

Weekly Devotional : Week 1

February 5-11, 2023


How to use this devotional

For many of us, encountering God's presence and growing in our relationship with him are real desires of ours. However, we may have never been shown ways to practically accomplish those goals. These devotionals are designed to help guide you through different steps as you spend time with God during your week.

We encourage you to set aside space for a daily rhythm of spending time with Jesus. That could be as short as 15 minutes each day or you may want to spend 30 to 45 minutes. It's up to you. Each day's devotion provides an opportunity to reflect, read, pray, and take action in response to your time with God. May God meet you powerfully in this season!

These devotions are written and developed by Molly Ovenden. If you would like to read more of her work or learn more about her creative endeavors, you can visit her website at <https://mollyovenden.com/>

Week 1 : Day 1

 STORY

Imagine this:

You've been searching intently to find a new place to live. You're viewing location after location on your quest for the perfect house or apartment to rent or buy. You've seen a bunch of places that aren't quite what you need and far from what you want. And then...you find it!

This is it. This is the place you've been searching for. The photos online look amazing, the description on the website is so awesome, and it's exactly what you want, in the perfect location, and you even got a viewing appointment scheduled so quickly. You are so very excited.

But then...When the time comes to view this amazing space, it's not what you thought it would be. When you arrive it is dirty with awkward stains in places stains shouldn't be. The corners of the countertops are worn down, and the tiles in the kitchen are dull and cracked. You're not even sure this is the same place as what was in the photos.

You feel so let down! Having hoped for something shiny and new, you've got something old and broken—and you still have to continue the search for what you are looking for.

 SCRIPTURE

Revelations 21: 1-4

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

 REFLECT

- Which verse feels hopeful to you today? Why?
- What might God want to say to you about making things new?
- You might want to write your reflections in your journal.

 PRAYER

God, sometimes I’m not sure if you’re even there. I have so many disappointments, so many unanswered prayers. And so many unexpected things that have happened in life. There is so much that feels old and worn out, broken beyond repair.

I don’t really know how to deal with the weight of all of the disappointment. Would you show me how to put my hope in you and would you heal my heart and make it new?

 ACTION

Engage your senses.

If you’d like to and are able, go for a wander outside. You can also choose to stay inside, right where you are. Take a moment, in the space you choose to be and look around you.

Look up, look out, look down. Notice the textures, the shapes, the colors, lines, the light, the shadows, the proximity of one object to the next.

What do you notice? What stands out to you? What don’t you see?
Make a mental note.

Then, when you can, set a timer for 5-10 minutes and write a journal entry about it.

Week 1 : Day 2

STORY

Imagine this:

You've been working hard all day. You've been stressed to be sure you finish this particular project. You have inspiration and motivation – even though it's stressful – so, you've chosen to get to work early and hardly took time for breakfast.

You're very nearly finished – it's so close! You want to ride this wave of momentum, so you grab a candy bar or bag of chips, and another coffee, or just a quick few bites of banana. You're determined to reach the end of this project today.

Eventually, having prioritized work over eating well today, your stomach is growling. You look at your watch and you see what's left of your project. You know if you just give it one last push, you can finish it today. After a little while longer, it's finally time to call it a day. Hurray!

But by now you're so hungry that you order some fast food and eat it so quickly that you hardly even tasted it and you're so tired that you're not even sure you're satisfied. And you got a stomach ache.


SCRIPTURE

John 6:25-35

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?” ²⁶ Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.” ²⁸ Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?” ²⁹ Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.” ³⁰ So they asked him, “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” ³² Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” ³⁴ “Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.” ³⁵ Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

REFLECT

- What part of scripture feels the most challenging? Why?
- What might God want to say to you about being the bread of life for your satisfaction?
- You might want to write your reflections in your journal.

 PRAYER


God, I trust you to meet with me today. I have an emptiness that I keep trying to fill, but it's not working. Teach me how to be satisfied with you. God, I'm here and I want to believe. If you are the bread of life as Jesus said, then please fill me up.

 ACTION

Grab your journal.

Write your thoughts in response to Sunday's sermon, and/or the above scripture passage. You can set a timer for 5-10 minutes, if you'd like to focus for a time. Otherwise, give yourself a few moments to contemplate what you've read today and write whatever comes to mind. You may choose to journal out your own prayers or questions here, too.

Week 1 : Day 3

 STORY

Imagine this:

You've been planning to go on a vacation to a place in the world you've always wanted to go—ever since you were a kid. Finally, you've been able to get some extra cash scraped together and set aside. After a couple years of planning and saving, it's finally time to go on your trip.

You buy a new suitcase, a new pair of shoes, that fancy-good-looking outfit that makes you feel smart and beautiful. Now, you're dreaming about how it'll be when you'll wear this outfit at the cool restaurant you've been reading reviews about, salivating over the menu.

You pack your bags and, off you go! Oh, it's exciting! This amazing and much-anticipated trip. It's so special and you're so proud of yourself for being patient and working hard to save. You deserve this amazing vacation and you're going to enjoy every moment of it. And you do.

It's beautiful and fun. You laugh and take pictures to show your friends and family and post on social media. You eat great food, see great sights, and you do go on some great adventures. While you're there, everything is breathtaking, life-changing. And now, your magical 10 days of vacation is over. What took years to save for and plan is now finished. This special trip has happened in a week and a half. It's time to come home.

When you come home your life isn't actually any different from how you left it. And in a matter of days, everything is back to normal, almost like the trip wasn't as important as you'd felt it would be. Almost as though you'd not even been gone.


 READ

Writer of Chronicles of Narnia C.S. Lewis said, “Christianity, if false, is of no importance. And, if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important.”

Take notes on what thoughts come to mind when you read this quote. You may want to add your thoughts into considering the following reflections or prayers.

 REFLECT

- What do you wish could be made new in your life?
- What do you wish could have a lasting impact in your life?
- Why do you wish for these things?
- What really has lasting importance in your life?

 PRAYER

God, make me new. Even when I don’t understand, I want to choose to believe it’s true you can and will make me and everything around me new. Show me what is full of meaning. Help me see what’s actually important.

 ACTION


Get Creative.

So often we can rush through life and miss basic experiences of the mundane that occur all around us. We move quickly by them and miss out. Today, take yourself for a walk, ideally outside, and allow yourself to slow down.

Be intentional to walk slowly. Notice how the air feels. Try swinging your arms more freely. Try lifting your feet higher with each step. Try skipping or swaying or jumping. Notice how your body moves through space. Notice how you feel when you slow down and pay attention.

You might want to write your reflections in your journal when you get back inside.

Week 1 : Day 4

 STORY

Imagine this:

You’ve spent the last couple of years building relationships with some really cool, kind, special people. These are your friends. You’ve not actually met them in person, but you’ve talked on video and exchanged numerous messages on social media apps.

You’ve truly been connecting with these great people all over the world, but now you are wondering if you’ll ever get to meet them beyond the screen. And then you wonder, if you do get to meet them in person, will they be as good of friends as you imagined? Or will you be disappointed for having built them up to be something amazing that they aren’t.

Then you start to recall stories about people who have met their heroes in real life and been disappointed. This celebrity, this hero is just as normal and just as human as you are. Do you even want to meet these friends? And now you aren't sure about relationships. Should you give up on them all together? The people you have managed to hang out with in person are awkward and you feel nervous each time the conversation turns toward you. You wonder if it's possible to have genuine friendships that aren't as nerve wracking and disappointing as you've experienced.

You wonder: Is it worth pursuing real relationships? Is it worth continuing to meet people and try to build connections in person and online? Is it possible for better, more life-giving connections? Could your relationships have more substance to them than your previous experiences?

 SCRIPTURE

John 14:4-6

⁴You know the way to the place where I am going.” ⁵Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” ⁶Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

 REFLECT

- What connections do you long to have with the people in your life?
- What connections do you long to have with God?
- Why?

 PRAYER

God, make me into someone who is a great friend. Help me choose connection with the people who are gifts in this season. Help me to prioritize relationships even when there is pain or brokenness in the relationship. Show me how I can be a better friend. Show me who my friends really are. And teach me what it means to have a friendship with you, God.

 ACTION

Relational moment.

Consider someone who's helped you in some way recently. Reach out. Call them or send a message to say, “thank you,” and let them know why their relationship is so valuable to you.

Week 1 : Day 5

 STORY

Imagine this:

You love looking at stars in the night sky. You know the story of the hunter Orion whose arrows point toward the bears. You've memorized stories of drinking gourds, of Gemini twins, or royalty stuck in the sky. You can name all of Saturn's moons and you were so sad when Pluto got demoted.

The first present you remember receiving is your trusty telescope. Every weekend as a

child you'd ask to go to the local planetarium. As you've grown older you still are fascinated by stars and you wonder about life beyond earth. You wonder what your life could look like if you were able to live—or at least travel—outside Earth's atmosphere.

Your time has finally come. The technology is more mainstream and you're in good health. Your name has been on the list to be the first non-astronaut to travel to outer space. You've loved looking at the stars and dreaming of being among them. But now it's possible, you're hesitating. Why?

You take time to consider the prospect of visiting space vs. going to the planetarium. Which would you prefer: The theory of space travel or actually doing it? If you thought you were getting on a spaceship, but you ended up just going on a rollercoaster, would you be disappointed or relieved? You wonder about the safety of the spacecraft. You wonder about if something goes wrong. You wonder if you want to leave earth. You wonder how amazing earth will look from the Milky Way. You wonder if you'd regret not going if you choose to stay.

When the time comes to get in the spaceship, childhood memories flash by and you decide to take a chance and...What would you choose?

 SCRIPTURE

Revelations 21: 1-8

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ²I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

⁶ He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. ⁸ But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

 ACTION

Examen.

Reflect on your week using an ancient spiritual practice called, examen. You may want to add these examen reflections to your other journal entries from this week.

You can spend as little or as long as you'd like on each stage of this examen process. However, if this is a new practice or if you're short on time, you can start with 1 to 5 minutes for each stage of the examen.

- a) Consider this week's consolations - What good happened this week that filled me up, brought me joy, gave me energy? Why, God, did this fill me up? Where were you in this moment/instance/experience? God, thanks for being here with me in the consolations.
- b) Consider this week's desolations - What bad happened this week that drained me, felt sad or angering, emptied me? God, why did this empty me? Where were you in this moment/instance/experience? Thanks for being here with me in the desolations.
- c) Ask God: What do you want to say to me about what more there is to life today?
- d) Ask God: What do you think of me? What have you given me awareness for today that's more than I had at the beginning of the week?
- e) Spend a moment thanking God for showing up—even if it wasn't how you'd expected.