

## Weekly Devotional : Week 2

February 12-18, 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/>

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### Week 2 : Day 1

 STORY

#### Imagine this:

You are new to the community. You and your family have just moved into the neighborhood and you don't know anyone. You spend your first Saturday knocking on doors of your neighbors to try and make new friends.

On one door you see the flag of a foreign country. You wonder if these neighbors are from that country. You don't want to judge them because you haven't even met, but you begin to wonder about them. You knock on the door and wait.

You hear someone come to the door and see as they open it. He introduces himself to you, you explain you're new, and he welcomes you in for a cup of coffee and cookies. You feel nervous meeting new people, but you want to connect and you want to fit in, so you brave this socially awkward feeling and accept the offer of a snack inside.

As he makes the coffee and puts a plate of cookies out on the table, he asks you questions about yourself and encourages you to make yourself at home. When he sits down with coffee in hand, it's your turn to ask questions.

You've had a few moments to look at books on the shelves, photos on the fridge, art framed on the walls. You have an idea of who your neighbor is and you feel a little

more comfortable. You exchange easy conversation over the next hour or so – longer than you'd expected to say. But, you're happy with feeling closer to a new neighbor who you might be able to call your friend.

Spending time with him means you have made a connection to spend more time together as neighbors in the future. Perhaps you could invite him over for dinner with your family in a few days next week. You wonder if he'd like your family favorite meal. You thank him for the time together of meeting a new neighbor and you leave saying, "See you later." And you mean it. You'll give him a call tomorrow afternoon.


 SCRIPTURE

**1 John 1: 1-4**

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. <sup>2</sup> The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. <sup>3</sup> We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> We write this to make our joy complete.

 REFLECT

- What part of scripture feels the most challenging? Why?
- What might God want to say to you about fellowship with God the Father and the Son?
- You might want to write your reflections in your journal.

 PRAYER

God, sometimes I find it difficult to have a conversation with you. I feel like I can't see you or hear you sometimes. I wonder if you're really there. If you're really here with me and really want to be my friend, please speak to me in a way that I can understand. God, I'm here and I want to believe. If you are the giver of eternal life as we read in the Bible, then please bring lasting life to me today.

 ACTION

**Grab Your Journal.**

Write your thoughts in response to the sermon, Alpha video, 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 2 : Day 2

### STORY

#### **Imagine this:**

You are walking down a corridor in your office, school, or apartment building. You're lost in a daydream about what you've accomplished so far today and what you need to finish later on. You flick through your calendar and messages on your phone, when all of a sudden: the lights in the hallway flicker and go dim.

Your heart races as you draw in a deep breath. You know you're safe because you are always wandering this passage. You know the way, right? But now in the darkness you are doubting what you know.

You feel along for the handrail on the wall and a tangible relief washes over you and you take a deep breath being able to hold onto some certainty. Once you regain composure, you realize you can switch your phone's flashlight on.

Just as your phone shines a bright beam just in front of your feet, shadows jump out at you and everything looks different. You try to tell yourself that you're confident and that you know the way to go like the back of your hand.

And then, just as suddenly as the darkness happened and your eyes soon adjusted: the overhead lights flicker and flash on again. The building's maintenance person hollers a friendly greeting and apologizes for the brief darkness, assuring you the lights are on for good again.

You smile with nervous relief and are grateful for the lights being on again. You're able to get back to doing your next task for the day.

### SCRIPTURE


#### **John 6:25-35**

<sup>5</sup> This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup> If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. <sup>7</sup> But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

<sup>8</sup> If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

### REFLECT

- Which verse feels hopeful to you today? Why?
- What might God want to say to you about shining light in darkness?
- You might want to write your reflections in your journal.

 PRAYER

God, sometimes at night it feels so lonely. I don't know where you are. Sometimes the nights feel long and I don't know if morning will bring light again. And sometimes (insert your current fears here) threatens and I feel afraid of being in the dark again. If you are the light, I pray you'd shine your light on me and help me to see clearly.

 ACTION

**Engage your senses.**


If you'd like to and are able, go for a wander outside tonight when it's dark. You can also choose to stay inside, right where you are, but turn all the lights off and close your eyes. Take a moment, in the space to become aware of all of the sounds, sensations you feel, how things smell, what you can taste.

Listen, if you can for sounds you've not been aware of before, but now that sight is less you can here more. Allow yourself to become aware of sounds both as close as your heartbeat and as far away as a siren down the street.

What do you notice? What sounds are amplified to you? What don't you hear? Make a mental note. Then, when you can, set a timer for 5-10 minutes and write a journal entry about it.

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## Week 2 : Day 3

 STORY

**Imagine this:**

You are in a hospital waiting room and a newborn with her mother comes in. You stare in awe of such a tiny body groping for her mother's warmth. Her mom looks tired, but glows with joy and stares with love to her new daughter.

You wonder about how many changes this mother has made to make space for her new child. You notice a bag full of new-looking items for Baby and her mom. She will have to give up sleep for her daughter to make sure she can grow healthy and have everything she needs.

You think of your own family and the sacrifices you've made and they have made to love you and ensure you are well. Small humans, you ponder, are so much easier to love than adults because babies really need to depend on their parents for everything and they really can't do anything wrong. They are just learning and they can't offer anything beyond their existence and smiles.

It's much easier to take care of a baby when they need your help. But, it feels more frustrating when they grow up and can do much more on their own, including to be selfish and not loving toward you all the time.

You wonder about the differences between loving humans who are kind and humans who do selfish or unkind things. You even recall times you've not been as generous or patient as you'd have liked to be.

 READ

*Time Magazine* described Jesus as 'the most persistent symbol of purity, selflessness and love in the history of humanity.'

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

- How would you like to be more loving to those around you in your daily life?
- What do you wish could be a more persistent character trait in your life?
- Why do you wish for these things?
- What impact do you really want to have on humanity?

 PRAYER

God, I don't always feel loving and generous toward my fellow humans. So often they annoy me and hurt me and they don't deserve me being kind toward them. But, I like the idea of being able to be more kind and pure and generous like Jesus is described to be. God, help me live a life as pure, selfless, and loving toward people as you have done.

 ACTION

**Get Creative.**

Take out some creative supplies (e.g.: markers, pens, crayons, or pencils, and paper) and set up a spot at your kitchen table or counter. So often we can rush through life and miss simple moments in which we could experience God and really know who Jesus and the Father are.

Today, take a moment to let go of perfection and try an experiment: Draw or sketch your family. It's great if it looks like a child has drawn it. Be intentional to notice how the crayon or marker feels in your hand as you draw. Try gripping your implements more gently. Try using a different color.

Once you've drawn your family, now ask God to show you where he is in relation to you and your family. Then, try adding a picture of God to your family portrait. When you've finished, pin your drawing up on the bulletin board or on the fridge. Notice how you feel when you slow down and pay attention to where God might be in your family. You might want to write your reflections in your journal.

## Week 2 : Day 4

### STORY

#### Imagine this:

Your best friend calls you on the phone and asks to come over right now to talk to you about something. Their voice sounds worried, so you rearrange your schedule to make time for them. You've been friends since before you can remember and you've been there for each other through thick and thin over the years.

In a few short moments from having spoken on the phone, there's a knock at your door. It's your best friend. Your friend knocks rapidly and when you open the door, they look worried. You invite them in and bring a glass of cold water, offering them a snack at the table, too.

You know this friend very well and you have a deep affection toward them because of the history you have. You will do literally anything for them, they just need to ask. You try to smile reassuringly as you wait for them to share what is on their mind.

Once your friend has taken a deep breath, they start crying and explain how things have gone wrong and list details of how they need your help. You love them and because of this, what they are asking for isn't as burdensome to you as it is to them.

"Of course," you say as cheerfully as you can, hoping they feel loved. You offer for them to stay as long as they need to recover from what's just happened. After all, you're best friends. They feel anxious about asking too much, and you do what you can to reassure them to stay, to know that you're friends no matter what, and that you'll help them as best as you can.

### SCRIPTURE

#### John 15: 9-15

<sup>9</sup> "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup> My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command. <sup>15</sup> I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

### REFLECT

- What does it mean to remain in God's love?
- What difference would it make if you could make and maintain even more loving connections with your friends, family, and with God?
- Why do you think you might like to experience more of God's love?
- How might your relationships change if you remain in God's love for you?

 PRAYER

God, make me into someone who is a great friend. Help me choose connections 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 your relationship with a friend who has been with you for a while and through it all. Invite them out for a meal to simply be with them. You might also want to consider a new relationship and reach out to get together with them. Ask them how they are doing and ask how you can better love and support them in friendship. Then, actually listen to what they say and where necessary, do something practical in response to what they've said.

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## Week 2 : Day 5

 STORY

**Imagine this:**

You've made a big mistake. In a batch of financial paperwork you've filled out all of the forms using the wrong name. You put someone else's instead of your own. Now the police are involved, legal professionals are calling you on the phone and sending you threatening letters in the mail. You have accusations of fraudulent behavior and impersonation coming against you.

You want to ask for forgiveness to make everything right again and get a second chance, but you have to show up in front of lawyers before your name can have a chance of ever being cleared. You want to say you know that's not your name and you didn't mean to write it, but it just happened. But, no one will listen.

You have lost weight because you've not been able to eat. You can't sleep most nights and when you do you have nightmares. Every waking thought revolves around the mistake you made and you feel powerless to repair your name. You just need someone to listen to your story. You just need some time to explain. But no one will hear you.

Eventually, you get to talk with a judge who listens to your story and encourages you to tell the truth. For whatever reason it made sense to you to write someone else's name on the forms at the time instead of your own. You admit to this mistake and try to make it clear that you never intended to be the person whose name you'd put on the paperwork.

It takes some time, but after what seems like months, you get the chance to clear your name and start fresh. You are forgiven and proved "not guilty." You get a second chance. You can sleep now without nightmares. You begin to notice the gentle breeze of morning air again.

You can be yourself, free from condemnation, free from accusation, free from the mistakes you made. Now you breathe lightly and easily. You wonder at all of the possibilities open to you now that for so long had been closed off. Now you're relieved. It's time to move on with your new freedom. What will you do next?

 SCRIPTURE

**John 10: 30-33**

<sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one.” <sup>31</sup> Again his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him, <sup>32</sup> but Jesus said to them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?” <sup>33</sup> “We are not stoning you for any good work,” they replied, “but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.”

 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 who Jesus is 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.