



THE BIBLE IS BORING AND HARD TO UNDERSTAND

As a young man growing up in a Christian home, I knew all too well that reading the Bible was a good thing to do. The problem was that I really struggled to read it!

So I would make a promise to God and myself (usually after church on a Sunday or Wednesday) that I was going to start being good. I was going to read my Bible every day. But you probably know the story. After a few days I'd get bored, busy, or distracted and give up. That, of course, would lead to feeling guilty all over again, and the cycle would repeat itself. Can you relate?

The truth is, developing a good habit of Bible reading is a hard thing for many modern Christians. We have our reasons: "It's hard to read." "I'm really busy." "I get bored easily." But I think it has more to do with our approach.

Sometimes we read the Bible like a self-help book. We're hoping to get something out of it. We want to learn something. We want to find a nugget that will be meaningful to our lives. And we want all of this fast. We Americans like our information short and to the point because we're busy! We've got jobs to do and goals to achieve! So our culture has conditioned us to look for wisdom and knowledge in little, bite-sized nuggets, and I think we bring this same approach to scripture.

Other times, if we're being honest, we read the Bible out of a sense of obligation. We feel like we should. We think God won't be happy with us if we don't read it, so out of guilt we go to God's Word hoping to save our conscience.

But here's the problem. Both of these approaches put us at the center. The Bible becomes a means to our end. The Bible, then, is only as valuable as it is useful. In other words, if I don't get something out of it, why would I read it? Exactly.

So what if we changed our approach? What if instead of approaching the Bible to get something out of it, we approached it like a relationship? What if we read it simply to know more of who our God is?

Here are a few helpful tips for developing a different approach to reading scripture:

- 1. Use a good Bible-reading plan and stick with it.** Don't always rely on your own judgement of what you should read because you'll just gravitate to the verses you like best! You want to get a BIG perspective of God.
- 2. Be okay with not getting anything out of it that day.** Do a husband and wife have breakthrough relational moments every day? Of course not! A healthy marriage is built on years of consistent face time.
- 3. Seek a relationship over an application.** Application isn't a bad thing, but if you seek to turn the Bible into an instruction manual for your life, you'll greatly minimize its value and purpose.

VERSES TO READ:

John 17:1-26

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- **Have I been approaching the Bible for quick fixes to my problems or to develop a better relationship with God?**
- **Do I read the Bible out of obligation? What can I change about my posture to help me have a meaningful relationship with God's word?**

PRAYER TO PRAY

Lord, today, I purpose to seek You and You alone. I pray as Paul prayed, that You would give me a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that I would know You more. Lord, You are my very source of life; apart from You, I can do nothing. So as I seek You, I ask You to reveal Yourself to me, so I may become more like Jesus. In Jesus' name, amen.



PUTTING GOD FIRST

We've all heard it said: "Put God first!" It sounds good, and we hear it talked about in churches all the time. But I wonder, what does it truly mean to put God first? Well, it's more than checking a box in our daily routine, and it's more than 15 minutes in the morning so we can move on with our business. Putting God first is a daily realignment of our hearts and minds to give Jesus

lordship over our lives.

What is lordship, you ask? Well, consider Jesus when the disciples asked Him to teach them to pray. In Matthew 6:9-10, He responded with the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done." First, notice how He's honoring His Father above all else. That's what it means to "hallow" God's name. It means that nothing else in your life will be above God's name and desires.

Naturally, then, this led Jesus (and it leads us as well) to surrender His will and desires to His Father's. Consider how He surrendered His throne and His glory when He came to the earth. And again, on the cross, He surrendered everything when He gave His body, His blood, and, ultimately, His life. Lordship is nothing less than a daily, continual surrender of your heart, mind, body, and will.

So now comes the real heart work; is that kind of surrender representative of your relationship with God? Or do you find yourself continually pleading with Him to "fix" something in your life? Ask yourself, "What am I seeking first—God's desires for my life or my own?" The answer to those questions will tell you a lot about who the real "Lord" of your life is. And if you're anything like me, you'll probably find that you have some work to do in this area! But here's the great news: Jesus is loving and patient with us. Even though we try to occupy the seat that rightfully belongs to Him as our Creator, He lovingly waits for us to recognize our pride and allow Him to take His rightful place on the throne of our hearts.

VERSES TO READ:

John 14:10-14; Psalm 25; Luke 9:23

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Is that kind of surrender representative of my relationship with God?
- What am I seeking first - God's desires for my life or my own?

PRAYER TO PRAY

Lord, today, I put You first. I surrender my life to You and give You lordship of my day. In every task, in every errand, in every meeting, in every encounter with another person, have Your way in me. Be my wisdom, righteousness, strength, and peace so that my life glorifies You. Lord, today, Your kingdom come, Your will be done. In Jesus' name, amen.



WHY AM I HERE?

Did your parents ever tell you that you were an accident? Even though they were thrilled that you were born, it makes you think, “Would things have been better had I been carefully planned?”

God saw you coming even if your parents were caught off guard. He participated in your creation by forming you while you were yet in your mother’s womb! He knew you and He chose you to be His own before you took your first breath (Zechariah 12:1).

You may not have been properly introduced earlier in your life, but God wanted a relationship with you from the very beginning. In fact, it is the number one reason you were born. You’ll never find “home” until you find your Heavenly Father.

How, then, do we connect with this great, unseen God?
How do we cultivate the awareness of His presence within us?

In Revelation 4, we read about 24 spiritual elders who are seated before God’s throne. Think of them as the wisest, purest people who ever walked on earth. In this chapter, we watch them connecting with God. What do they do?

They simply begin to worship God and give Him thanks! It is obvious that they take tremendous pleasure in this exercise, and God, likewise, takes great pleasure in their worship. If you want to understand the deepest and most meaningful reasons for your creation, worship God. Give thanks to Him for every good thing you can think of. Spend a few minutes doing this early in your day and see if you don’t find yourself with new purpose and meaning for life.

VERSES TO READ:

Isaiah 44:2; Zechariah 12:1; Revelation 4:1-11

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Can I worship God even when I don't feel His presence?
- Do I lose sight of His goodness by worrying about things I don't have?

PRAYER TO PRAY

Heavenly Father, I worship You because You loved me, and You chose me to be Your very own child. My greatest purpose in life is to give glory to Your name. In Jesus' name, amen.



FONDNESS OR SURRENDER?

Millions of people in the Christian world hold a very favorable view of Jesus Christ. In fact, many would call themselves Christians. Most would affirm a strong belief in God even though their behaviors might not represent Jesus at all. Can a person have genuine faith in God simply by holding a favorable view of Jesus Christ?

During the first 300 years of Christianity, true believers paid a steep price for their faith, and it is still going on today. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, have been martyred for refusing to deny the Lord. They have been slaughtered in the most horrible ways. I think they held something much deeper than a mere fondness for Jesus' teachings and humble lifestyle.

Romans 10:9 teaches us that salvation comes to those who surrender to the lordship of Christ: *"If you confess with your mouth that 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."* Calling Jesus your Lord is a statement of surrender—total surrender. This is but the beginning of a life journey of learning to surrender to the will of the Father. Why is surrender to God so difficult for us? It comes down to one word: trust. In the secret places of our hearts, we do not really trust that God wants and knows what is best for our lives. We are afraid to put our dreams, relationships, interests, and desires into His hands. We have more confidence in our own ability to direct our lives even though we have ample evidence to the contrary! We want to be our own god.

God asks us to trust Him, but not blindly. Romans 5:8 says, *"But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* He has proven His love for us. He has proven that we can trust Him. He comes to us with His hands open and outstretched. And if we will daily trust Him, He will lead us on a life journey of freedom and fulfillment that does not exist in this world. He asks us to live for Him, but this joyous life cannot be found by fond admiration. It comes only through total surrender.

VERSES TO READ:

Romans 10:9; Romans 5:8; Matthew 16:24-26; James 1:17

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Have I unreservedly surrendered my life to Christ?
- Do I daily deny my natural inclinations and impulses that come into conflict with His claim on my life?
- Do I fully trust Him and believe that His will is the best for me?

PRAYER TO PRAY

Heavenly Father, I confess anew the lordship of Jesus Christ. I believe You want good and perfect gifts for me. You see where my heart struggles to surrender. Help me to trust You more. I give up myself—my will, my thoughts, and my body to You. Thank You for making Your lordship a reality in my life. In Jesus' name, amen.



WHAT IS MY FOCUS?

At some time or another, you've probably experienced the pain of a splinter in your hand. Most of us know the feeling of having an unpleasant distraction and a constant annoyance like that. It's hard to ignore a splinter. It's the kind of distraction that we have to be intentional about removing, just like so many other distractions. Often, the best way to remedy a splinter is to ask for

help from someone with the skill to safely remove it without causing more damage. The best thing we can do is take our eyes off of the splinter (or distraction) and shift our focus to the calm, steady presence that's helping to remove it.

How do we keep our focus on Jesus in the midst of a distracted world that's constantly grabbing for our attention? In John 15, Jesus tells us that He is the vine, and we are the branches. He tells us to "remain" in Him numerous times. In John 15:4, Jesus specifically says, *"Remain in Me, and I in you."* This direction from Jesus is the key to overcoming distractions in our lives.

To remain in Jesus isn't just a desire; it's a choice that demands focus. To focus on something is simply the ability to pay attention to what is important in the midst of distractions. The world wants our focus and is full of endless opportunities for us to lose sight of what's important, but Jesus wants our focus to be on Him first and foremost. In order to remain in Jesus, we must make daily decisions to do the things that keep us in close contact with Him.

If we remain in Him, Jesus promises that He will remain in us. He is lovingly calling us into a close, mutual relationship. He is the focus that allows us to navigate through the pain and challenges of this world. We have the option to daily live in a close relationship with a God that is full of truth, grace, strength, mercy, and love. It won't happen overnight, but all it takes is the first step toward Him, followed by another—day by day, moment by moment, shifting our focus back to what's important.

VERSES TO READ:

Hebrews 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 4:18; John 15:1-8; Matthew 6:33

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- What specific times throughout each day can I pause to acknowledge God?
- What practices can I implement throughout each day to keep me in contact with God?

PRAYER TO PRAY

Father, thank You for creating me to be in a close relationship with You. I acknowledge that You are the vine, and I am the branch. I choose to remain in You today. Help me to clearly see what choices I can make today that will draw me close to You. In Jesus' name, amen.



DEVELOP CONSTANT CONVERSATION WITH GOD

Have you ever been hungry, but after eating, you still aren't satisfied? Sometimes we eat, and our stomachs are full, but the hunger for something specific remains. Life can feel this way. We have busy schedules with very little time unaccounted for, but if we are really honest with ourselves, most of us aren't satisfied, and we don't know why.

God wants us to know Him, so He planted a longing in us that can only be satisfied in His presence. Thankfully, access to God isn't limited to church services. God wants to be a part of every moment of your life, even the busy ones. He desires to have an "all day, everyday" conversation with you.

You can begin this conversation now. Use plain language. Be yourself. Simply acknowledge God and invite Him in. Whether you're changing a diaper, mowing the lawn, or closing a deal at work, it doesn't matter. Be mindful that once invited in, He may have something to say. You may gain clarity where it was lacking or have an idea you recognize is not your own. The key is to turn all of life's activities into conversation with God. It's not difficult, but it does require being intentional.

A constant conversation with God starts by practicing it until it becomes a habit. There is nothing too big or too small to talk to Him about. He cares about it all. You will spend some time talking and some time listening. As you choose God over and over throughout your day, you will begin to know Him better. If at any time you become unaware of His presence, simply pause and realign your thoughts. Invite Him back in. You are as close to God as you choose to be. No place is any closer to Him than where you are right now.

VERSES TO READ:

Isaiah 55:6a; Psalm 16:11a; James 4:8

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Have I been putting conversation with God in the box of church or chair time only?
- What step can I take to increase the amount of conversation I have with God every day?

PRAYER TO PRAY

Dear Heavenly Father, I acknowledge that You desire an intimate, personal relationship with me. I am amazed and humbled that the Creator of the universe wants to be in constant conversation with me. Right now, I invite You in to every part of my life. From the spectacular to the mundane, nothing is off limits to You. I want to remain in Your presence. I choose to be intentional. I am determined to speak to You throughout the day, and I welcome You to speak to my heart. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing to You. In Jesus' name, amen.



BETTER TOGETHER

Congratulations! You've already made it to Day 7 of the 21 Days of Prayer. Clearly, you have a desire to grow spiritually, and that's a good thing! The Bible has much to say about desiring spiritual growth, but perhaps the most misunderstood aspect of spiritual growth is the important role that other people play in it.

Let's talk about one impediment to spiritual growth that's hard to see sometimes—autonomy. This is an idea that stems from our culture which actively endorses, celebrates, and even prescribes self-expression above all else. Essentially, we are the answer to our problems, or, at best, we want to believe the answer to our problems lies within us. Consequently, we may have a tendency to approach spiritual growth very much the same way we would approach growth in any other category. We take matters into our own hands. We go it alone.

Our "'rise and grind' to 'work hard' on our 'side hustle' in order to 'get 'er done'" attitude toward life in general, and spiritual growth in specific, presupposes that growth depends on us and us alone. For some disciplines, that may be the case. But what if the path to spiritual growth is different? No doubt, individual effort is a part of spiritual growth. But what if God set it up so that spiritual growth actually happens best within the context of a broader group of people, like a church family?

Scripture is laced with verses and stories of people rallying around each other, to help, sharpen, encourage, support, challenge, love, and even correct one another. Why is that?

It is because God designed people to need people. And He designed spiritual growth to happen best with others! That is why we gather together corporately, and it's why we circle up in small groups, so that through relationships we might grow closer to Christ.

VERSES TO READ:

Proverbs 27:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Do I find myself trying to go it alone when it comes to growing spiritually?
- What person in my life has had the biggest impact on my spiritual growth?

PRAYER TO PRAY

Lord, help me in my pursuit of You to remember that there are people that You've placed in and around my life to help me grow closer to Jesus. I ask that You would use me to help my brothers and sisters grow closer to Christ as well. In Jesus' name, amen.



THE IDEAL FAMILY

What's a family supposed to be like? Our culture is enamored with this question.

Over the years, shows like *The Brady Bunch*, *Full House*, *Family Ties*, *Family Matters*, *The Simpsons*, *Gilmore Girls*, and *Keeping Up With The Kardashians* have taken part in shaping our view of family. Even if you love your family, you have an idea of how wonderful family could be.

Author James McBride once said, "Family love is like the wind: instinctive, raw, fragile, beautiful, at times angry, but always unstoppable. It is our collective breath. It is the world's greatest force."

But family is not a new idea. God created family for the benefit of human flourishing. His plan was to give us a defined space where we can each find a deep sense of love and belonging. Yet that's not the kind of family many people experience. For many, the very subject of family can be a mix of painful emotions.

The problem with family is sin. Sin deeply fractured the very institution of family. From the first pages of the Bible, we see sin's effect on families. God's defined space for love and belonging was broken. So He did something about it. He sent Jesus.

Jesus introduced a new kind of family. His family, too, is a defined space where we can gain a deep sense of love and belonging. But the family of Jesus is different than any other! God's redeeming love in Jesus has set His sons and daughters free from their past, creating an environment where anyone can belong!

1 John 3:1 says, "*Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God!*" The family of God is the ideal family—a place where you are loved, a place where you belong, and a place where you can grow and flourish.

Are you planted in the family of God?

VERSES TO READ:

John 13:34-35; Psalm 92:12-15

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- How are my thoughts and attitude toward family affecting how I view the family of God?
- How could I be more rooted in the family of God?

PRAYER TO PRAY

Father, thank You for sending Jesus to not only redeem me, but also to redeem family. Thank You for creating a safe place where I am loved, where I belong, and where I can grow. Help me to surrender my idea of what family is and embrace what You created the family of God to be. In Jesus' name, amen.



CALL ME "OLD CAMEL KNEES"

God's plan for humanity has always been for us not just to know Jesus, but to be like Jesus; this is why we were created in communion with God and in His image. But the devil's lie in the garden changed what it means to want to be like God. Rather than letting God define what we do, sin caused humanity to desire to rule over itself, to be the one who decides what is "right for me." Sin allows us to know all about Jesus, but not live like Him.

James, Jesus' half-brother, knew Jesus. In fact, he grew up with Him, but growing up in the presence of the Messiah didn't change James right away. John 7:5 tells us that James knew about the miracles Jesus had performed and still didn't believe in Jesus. But James went on to write one of the most practical books in the New Testament on being Christ-like. In fact, James was called "Old Camel Knees" by an early Church writer because he spent so much time kneeling in prayer that it deformed his knees! What changed? James 2:17 shows us he realized a life-changing biblical truth: *"faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless."* Knowing about Jesus is meaningless if it doesn't compel you to be like Him—if it doesn't cause you to do something.

Like James, it's easy to grow up knowing Jesus, maybe even call Him brother or friend. But knowing His Word, sitting in His presence every weekend at church isn't being like Him until it impacts our actions—until it changes us at our very core. I'm not talking about the type of life change that puts you in a pew; I'm talking about the type of life change that deforms your idea of yourself.

VERSES TO READ:

James 2:14-16; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Romans 12:1-2

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Do I just know about Jesus, or am I truly becoming like Him?
- What's one practical thing I could do today to start being like Jesus?

PRAYER TO PRAY

Father, thank You for allowing me to know You and for creating me in Your image. Help me never to take the knowledge of what You've done for granted, but compel me to live like Jesus. I ask that You transform me as I surrender my thoughts, actions, and feelings to You. In Jesus' name, amen.



CUT IT OUT

When you were a kid, did you ever fall asleep with gum in your mouth only to wake up with it deeply entangled in your hair? Or maybe you've had this happen to one of your kids? Nowadays, a quick internet search will give you tips on how to remedy the old gum-in-the-hair situation. Some say peanut butter does the trick. Others say it's all about olive oil. But sometimes you have such a mess on your hands, the only solution is to cut it out!

Whatever your background is, one thing is for certain; you brought gum-in-the-hair issues with you into your relationship with Jesus. We all do. Some of us come to Christ entangled with a past relationship and or destructive habit. Others come mixed up emotionally because of hurtful things others have said or done to us. Still, others of us seem to bring natural tendencies of being overly critical of ourselves and others. We want to become more like Jesus, but how do we really say goodbye to our yesterdays?

The Apostle Paul talks about this idea in Galatians 5:1. He says, *"Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage."*

With His death, Jesus not only paid the penalty of your sin, He gave you His own righteousness. Jesus Himself said in John 8:36, *"So if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed."* Saying goodbye to your past starts by knowing your freedom has already been purchased!

Next, you need to know this freedom comes with the particular strength you need to be disentangled from your past (Hebrews 12:1). It may be uncomfortable, time consuming, and somewhat painful. You may have to cut out certain relationships or starve out certain habits, but you have the power to do it. You can throw off the old you (Ephesians 4:22) because Jesus said you are already free!

VERSES TO READ:

Galatians 5:1; John 8:6; Romans 13:14; 2 Corinthians 5:16-20

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- What habits, attitudes, and ways of thinking from my past or my family history are still affecting me today?
- What relationships should I walk away from in order to live in true freedom?

PRAYER TO PRAY

Lord Jesus, Your mission was to set captives free. Without You, I would be utterly lost and hopelessly bound to my past. Thank You for freeing me and empowering me to change. Help me to say goodbye to my yesterdays and become more like You every day. In Jesus' name, amen.



WHO KNOWS YOU?

You weren't meant to do life alone. No one was.

When God surveyed all He had created in Genesis 1, He pronounced that it was "good." But when He looked down at Adam, God changed His tune, for man was a prized and dearly loved creation.

In Genesis 2:18, we read, *"The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone.'" And it never is—for any of us.*

Somehow though, we continue to find ourselves lonely and cut off from meaningful relationships with others. God understood from the beginning that the perfect recipe for our hardship and heartache is for us to be alone. So a critical question for all of us has to be, "How disconnected am I from others... really?"

Thankfully, if isolation is the path to hardship and heartache, the opposite is also true. Meaningful relationships with people who are following Jesus can be our greatest source of joy, blessing, and even healing.

James 5:16 says, *"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."* Think about that. Sometimes, God chooses to deliver supernatural healing to us through our connection with other people—not shallow greetings as you walk into church or a text message every now and then to say, "How's it going?" We're talking about meaningful relationships that give others permission to really know us and speak into our lives.

So who in your life knows your story, your struggles, and your secrets? Are you engaged in a discipleship track? If not, what are you waiting for?

Hardship? Heartache? God said it from the very beginning, so we can trust it to be true: going it alone is "not good." But sharing your life with others is! Make it a priority.

VERSES TO READ:

Ecclesiastes 4:8-12; Romans 12:9-10; Hebrews 10:24-25

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Am I intentionally seeking out healthy relationships with genuine disciples with whom I can share my story, struggles, and secrets?
- Am I engaged in a discipleship track? If not, what is holding me back?

PRAYER TO PRAY

Father, I know I am in danger if I am alone. I don't want to be isolated, and I know from Your Word that You don't want me to be either. Help me find people around me who will build up my faith. Give me the wisdom and courage to step toward those relationships that will bring me joy and healing. And help me be the kind of person that builds others up as well. In Jesus' name, amen.



THE GLORY OF GOD

Whether you've witnessed it in the mesmerizing colors of an intricate sunset sky or felt it through a simple act of kindness or maybe found it in the expanse of a breathtaking landscape view, we've all had glimpses of a unique beauty that exists in the world around us. This somewhat invisible force can seem intangible and mysterious, yet the Bible speaks clearly about what's actually happening in these moments. The world is simply glorifying its Creator—it can't avoid it. It's what all of nature was designed to do, now and for all of eternity. It's what you were designed to do.

Though we were designed to worship God with our lives, there's a very real spiritual opposition to that purpose at play. There is a voice that whispers to us, trying to convince us that we deserve some measure of that glory—lead the life you want to live, achieve the things that will make you look good, and do what it takes to make yourself happy. As long as you keep following your heart, everything will eventually get better, right? Well, not quite.

It sounds good on the surface, but the reality is that glory belongs to God alone. When we listen to that voice and try to take it for ourselves, we exclude ourselves from the very purpose we were created to fulfill. Though He won't force you to give Him the love and honor that is rightfully His, neither will He compete when you decide to position that glory elsewhere.

Until we understand that the purest form of our purpose is to simply put glory in the right place, our lives will not make sense. When we can truly say in word and action, "Not my will, but Yours be done," that's when we are on the right track to our life-giving purpose.

VERSES TO READ:

Romans 1:20-25; Romans 5:1-11; Matthew 5:16

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Where might I be misdirecting glory in my life?
- In what way am I not open to God's purpose for my life because I'm distracted by my own pursuit of glory?

PRAYER TO PRAY

Lord, I am in awe of how good You have been to me, though I deserve nothing. You are holy and perfect in every way, and I can't think of a better way to use my life than to glorify You. I ask You today to use me for Your glory above all else. Help me to see where I am misdirecting glory to the wrong places and teach me to align my will with Yours. In Jesus' name, amen.



YOU ARE NO ACCIDENT

Long before you were conceived by your parents, you were conceived in the mind of God. He thought of you first. It is not fate, nor chance, nor luck, nor coincidence that you are breathing at this very moment. You are alive because God wanted to create you! Ephesians 1:4 says, *“Long before He laid down earth’s foundations, He had us*

in mind, had settled on us as the focus of His love.”

In Psalm 139:15-16, David declares that God’s eyes were fixed on us not only when we were in the earliest stages of being formed in our mothers’ wombs, but even before we were conceived. This means there isn’t a single human being on the earth who was a surprise to God, and that includes you!

You are the crowning glory of the creation of God, and as a result, you have an inherent dignity, worth, and value. When you realize God is the one responsible for your life, you are accountable to God to make Him the focus of your life, so that through Him and in Him, you can discover its meaning and purpose. Nothing in your life is arbitrary. It’s all for a purpose. He has a purpose for your life. He wants to use you! He wants you to be a significant part of His plan!

VERSES TO READ:

Colossians 1:16; Ephesians 1:11-12

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- What is stopping me from accepting that God has a divine plan for my life?
- Am I focusing on God to discover my purpose?

PRAYER TO PRAY

Lord, I am so glad that You knew me and called me even before I was conceived in my mother's womb. According to Your Word, I am no mistake; therefore, I ask You to help me start looking at my life with respect, esteem, and honor. You called me, and You have an awesome plan for my life. I ask You to help me uncover that plan, so I can get started on the road of obedience toward fulfilling what You brought me into this world to do! In Jesus' name, amen.

LISTENING FOR GOD



If you were to put away your phone and computer for a few days, you would later discover that a lot of people felt it necessary to communicate with you during your hiatus. Unfortunately, much of the communication we receive today has little real impact on our lives. Most of it ends up being nothing more than camouflaged distraction.

When the prophet Samuel was a little boy, God wanted to communicate with him, but God didn't send Samuel an email or a text. God spoke directly to Samuel and waited for his reply (1 Samuel 3). It's important for us to realize that God knows us individually and wants to communicate with us, too. Sadly, we often make our communication with God a one-way street where we do all the talking and offer God no time to respond. God created Samuel for a certain purpose, and it was important that Samuel took the time to hear what God had to say about that purpose.

As we grow, if we're not careful, we can lose some of the faith we had as a child. A child's world is full of wonder and imagination. They have no problem believing that God would want to talk to them. As adults, we shouldn't lose that sense of closeness to our Creator. In Matthew 18:3, Jesus pulled a little child to Him and said, "*Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven.*" Don't let the skepticism in the world around you keep you from finding your God-given purpose. God wants to communicate with you as well. He knows you just like He knew Samuel. Ask God for the purpose He has for you and expect Him to respond.

VERSES TO READ:

Matthew 7:7-8; Romans 11:29; Psalm 37:4

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Do I really expect to hear from God when I pray?
- Am I confident in the purpose I was created for?

PRAYER TO PRAY

Father, I believe that You created me for a purpose, and I also believe that You want me to be aware of that purpose. I ask You to make Your will for my life known to me, so that I may confidently do what You have called me to do. Just as You revealed Yourself and Your purpose to Samuel through Your Word, I look to Your Word for direction.

In Jesus' name, amen.



PLANNED IN ADVANCE

What were you made for? What do you dream about? What makes you feel alive? Have you found that thing yet? Or have you lost hope that it's really there?

Let me tell you a story.

From the beginning of time, God has had a plan—a great epic adventure, a love story that started with Adam and Eve, was re-birthed when Jesus hit the scene, and now is being played out every single day with you and me.

You are a part of that epic story. That dream you're looking for is already waiting for you. You have a great role to play in God's kingdom. You were sent for such a time as this, to shine in this moment for the glory of the One who sent you.

Ephesians 2:10 says that before the beginning of time, God made each of us as a masterpiece and prepared good works for us to walk in!

And the best part is that it's not based on merit. It's not something you have to earn! Jesus offers us His own perfection! All He asks is that we have a relationship with Him. God has already done all the heavy lifting and planning, and all we have to do is walk with Him along the path He has laid out!

Seeking to become more like Jesus will lead you to the good works God has planned for you. And not only does He lead you to those wonderful life-giving opportunities, but He empowers you by His Spirit to accomplish them.

God knows exactly where you are right now as you read this. He sees you today. He loves you so much and has such a great plan for your life. Nothing is a surprise to the Lord. Ask Him what He has for you this day!

VERSES TO READ:

Isaiah 30:21; Psalm 139:14-18

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- What things am I naturally good at and enjoy? How could those gifts be used as good works to glorify the Lord?
- What is one step I can take to trust Jesus' plan for my life?

PRAYER TO PRAY

Lord, thank You for relationship with You and for my life that You have created. I trust You with the big plan for my life and even for this day. Thank You for walking with me through every step. Instruct my heart on how I can use the gifts inside of me to glorify You. Thank You for the good works You have already prepared for me to do. Grant me the courage, joy, strength, and peace to walk them out. In Jesus' name, amen.

PURPOSE FOR ALL CREATION



Each of us has been uniquely crafted by God with gifts to be used to bless the Church and other people. That's right! God wants to use each of us to advance His kingdom. God's purpose for you is to bring Him glory.

Jesus stated that even He didn't come for His own purposes, but for the Father's. When Christ came to this earth, He came to reconcile people to God and give them a new story. This is God's master plan and wonderful purpose for all of His creation: reconciliation and new life.

We get to use our specific gifts and passions in this plan of God because He invites us into His work—to make disciples of all people. This may seem daunting, but we are not without help! God's purposes are carried out first and foremost by His sovereignty and by the work of Christ, but also by His choice of people and the assignments He has given to each of us.

Paul tells us in his letter to the Corinthian church that each person has a role to play. Some do the planting, some do the watering, and God gives the growth! That means we have some pretty great partners in the work we've been given to serve others and, ultimately, God's kingdom.

When we understand that God's purposes for this life aren't just about us, we will be amazed at the incredible ways God can use us.

VERSES TO READ:

John 6:38; 1 Corinthians 3:5

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- What unique gifts and personality traits do I possess that can bless other people?
- In what ways can I begin to partner with God to use my gifts in His great purpose?

PRAYER TO PRAY

God, I love You and thank You for allowing me to be part of Your purpose for creation. Thank You for the specific gifts and unique personality I have to help and bless other people. Help me to willingly use these gifts well, not solely for my own gain but for Your kingdom. Thank You for partnering with me in the special assignments You've given to me. In Jesus' name, amen.

SHAPED FOR SERVICE



Before builders design a building, they first ask, “What will be its purpose? How will it be used?” The intended purpose of the building determines its structure and form. Ephesians 2:10 says, *“We are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

You are God’s handcrafted work of art. You are not an assembly line product, mass produced without thought. From your unique thumbprint to the intricate design of your eyes, you are a custom-designed, one-of-a-kind, original masterpiece! You are unique!

God didn’t put you on this planet just to take up space. You were shaped by your Heavenly Father with a purpose! You have abilities, interests, talents, gifts, life experiences, and a unique personality that can and should be used for God’s glory. And nobody else can be you! If you don’t use your unique gifts for God’s purposes, your gifts will be missed on this earth! 1 Peter 4:10, puts it this way:

“God has given each of you some special abilities; be sure to use them to help each other, passing on to others God’s many kinds of blessings.”

You are part of God’s story, just like all of the different people and stories you read about in the Bible. God has uniquely designed you with a purpose and a calling that fits you – your gifts, your talents, your passions, and your personality – which all fit perfectly into God’s amazing plan!

Remember, when you use your time, your talents, or your gifts, and you do something for somebody else, God says it’s like you’re doing it for Him personally. Jesus said in Matthew 25:40, *“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for Me.”*

Your greatest joy can be found in using your unique gifts and passions for God’s purpose!

VERSES TO READ:

Matthew 25:35-40; 1 Peter 4:10-11

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Have I ever experienced the joy of using my gifts and abilities to serve somebody else?
- Have I found a place of service where my gifts can be strengthened and used to make a difference?

PRAYER TO PRAY

Lord, I'm amazed at the details of all of Your creation! I believe You designed me with a purpose. My entire life is in Your hands! Open my eyes to see the gifts and abilities You've given me, so I can walk out Your purpose for my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

GOD REWARDS OUR UNIQUENESS



Insignificance has its root in comparison. Due to the brokenness of humanity, we have the tendency to discount what God has given us and are driven to compare what we have with what others have – our gifts versus their gifts, our marriage versus their marriage. Insignificance slowly creeps in to how we view our service in the kingdom of God, and we find ourselves with feelings that foster an idle attitude toward what we have

and what God has designed for our lives.

Scripture shows us that God often hides His most significant plans in very insignificant places. He hid Moses in a basket to preserve his life, and he eventually became the deliverer of the Jews from Egyptian bondage. Elisha was found plowing a field before he replaced Elijah as a prophet. Jesus was hidden in a manger, and yet His contribution to God's plan for all of mankind is the centerpiece of the gospel message.

It's important to understand that when we have feelings of insignificance around our service in God's kingdom, God never views us or our service as insignificant. He has called and designed us to play our part. Giving in to these feelings has a hint of resistance to God's plan for our lives.

The single greatest skill we can learn in this life is to acknowledge God's unique design for our lives and to accept the limits of our design.

VERSES TO READ:

Matthew 6:1-4; Hebrews 6:10

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- What areas of my life do I tend to compare with others?
- What are simple, practical ways I can acknowledge and appreciate my unique gifts and contribution to the kingdom of God?

PRAYER TO PRAY

Dear Father, help me to recognize, appreciate, and acknowledge my significance, so You may receive glory from my unique service in Your kingdom. In Jesus' name, amen.

GENEROUS LIKE JESUS



Jesus is remarkably generous. He's so generous that He can't seem to keep anything to Himself. Whatever His Father gives Him, He shares freely with His people.

He gave up His power and glory in Heaven to become one of us. On earth, He was anointed with power that was beyond anything the world had ever seen, and yet, instead of using it for His own gain, He used it to liberate people. He even gave up His innocence before God to take our place on a cruel, rugged cross.

He was taken so you could be free. He was condemned so you could be forgiven. He was cursed so you could be blessed. He was forsaken so you would never be alone. He died so you could have life.

The breadth of His love is so great that He gives all He has for our sakes. As 2 Corinthians 8:9 says, *"You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that by His poverty He could make you rich."*

Isn't He wonderful? Who has ever loved you like He loves you? Who has ever given for you like He has given for you? There is no one like Jesus, the author of life who gave Himself up to death so you could live forever with Him.

As His followers, we, too, ought to be remarkably generous with our lives – people who use what God has given us to enrich the lives of others. Today, let's reflect on how generous the Lord has been to us, and then let us go and live generously toward others. For Jesus Himself said in Matthew 10:8, *"Freely you have received, freely give."*

VERSES TO READ:

Philippians 2:3-11; 1 John 4:10-11; 2 Corinthians 9:6-11

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- How has the Lord been generous to me? (Take a few moments to reflect on this and then thank Him for what He has done in your life.)
- What can I do to be more generous toward God and others?

PRAYER TO PRAY

Father, thank You for what You've done in my life. I stand in awe of how good and generous You are. You know that I deserved the worst. I deserved punishment and wrath, now I get to experience the riches of Your grace. When I consider how You've treated me, I desire to treat others with that same generous spirit, so I can reflect who You are. Lead me today, I pray, and open my eyes to ways I can live with greater generosity. In Jesus' name, amen.

GREATER IS HE



1 John 4:4 says, *"The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."* Perhaps you're familiar with this verse, but let's consider for a moment what this verse implies. Who is in you, and who is He greater than? The simple answer is, the One inside of you is the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is greater than the spirit of opposition that exists in the world. There is a spirit that exists in our world that is completely opposed to the message of

Jesus.

The good news for us is that Christ disarmed this enemy through His death and resurrection (Colossians 2:15). Not only has the enemy been disarmed, but according to Acts 1:8, *"... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses."* This transforming power is in part meant to equip you to go into the world and make disciples. As a follower of Jesus, you're a witness to God's kindness (Romans 2:4).

As you journey through these 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting, and sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart, you will be able to express the hope that exists inside of you (1 Peter 3:15). When you step out and go, you can be confident the Holy Spirit is with you every step of the way. In fact, the Holy Spirit will even give you the words to say when you are asked to give an account for your faith (Luke 12:11-12). Remember today that the One inside of you is greater; therefore, go boldly with the message of Jesus and the hope that is inside of you!

VERSES TO READ:

Romans 8:11; Romans 8:37; John 16:33

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Who do I have influence with?
- What can I do to better serve the people in my life?

PRAYER TO PRAY

Father, I thank You for the work You accomplished through Jesus. I ask You to equip me with everything I need to accomplish Your will in my life. I thank You that through the power of the Holy Spirit, I can go boldly with the message of Jesus. Greater is He who is in me than any spirit of opposition that exists in my world. It is through Jesus and the word of my testimony that I will overcome any such spirit. Therefore, I ask for opportunities to go and make a difference in other people's lives. In Jesus' name, amen.

CALLED AND COMMISSIONED



"Our greatest hindrance to usefulness is slave-like fear."

–Matthew Henry

We would all say we want to be used by God. Theologian Matthew Henry points out what's holding most of us back from being used by God is fear. Maybe you are unaware God has called you to a higher purpose, or maybe you know what you're called to do, but you're afraid to step

into that calling. If that's you, you're not alone!

In 2 Timothy 1:6-7, the Apostle Paul tells Timothy to *"fan into flame"* the gift he has received. There's a flame that exists within each of us that we must *"fan"* in order to see God's ultimate purpose for our lives. This takes discipline. And it's why Paul followed up that verse with *"For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity but of power, love, and self-discipline."*

Timothy was a young pastor that apparently struggled with fear. Satan wants so badly to keep us from the work of the Lord that he uses fear as a tool to deter us from what God has called us to do. In 1 Corinthians 16, Paul again speaks of Timothy's fear by telling the church of Corinth: *"See to it that Timothy has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord."*

What is the work of the Lord? In Matthew 28, Jesus tells his disciples, *"Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations (or peoples)..."* Jesus made it simple for those 11 disciples that day, and He has made it simple for you as well. You are called, commissioned, and commanded to make disciples of Christ. You may not be able to travel the whole world, but you can begin by influencing those in your world. Don't let fear keep you from being used by God!

VERSES TO READ:

Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 16:10; 2 Timothy 1:6-7; 2 Peter 1:10

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- How am I currently working to influence people in my world?
- What steps can I take to apply this calling in my day-to-day life?

PRAYER TO PRAY

Father, I ask for a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline as I follow You this year. Give me a heart for people, so I can fulfill the calling You have placed on my life. Help me to recognize my importance in the body of Christ and open my eyes to see who in my world I can impact this year. In Jesus' name, amen.