

## Weekly Devotional : Week 3

February 19-25, 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 3 : Day 1

 STORY

#### Imagine this:

It's the morning after you've had the most incredible day off. And today is your second day in a row that you don't have to do anything. You've woken up feeling rested and full of joy. You are hungry, but not hangry, and as you wake up, you're able to make the best breakfast. And that starts with your favorite morning drink.

Perhaps you grind your coffee fresh and boil water for the perfect cup of coffee. Or you take out your favorite tea leaves and tea strainer—the one a dear loved one gave you as a gift. The aromas of the beans as they brew, the fragrance of the tea as it steeps brings a sense of calm over you. You inhale deeply and exhale slowly as you wake up, remembering all of the goodness. You remember how before yesterday's time off you felt drained of energy, like parts of you had fallen asleep long-term—or even worse—that parts of you had died.

The timer dings to signal that the brewing or steeping time is up: your perfect drink is ready. You mosey along to the most comfortable chair in your home. The chair that holds you upright, but lets your muscles fully relax. As you sip from the mug cradled in your hands and stare dreamily out the window, you remember your incredible day off yesterday.

This incredible day in which you felt fully alive, refreshed, joyful, rested, exhilarated...How did you spend the day? Were you alone? Were you with friends or family?

What did you do? Did you hike in the woods? Did you go to a museum or art gallery? Did you meander through a park or local garden?

If you were with someone else, what did you talk about? If you were alone, what did you think about? If you were aware of God's presence, what did you pray about?

You recall all of the details of where you were, what you saw, felt, smelled, tasted, touched, and heard. You feel all of the emotions you experienced yesterday, again, too—all in this memory.

What strikes you the most is how full of life you feel this morning, how revived you feel, and how you remember the sensation of yesterday so clearly. As you take the final sips from your mug, you consider how you might replicate yesterday today. You take a deep breath and realize that in order to have a reviving day again today, it needs to start with...

Is it possible to have the same fullness of life and revitalizing experience two days in a row?

 SCRIPTURE

**John 11: 25**

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.

 REFLECT

- What part of scripture feels the most challenging? Why?
- What might God want to say to you about Himself being "the resurrection and the life" for you if you are willing to believe it?
- You might want to write your reflections in your journal.

 PRAYER

God, I trust you to meet with me today. I have a deadness inside me that I keep trying to make alive, but no matter what I do, it doesn't seem to work. Teach me how to be alive with you.

God, I'm here and I want to believe. If you are the resurrection and the life as Jesus said, then please help me believe so I can truly live.


 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.

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**Week 3 : Day 2**

 STORY

**Imagine this:**

You've finished what you needed to accomplish earlier than you expected. Your class project went more smoothly than you thought it would. Your work meeting came and went without a hitch and you checked all of the items off of the agenda. Your shopping trip was more successful than you'd anticipated it'd be—there wasn't any traffic to get to the store and everything you needed was in stock and in the location you thought it would be.

The result? Surprise! You have about two hours of bonus time in your schedule.

Hurray! You feel excited because you can make it to the early showing of a movie that's only just come out. You had thought you'd end up binging it on Netflix when it's released, but now you have the luxury of watching it on a massive screen.

You double check your route to the movie theater and the show times: you're all set. This movie is a re-make of a childhood favorite—it's a classic for you and you're pumped to get to experience it in a quiet moment by yourself.

You feel giddy at the idea of going to see a movie on your own during the day. It feels a bit like you're sneaking around and doing something un-allowable. But, it's totally fine! You don't have anything else you have to do or anywhere you need to be for the next couple hours.

As you make your way to the theater, you even remember you have birthday money from your aunt who still sends you a card every year. And you actually have that money in your wallet. Bonus! Your heart is racing with delight as you plan what you're going to splurge on for movie snacks.

And then, as you approach the theater, there is someone on the sidewalk with a cardboard sign. You don't want to stop. You are eager to get to the movie and make the most of this time. This person looks tired, has dirty clothes, and the sign reads, "Anything will help. God Bless You."

Nearly everything in you shouts to ignore this person, don't make eye contact, keep going to make your show time.

Nearly everything shouts...except a quiet voice. It's barely a whisper. You grudgingly slow down to talk to this person with the cardboard sign. You groan as you feel like you are supposed to take some time to listen to their story—this likely means you'll miss the start of the movie. You want to ignore this quiet voice and this person on the sidewalk, but you just can't. So, you kind of smile and say, "hello."

You ask for this person's name. You ask what they need. You even ask them, "Can I pray for you right now?"

As you listen to their story, your heart softens and you're moved with compassion as you really listen. And then you feel prompted by that same whisper to use the birthday money in your wallet to purchase some hot food and new shoes for this person. There just so happens to be a fast food restaurant with their favorite meal available and also a shoe store just down the road.

You make the purchases with a cheerful heart, and you hand them to this person with the cardboard sign with a genuine smile that's flowed from your heart to your face. When you say goodbye, you call them by their name and wave. And then, you go home and get on with the rest of your day.

It's not until you lay your head down on the bed that you realize you didn't go to the movie theater. You breathe with deep contentment and say a prayer for your new friend with the cardboard sign. Their smiling face is the last image in your mind before you fall asleep.

 SCRIPTURE

**Philippians 2: 1-11**

<sup>1</sup> Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, <sup>2</sup> then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, <sup>4</sup> not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

<sup>5</sup> In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

<sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature [\[a\]](#) God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;  
<sup>7</sup> rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature [\[b\]](#) of a servant,

being made in human likeness.

<sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death—

<sup>9</sup> Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,

<sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

<sup>11</sup> and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

 REFLECT

- Which verse feels hopeful to you today? Why?
- What might God want to say to you about humility?
- 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 much going on in my own life. There are many days when I feel like I can't make ends meet financially, socially, emotionally...I've experienced things in my life that I wish I could do over.

At times, there is so much that feels amazing that I am unwilling to give it up. Other times, there is little I feel I could even offer, when I'm running on empty.

I work really hard. And I want to deserve the good things I've worked for. But then, there's so much bad stuff in the world that I don't really know how to deal with the weight of it all. Would you show me how to put aside my own good ideas and replace them with your Godly best ideas? I don't really even want to pray this, but, God, would you help me experience what it means to be truly humble so that I can know you are for real?

 ACTION

**Engage your senses.**

If you'd like to and are able, go to a public space where you can do some people watching. You can also choose to stay right where you are now. Maybe you watch a show on your favorite streaming site, but try watching it from a different perspective: observe. Take a moment, in the space you choose to be and look around you.

Look up, look out, look down. Notice the people's faces, their expressions. Listen to their laughter or yelling. Feel the cadence of their storytelling. Take note of the words they use while they talk to the person on the phone.

Are these people happy? Sad? Angry? How do you know? What do you notice? What stands out 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.

### Week 3 : Day 3

 STORY

**Imagine this:**

You just hung up the phone. Your dad's words still sting as they echo in your memory. What he said really hurt you.

Then, you remember what you said back to him. It was mean. You still feel a flicker of justification. You try to convince yourself that he deserved you saying that to him. It was really mean, what you said back to him.

After everything he's put you through, he shouldn't have treated you this way, though, and he deserved an earful from you.

Suddenly, you're overcome with emotion. You don't know exactly why, but you regret being so harsh to your dad. You wish you could take back the words that hurt. You've been struggling with your relationship with your dad for awhile now and you don't actually want to make it worse for either of you.

You want to apologize. You know what you said was wrong. You want him to know what he said and did was wrong, too, but, you sense the dread of having to call him back and ask for forgiveness.

Now, you feel the burn of shame. You rehearse the conversation you just had. Your own words echo like a nightmare in your own ears, like you were saying them to yourself. "Something is wrong with me! How could I think, let alone say, something so cruel?"

"I hurt my dad and I deserve to hurt because of that," you mutter under your breath.

After letting the anger and hurt stew for a while longer, alternately wanting to scream swear words, and then beating yourself up for being such an ungrateful, disrespectful child...you practice your apology. You can't quite get yourself to form the words to make it sound right. You feel sorry for what you said and how you reacted to your dad, but you don't feel worthy of forgiveness.

Despite this, you pick up the phone and call your dad again, not quite sure how you'll say what you feel needs to be said.

 READ

C.S. Lewis said, "Everyone thinks forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have something to forgive, and then it's really hard."

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

- Who do you need to forgive?
- Who do you wish would apologize to you?
- Why do you wish for these things?
- What would it mean to you if you go freely give and receive forgiveness?

 PRAYER

God, help me to forgive. Help me to say “sorry” when I mess up. Help me to forgive myself when I don’t do what I said I wanted to do. Change my heart so that it’s clean and so that I feel forgiven. I don’t understand why the Bible talks about forgiveness being important and why it’s such a struggle to admit things that are my fault. And I don’t understand why it hurts to give and receive forgiveness sometimes. I want to choose to believe it’s true that you can and will help me to apologize when I’ve hurt someone and that you will help me forgive myself when I mess it up. Help me see when I’ve hurt someone and actually apologize.

 ACTION

**Get Creative.**

So often we can rush through life and not want to admit our mistakes. We avoid conversations with people when we need to ask for or extend forgiveness. We find it difficult, so we do everything we can to skip out on those connections.

Take a piece of paper and a pen (or any art supplies you have to hand) and draw yourself and then, on the same page, draw someone who you need to forgive.

(You don’t have to show this drawing to anyone and it doesn’t have to be a good drawing.)

Now, picture both of your hearts beating right now. Picture what they’d look like as a cartoon. Are the hearts broken? Does one or both have a bandage on it? Draw these details as detailed or as childlike as you can.

Next, draw a couple of speech bubbles or thought bubbles next to each of your mouths in the cartoon picture. What thoughts or words might each of you think and say when forgiveness is asked for and given? Write those in the bubbles.

How does it feel to draw this out as you consider forgiveness needed in your own life?

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

## Week 3 : Day 4

### STORY

#### Imagine this:

You come home and your neighbor has done that annoying thing again. You know the thing. You've asked them nicely the first few times. You've even left a note reminding them that the thing they do is really annoying you.

You've talked to other neighbors about this annoying thing and discover they are annoyed, too, so you feel justified in your annoyance. You feel like you're a good neighbor and if you found out you were bothering a neighbor you'd absolutely change your behavior.

"It's common sense," you roll your eyes as you tell a friend about it on the phone.

Today when you come home, you decide you've had enough. "They are so inconsiderate. They are rude. They shouldn't even be allowed to live in that house anymore. What kind of person are they that they think it's okay to do that?"

The venom of repeated offenses piles up in your heart and you feel your face get hot. You know you have to say something in person to them again. And this time you're not going to hold back and try to be nice. You're fuming.

This time, you're determined they will know how annoying they are and how wrong their behavior is.

### SCRIPTURE

#### **Romans 2:1**

"You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.

### REFLECT

- What kind of neighbor would you like to be to the neighbors who annoy you? To the neighbors you find easy to get along with?
- What kind of neighbor might God be inviting you to be?

### PRAYER

God, make me into a neighbor who is kind, forgiving, compassionate, and generous. Help me choose grace and reconciliation with the people who are frustrating in this season. Show me when I'm being judgemental. Show me how I can be a better neighbor. Teach me what it means to be a neighbor to those who annoy me with the same loving kindness I give to those by whom I love living near.

### ACTION

#### **Relational moment.**

Consider a neighbor you don't know well. Perhaps one who has annoyed you—or one who's expressed their annoyance toward you. Reach out. Bring them a cake or flowers.



Bring a handwritten note. Thank them for being your neighbor and for letting you be theirs. Ask them how you can be a better, more helpful, neighbor to them.

## Week 3 : Day 5

### STORY

#### Imagine this:

Your family member is going through a hard time. You want them to get over it, but have realized that you could cut them some slack. You know, because you've asked them what's going on, that they are stressed about a project they are working on. And one of their important relationships is teetering.

It's their turn to wash the dishes, but they are piled up on the side next to the sink. Your family member is in their room working or stressing about their relationship. Normally this would bother you that the kitchen is a mess and you would remind them that it's their turn to wash up, but for some reason you don't go to them to complain.

You list out possible reactions to choose, instead. You could call it a night yourself and go to sleep, leaving the dishes. You could roll your eyes and complain about how they have left the dirty dishes in the sink—again—third time this month they've not washed up right away. Or, you could choose to serve your loved one and show kindness.

With no one else around, you decide you will wash the dishes. You put your earphones in, press play on your favorite podcast, and then you wash the dishes. One plate washed and rinsed, and then another. As you scrub the pan clean of pasta bake, you smile.

You could have complained about the dishes like you normally would, but you chose to do something nice for your family, instead. You say a little pray for them to be better, to feel better, to be less stressed, and they they'd feel loved. You're not sure if the prayer makes a difference, but you notice you feel better about yourself and even about your family.

All the dishes are clean and drying in the rack. You wipe down the counters and hang up the towels. You even notice that you don't feel like you need them to say, "thank you." So, you head up to bed, feeling lighter than you did before.

### SCRIPTURE

#### Philippians 2:12-18

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

<sup>14</sup> Do everything without grumbling or arguing, <sup>15</sup> so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky <sup>16</sup> as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. <sup>17</sup> But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. <sup>18</sup> So you too should be glad and rejoice with me”

 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 life–resurrection 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.