may begin to question, to doubt, to ask: "Do I really trust God?"

And it's okay to ask! God knows our hearts; He loves us through all of our doubts, fears and insecurities. He understands.

Trusting God is hard when the people in our lives have always failed us.

And trusting God is hard when we can't see any possible good in our current circumstances.

Sometimes we mistakenly believe the myth that once we receive Jesus into our hearts, once we become a child of God, and are sealed with the Holy Spirit our story will become tied up nicely with a bow of "happily ever after."

But God never promises us a "happily ever after."

In fact, His promise in John 16:33 is just the opposite: **"In this world you will have trouble."** Wait, what?!?

But hold on, that isn't all Jesus says, the full verse reads: **"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."**

In this world we will have trouble. But in Jesus we have peace. So we must stick close to Jesus.

I'd like to invite you to spend some time in one of my favorite chapters of the Bible, John 15. Read the words of Jesus where He says:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener." (v1)

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (v5)

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love." (v9)

"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." (v11)

Jesus Himself promises we will have trouble. But He also promises His love. If we remain in Him and in His love.

So how do we remain or, as some translations read, "abide" in Him?

We depend on Him, we spend time with Him, and we follow His direction for our lives. We remain united with Him in heart, mind, and will.

And when we remain in Him, no matter the circumstances, He will make our joy complete.

The Greek word for complete in the New Testament is pleroo which means: to fill a vessel or hollow place, to fill by diffusing something throughout, to fill one's heart, to take possession of it.

When we allow Jesus to take possession of our heart He will make our joy complete!

Complete joy! Can you imagine?

A joy that is not only sweet, but is completely fulfilling and sustaining. A joy so complete the "happily ever after" of Disney princesses pales in comparison.

A joy in which we can know and trust that through His great love for us, God is indeed working all things together for our good.

Tara Blake Hatton
<http://storyofmyheart.org>

Day 26: I am Christ's friend

John 15:15 I no longer call you servant's, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead I call you friends for everything I have learned from my Father I have made known to you.

Oh my goodness, these words! These words that Jesus spoke. Did you hear them? I mean did you really hear them? Read them again and then when you're finished, just be still and let them sink in for a minute. We all know that God loves us so much that He sent Jesus to the cross to die for us. But this, this takes it to a whole new level. Not only are we loved but Jesus tells us that we are friends.

In today's world of social media, a "friend" may not seem like such a big deal. We use the word to describe anyone and everyone that we have any kind of connection to. I don't believe that this is how Jesus intended this word to be used. As a matter of fact, he goes on to tell us that everything he learned from the Father, he has made known to us. That means you and me!!! How amazing is that?

Now let's take this a step further. Whenever I read a verse that really inspires me, I always go back and read the scripture surrounding it so that I can go a little deeper. John 15: 1-17 is the familiar passage about the vine and the branches. Jesus describes himself as the vine, God is the gardener and as believers, we are the branches. Along with the knowledge that Jesus gives us as friends, he also passes along a certain amount of responsibility. Our responsibility is to remain in Jesus and to remain in his love. In order to remain in his love, we are to obey his commands. The command here is to love each other just like Jesus loved us, like a friend.

It's really an unbelievable title to be given to us, one that we can treasure. As we read His word, and learn more about Him, we are able to love as He did, we are able to discover what being a true friend means. Be encouraged that as a believer you are a friend of Christ, and then pray about how you can show that level of friendship to others around you.

Tracy McGee
All Your Heart Ministries
<http://www.allyourheartministries.com>

Day 27: I am God's child

John 1:12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

I didn't plan it this way - when I put together the Identity calendar I originally had today early in the month. It ended up getting switched around at the last minute due to arranging writers and artists but interestingly enough - we have "I am God's Child" and "I am adopted as his child" right next to each other. I toss up duplicate as God's plan - an emphasis for us to really fix our mind on what it means to be a child of the one, true King. Thank you to Amanda Hertzler for today's devotional.

"Adoption brings beauty to an ugly reality. You would probably quickly agree that the concept of adoption is wonderful, but think of why it is needed. A child is adopted because they were orphaned. Their parents, family, and identity were taken from them. They do not know stability. They are not told of their worth. They are alone. However, through the selflessness of another, these missing pieces can be restored.

We cannot earn the right to be adopted into God's family. We cannot fight for it, debate for it, or work for it. We can only accept it. We can choose to exchange the reality of loss and loneliness for one of love and acceptance. He GIVES us the right.

Stop living as though you are not worthy of his love. Stop trying to analyze your flaws and weigh your values against your problems. You have already been given the right to be a part of God's family. He offers you his name. He offers you your identity. You are not a lonely, forgotten child. You are a beautiful creation who bears his name. This is a name that is greater than fear. It is stronger than our weakness. It breaks the chains of death and despair. It bears grace and establishes peace.

I have been challenged to live in this freedom. To be honest, I don't fully understand it. I am constantly tripping over my own inadequacies. But God is constantly reminding me that it's okay that I can't conquer my fears alone. I'm not meant to. I am a child of God. I am a part of his family, and I bear his name.

I pray that you come to know this freedom as well. Turn your gaze from the mirror and look to the One who holds it. Listen to who he tells you that you are."

Amanda Hertzler

Day 28: I am adopted as His child

Ephesians 1:5 He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will

As you read today's verse, take time to read the below reflection from Teresa Idoux. In a world where we have to earn everything, it's hard to understand the gift God gave us by sending His son to die for us.

"Many days I wake up on a familiar path, mostly guided by the way and routine of this world, and I pace and move, then find myself sprinting along, trying to keep up. My heart sighs and weighs in as troubles come. Then as sure as the day sets in, my heart begins to long for a place of understanding and belonging. Growing up, I struggled with this feeling. Losing my father at an early age gave me a skewed idea of my place in this world and I struggled to find it for myself- I looked for my place in my grades, in being "good", my accomplishments, in my faults, my mistakes, my inequities. I tried hard and I worked hard and I paced, and paced, and paced. Until one day, the truth that He had wanted me to hear all along came in one sentence, "He has done it all, you need not do anything but believe."

I think that in order to feel loved and accepted, we believe we need to be able to pull our own weight, do something to earn our place. Our Father does not ask us to perform to be accepted as His. He loved us enough to send His only son to die for us so that we would live as His children, chosen and holy and loved (1 John 3:1). No grade requirements, no weight standards, or tasks to mark off a list. He died for us as we were and keeps us within His loving grasp as we are. He knows us by name, we belong to Him, and we are His (Isaiah 43:1). May we walk in this truth as we strive to belong; may we set performance aside and simply remember that we have a place. May we embrace our identity as children of a Father who has done it all for us."

Teresa Idoux

Day 29: I can grasp how wide and long and high and deep Christ's love is

Ephesians 3:18 ... may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ"

Recently, out of His great love for me, God has begun to show me that I have spent my entire adult life building walls. Walls around my self, to protect and fortify my heart, walls of safety that I felt were a necessity. I have lived so long with these walls in place that they have become a part of me; I could no longer see nor realize they were there. God has unveiled my eyes to see the truth, that these walls are built by bricks of lies, fear and insecurity. He is showing me that the walls built by lies cannot withstand the truth of His love.

In our verse for today, Paul writes that he wants the Ephesians to "**grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.**"

I thought I did. I thought I had a good, solid grasp on the magnitude of God's great love for me. But while I know the words to be true, and while I believe them with all my heart, I know that I have not been walking freely in the fullness of God's love for me.

God, in His goodness and mercy, is showing me that even were I to spend the remainder of my days building with all my might, I would never be able to construct walls to withstand the power and ferocity of His great love for me.

In Romans 8:35 Paul writes that "**nothing shall separate us from the love of Christ.**" Nothing. He goes on in verses 38-39 to declare: "**neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**"

Not any thing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God. Nothing.

Not even walls of self preservation that we may have spent over half our lives constructing.

God's love is so wide. We cannot go around it.

His love is so long. We cannot escape it.

His love is so high we can never build walls high enough to keep His love out.

And His love is so deep that as much as we may try to burrow into our cave of self protection; the deeper we try to hide our selves away, we will always only ever find more of His great love for us.

In Psalm 139 David writes that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made." He also proclaims that there is no where we can go from God's Spirit, no where we can flee from His presence.

8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there;

if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I

settle on the far side of the sea,

10 even there your hand will guide me,

your right hand will hold me fast.

Psalm 139:8-10

God's love for us is so wide, so long, so high, so deep; there is NOTHING that will ever separate us from His great love. We simply cannot escape His love.

God, I thank You that in Your Word You promise to shine the light of your love brightly in my heart, to expose all of my dark places, all of my hurts, and all of my pains, to Your healing love. I thank You that You take my brokenness and You make me whole. I thank you that wherever I may be, from the heavens to the depths, from the wings of the dawn to the far side of the sea, You see me. You know me. And you love me. I can never escape your love.

I pray for my self and for all Your children reading these words that we will live as people free and confident as we walk in Your love for us. I pray that we will be strengthened with power through Your Spirit in our very souls, to the very core of who You have created us to be so that Christ will dwell in our hearts through our faith in Him. I pray that we will know that our roots run deep in Your love, that we will know that we are established not in our own selves, but in Your love and that we will not only know, but that we will live and walk in the width and length and height and depth of Your great love. I pray that we will truly know Your love, a love that surpasses knowledge. And I pray that we will be filled to the measure of the fullness of You God. God, I thank you that **You promise** that it is **Your power** at work within us and that **You will do** immeasurably more than we could ever ask or imagine. I thank You Father God that we can stand firm on Your Word, that what You promise, You are faithful to fulfill.

In Jesus' holy and precious name,

Amen.

(from Ephesians 3, Psalm 139, and 1 Thessalonians 5:24)

Tara Blake Hatton
<http://storyofmyheart.org>

Day 30: I am a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit

Ephesians 2:22 I am a dwelling for the Holy Spirit

God breathed life into Adam and Eve. They weren't merely created, they were given a life giving breath by God. And then they dwelled with God.

Take a minute and imagine what that must have been like- the lush beauty of the garden. The feel of the grass on their bare feet. The sun warming them just right as they walked through the Garden with beams of sunlight peeking through the boughs of the trees- full of fruit- perfectly ripe and ready for the picking.

As the day rolled on, Adam and Eve rest in the shade of a tree. And in the midst of Adam and Eve sitting against the trunk of the tree- God sat with them.

It's not that He was dwelling with them in a blaze of glory that caused them to need to cover their faces as Moses did. It's not that He overwhelmed Adam and Eve- it's that He completed those moments. He brought a wholeness to the creation that He created. The creator dwelling with the created. The male and female He created and used His own breath to breathe life into- just dwelt and all was very good.

It's hard for me to remember that this sense of wholeness and completion is what it means when we dwell with God. The perfect grace and peace that comes with that dwelling is a gift and a taste of what Heaven is like. When the fall happened- it wasn't just the brokenness and sin and evil that ran rampant and created a chasm between us and God- that was bridged with Christ's death and our acceptance of that sacrifice.

Where Satan starts to win with God's people is when he throws the lie that Christ's death doesn't qualify us to DWELL with God today. We have had a blanket thrown over our heads that makes us forget that when God breathed life into us, He breathed part of Himself into us- the Holy Spirit. That is almost ridiculous to think about. The God of the universe not only desires to dwell with us but makes it so easy by creating in us a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit.

We don't have to go any place special to dwell with God. We don't have to call and set up an appointment to meet with God. He has made it so simple, we can't always believe it- He's with us all the time. Immanuel- God with us. Not just when we rub the lamp, but all the time.

Dwelling with God is a gift and part of the intent of God's creation. God desires for us to dwell with Him and be with Him. Did you catch that? Do you believe that- God pursues you to dwell with you. The artist of your soul and of your being desires to be with you.

It's in those times of dwelling with God that we experience His love in ways that are at times so real they are uncomfortable. It's the dwelling times that give us the space to sit and BE who GOD HAS CREATED US TO BE. We allow the artist to continue to create more fully what He has started. He who began a good work in you will continue until the day of completion. When we dwell with God, we are giving permission for the artist to continue the masterpiece.

Day 31: Bonus Devotional

My husband says I'm the least patient person he's ever met.

That might sound like something horrible to hear but I know it's true. The second least patient person is probably my oldest daughter, in whom I see myself every time she drives me somewhere or we talk about certain subjects such as...

... people's behavior in crowds. Or their behavior related to politics. I

get her and we feel each other's pain.

One year for Lent I gave up making angry remarks about other people's driving. When I saw how often I had to stop myself mid-sentence, I realized how much of a bad habit it was for me. I'm really glad this became permanent beyond Lent and I either stop a snarky comment before it continues or I just keep it zipped in the first place.

I have no idea how I got such a minuscule (and even that is a generous description :)) supply of patience in my DNA. My parents have pretty much an unlimited supply. In fact they're probably at the other end of the spectrum - in the most patient people in the world category. I guess they got our whole family's portions because my brother doesn't have a whole ton of patience either. The only sibling with patience is the one not biologically related to us. Oy. Lucky her!

So anyway ever since I started working as the Office Manager / IT Department / Help Desk / Chief of HR / Compliance Supervisor for the family business, I spend a great deal of time needing to contact customer service representatives from many organizations.... our internet provider, companies we contract with, vendors, banks, the mobile & landline phone companies, computer and software companies, copy centers and office supply stores.

I also spend time with some regularity in lines at the post office....

When I first started doing this job I was frustrated within the first millisecond - as in, when I realized I had to pick up the phone and deal with this thing. Or definitely by the time the "menu options" were announced.

But lately I realized, after a delivery truck tore the cable line out of the pole in front of our house and our internet, landline, fax and cable went out during the Verizon strike and therefore weren't restored for three days ... when I called and told the same story more times than I can count for a few days in a row with an extremely calm voice... that dealing with customer service was actually becoming one of my talents.

Was I actually starting to develop PATIENCE???

God works in mysterious ways.

But I also realized something else recently: I've been going at it ALL WRONG. I stumbled on that realization by "accident" when I signed up to be a guest contributor for The Loved Bible Project. The scripture I was supposed to design art work and/or a blog post for is **"Through Him [Jesus] you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit"** (Ephesians 2:22).

The scriptures say that Christians are meant to be unified and work as if they're a single body (Christ's

body) together, each person having crucial roles, to make a positive difference and help lead others to God, the same way that Jesus did during His time on earth. So God should be dwelling in that collective body.

The scriptures also say that each individual Christian's body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). I've always looked at this verse only as a reason to have profound respect and take care of my body the way the Israelites were taught to respect and take care of the Temple.

But I started reading more scriptures about the effect that being a dwelling place for God should have on a person, and there's so much more to it than a little blog post can do justice but basically this is mind-boggling. Before Jesus, people could only rely on their own abilities and sometimes they were given momentary Holy Spirit power. But Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to stay in us.

From personal experience and stories I hear from other Christians, I know that upon salvation we can be miraculously and instantly healed of many things. But we don't become perfect. We're wrapped in human flesh and we're always going to struggle with its weaknesses. The Holy Spirit is what helps us keep healing and keep being more than we could ever be on our own. The same power that created every single thing DWELLS, permanently, in me.

The same power that created every single thing DWELLS, permanently, in me.

What?? What a gift!!!

Why on earth am I not tapping into that constantly?

Here I am literally having this superpower but I keep trying in my own resolve to have more patience or conquer fears or be nicer. Then I berate myself for not being a "good enough" Christian / person / whatever.

I'm guessing others can relate... especially because this seems to be preached quite a bit: "What's wrong with you? You're a Christian, you're not supposed to struggle with that anymore." "Be more _____." "That's 'bad' so shame on you."

The point isn't to minimize our faults or be defeated by them or beat ourselves up over having them. God is so loving and caring that He actually comes and dwells in us so we have help. "for it is God who works in you to will and act in order to fulfill His good pleasure." (Philippians 2:13).

This isn't supposed to be a secret, but for some reason we're always told to "be more _____" in our own strength instead of going to the God who works in us.

So I've been trying something different this week with my struggles. Instead of summoning my own will to be patient, kind, or have self-control when I don't feel like it, I stop and say to myself "ok Holy Spirit, **I can't do this but You can.**"

It takes a lot of trust in God for me to do this. If I don't trust that His ideas about loving my neighbors and having self-control are actually wiser than my ideas to look at Facebook instead of go help my elderly neighbor or to indulge in something unhealthy my stomach or brain is telling me it wants, then I'm not going to let the Holy Spirit help me.

It reminds me a lot of willpower. We can keep questioning our lack of willpower and vow to summon up more willpower tomorrow, or on Monday, or for our New Year's Resolution. But for some reason it just doesn't seem to stick.

Our "why" makes all the difference in the world.

Why should I let the Holy Spirit be patient for me when not a cell in my being wants to be? Because He knows better and I trust Him and it works.

I want to end by repeating that as long as we're wrapped in human flesh we will struggle. No perfect person exists, even with the Holy Spirit. I'm not saying the Holy Spirit will fix and cure every single problematic human tendency if we let Him. But we can most certainly be people who are becoming more peaceful and content and helpful and caring than we were before being saved or can ever be in our own strength. We should be part of the solution, not part of the problem. We Christians have power within us to ease our own pain and that of others.

As Priscilla Shirer says in the Armor of God study, we have this benefits package and quite an exquisite inheritance at our disposal. We need to stop living below our means.

Here's to continuously opening this amazing gift from our lavishly loving God!

Believe in what He can do for and through you, and let go of the expecting perfection or superpower on your own! It's not about you... you can't but He can.

Debbie
<http://www.imgoingthedistance.com>

Day 31: I am set free

John 8:32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free

I am so excited to be writing the final devotional for "The Loved Bible Project" Identity Devotional. It seems so fitting, that God led me to write for these two verses that talk about freedom. We've spent 31 days in God's word. Praying, writing, thinking, processing, loving, immersing, meditating. God's promises about what is to come for us are incredible. He promises freedom.

- Freedom from feeling inadequate
- Freedom from our past mistakes
- Freedom from the mistakes of others that affect us
- Freedom from the lies of satan that tell us we are not enough
- Freedom from the pressure to be anything that we are not
- Freedom from expectations
- Freedom from overwhelming fear.
- Freedom from sin.
- Freedom from shame.

Jesus said...'If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, **and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free**...truly, truly I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.'

[John 8:31-36, emphasis mine]

As I reflect on the last 31 days, I am so encouraged by the promise made to us in this verse.

What would this generation of women look like if we truly loved and lived like we believe the freedom God promises in John 8:32? We would love more passionately. We would serve without fear. We would share with reckless abandon. We would forgive. We would flood the gates of heaven, praying and petitioning for what God has put on our hearts. We would be faithful in the small instead of feeling inadequate to attempt more. We would run to Christ, chains broken and spirits encouraged.

What do you need to be freed from? Write it down. Stare it in the face. Share it with a trusted friend. And then declare God's word over it. He promises that if we abide in his word and are truly his disciples, freedom will follow. Today, tomorrow, next week, next year. Maybe he frees you through counseling, a friend, a book, prayer, more time in the word, accountability, community, or any combination. God is big. So much bigger than we could ever comprehend. God's word is living and active and his love is steadfast. His promises are all given in faithfulness to his precious children [Psalm 33:4].

Let's start living like we believe that if we know the truth of God's word – if we know who we are in Christ and find our identity in him – **the truth will set us free. And if the Son sets us free, we are free indeed.**

You are overwhelmingly loved.
In Christ you are enough.
And through Him you are set free.

Jessica

<https://oursimplyabundantlife.wordpress.com/>

Day 31: Bonus

John 8:32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free

We've spent the last 30 day digging into what it means for our identity to be grounded in Christ.

When I think of identity I often think of the lies I've believed in my own life about who I needed to be or what I perceived as others expectations of me. About five years ago God began to chisel away at the words, thoughts and emotions that had plastered themselves around my heart.

Unfortunately many of those had to do with my identity. One of the biggest lies that up to that point had controlled much of my life, even as a follower Christ, was this idea that I needed to have it all together at all times and that there was no room for brokenness. That lie kept me from asking for help, from allowing others to grieve with me over losses in my life, and ultimately from confessing my sins and experiencing God's forgiveness. As God chiseled away at those things binding my heart I realized that all that was left was this broken hot mess and it wasn't as scary as I thought it would be. It took vulnerability, accountability and several teary moments as God took each piece and stitched my life back together into the life He'd created for me.

One of today's verses is John 8:32, "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." In my life that truth was that at the end of the day it didn't matter if I was married, if I had children, if I had a good job, if I had a college education, if I had a nice home, or if my life looked picture-perfect; it only mattered that I was a child of God. As I've learned to walk in that mindset not only has my perspective on life changed, but I've experienced firsthand the freedom of not living up to others expectations and not allowing the things of my past to be my identity.

In the book of Acts we are introduced to a man name Saul who mercilessly persecutes the followers of Jesus. He has them arrested, thrown into prison and stoned for following Jesus' teachings instead following Jewish law. If you read the story, which you can find in Acts 9, Saul become blind after an encounter with God. God then send's one of His followers Ananias to Saul instructing Ananias to pray that Saul's sight be restored. It is said that something similar to scales fell from Saul eyes and he could immediately see. Saul confessed his faith in God and dedicated the rest of his life to serving Jesus. He also changed his name to Paul, as an outward sign of his inward heart change. God used Paul in incredible ways to further the gospel, to write letters that we read today in the Bible and to be a practical example of God freeing us from the labels we so easily get caught up in.

Paul could have believed that he was not able to be free from his sins and allowed them to dictate his identity. Instead God used him as a practical example of a changed life. The truth that sets us free is the gift of God's grace which is unconditional. It cannot be obtained through good thoughts, good works or words. In our lives we come up against emotions and situations that can become a prison for our souls, our thoughts and our bodies.

When you accept Jesus truth and freedom, it doesn't mean that the temptation you are fighting today will instantly be gone tomorrow. Or that the financial trouble you are currently walking out will disappear. Rather it means that in recognizing the truth of who God has created you to be; His child.

What does that mean practically for our identities?

It means if you're an addict, you wake up each day surrendering to God and asking Him to give you the strength to fight against your addiction.

It means if you're a mom, and you've bought into the lie that "you're only a mom," you ask God to provide you with joy as you run from carpool, to practice to making dinner.

It means if you're an executive whose days are filled with stress and anxiety, that you face the day asking God to give you the grace to not allow the stress and anxiety to control your life.

In Romans 8:2 Paul wrote, "Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death" The law of the Spirit is referring to who you are submitting to everyday; Satan with his negative and evil ways or Jesus and His grace and kindness. The law of sin is the bondage we are in from our actions and our thoughts. While the law of the Spirit is the redemption we experience when we accept that Jesus came and paid the price for our sins; offering us unconditional freedom, through His shed blood.

Where is your identity today; is it in being a child of God? If not will you join me in this freedom of accepting God's grace and walking out this life as God's child? It will change your life from the inside out!

Sharise Toombs

Thank You

I want to thank you for going through this devotional. If you went through the last 31 day, I hope you are renewed and strengthened by God's Word and his promises to us.

This devotional was originally a 31 day challenge on The Loved Bible Project Facebook page. I am so thankful for the many individuals that volunteered their artistic and writing talents to encourage others to get into the Word and draw closer to our Lord and Savior.

I love how Jessica from Our Simply Abundant Life stated her heart as she wrote devotionals for The Loved Bible Project "If you are visiting from The Loved Bible Project page, know that I prayed for you specifically as I was writing this. I boldly asked God to give me words to speak His truth."

We prayed for you and will continue to pray with you as you continue your journey knowing who you are in Jesus Christ.

HOW TO LOVE A BIBLE

PRAY.

Spend time in prayer. Before. During. After. Pray that whoever holds this Bible, Jesus will pierce their heart, open their eyes to see and ears to hear.

CAST AWAY YOUR DOUBT.

ANYONE can love a Bible. Cast away your fears of not being wise enough, not being creative enough, not having enough time. You will never be enough. It is in Christ that we are enough!

BUY A BIBLE.

Purchase a leather (or like leather) 4×6 Bible. I like to use The New International Version or the English Standard Version. The size is important; often the receiver has to travel light with very few things. We do not want this to be a burden.

LOVE IT.

Highlight verses – encouragement, worry, fear, courage, grace, strength, rest, mercy, love, salvation. Follow along with The Loved Bible Project on Facebook for weekly prayer prompts. Write on sticky notes, cards, sheets of paper. Include prayers, songs, drawings, or add stickers.

I like to put a sticky note in the front of the Bible I am working on. I put a goal... *I will pray and Love this Bible for 10 minutes, 3 times a week for 30 days.* It can be any goal that suits your life right now. Just hold yourself accountable.

<http://www.lovedbibleproject.com/how-to-love-a-bible/>