

Weekly Devotional : Week 4

February 26-March 4, 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 4 : Day 1

 STORY

Imagine this:

Today is the day. You've been looking forward to this all month. Your friend has planned a mystery walking tour for you and a few others—people you each know pretty well and whose company you each enjoy. You've packed a few of your favorite snacks, a metal insulated mug with a hot drink, and a large bottle of water.

You're wearing your most comfortable clothes—and you've packed a couple lightweight layers. From past mystery walks you learned that versatile apparel is rather helpful to stay warm or cool enough and dry while exploring. Each of the past walks has been interesting, learning about the history and geography of the area. They've also been breathtakingly beautiful to wander around in nature. Your friend really does their research and shares in a really entertaining, yet thoughtful way.

You wait at the starting point. Other walkers are coming one-by-one on their own or two-by-two with a friend. You remember previous walks. You recall the morning sunrise that shocked your group through the clouds and took your breath away. You recall the time when you thought everyone was lost but you still managed to escape the heavy downpour, finding shelter just in time. And the smell of chimney smoke rising from wood fires.

As you gather with everyone else, you notice how some have been coming on walks for quite a while—longer than you have, even. Others are newer to the walks and their eyes

dart around searching for the way. One of the newbies sidles up to you, amid your recollections of past beauties revealed through walks in the woods. You can tell they are nervous.

When they ask you questions about where the walk will be and what you will all do when you get there, you smile and nod. You share with them that even though you don't know where you're going today, you're confident that your friend, the "Mystery Walking Tour Guide Extraordinaire" is your dearest friend and you've been wandering for year and years and your friend has never led you into danger.

"You can trust 'im!" you say with a smile for the newbie. "He's good."

 SCRIPTURE

John 10:11

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

 REFLECT

- What part of scripture feels the most challenging? Why?
- What might God want to say to you about Himself as "the good shepherd"?
- You might want to write your reflections in your journal.

 PRAYER

God, I trust you to meet with me today. I often stray off the path. I often go the wrong way. Teach me how to trust you and take steps in the right direction.

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 really follow you into goodness.

 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 4 : Day 2

STORY

Imagine this:

You're waiting in line at a restaurant you've never been at before. Friends of yours recommended it. You read the reviews online and they looked good. You examined the menu ahead of time so you could know what to expect. You picked your top three entrées and appetizers that sounded the most appealing. They have an impressive menu with lots of good options.

It's a really busy restaurant, yet it feels cozy and welcoming. Various wait staff have brought small glass cups of mint tea for you to sip while you've been waiting in the evening chill of the line. They've asked you how each cup was and thanked you for waiting. You feel refreshed by the warm cup of tea and smile as you anticipate the experience. So far so good.

The line of guests ahead of you keep flowing into the restaurant. Eventually, it's your turn to be seated. As you settle into the booth seat and wait for the server, you mumble a question to yourself, or rhetorically to the friends who recommended this restaurant: *What makes this restaurant so "good?"*

The server promptly takes your drink order and asks when you'd like to order what you'd like to eat now, or wait till the drinks come. You ask for more time to make your final decisions about the meal. While you wait to decide your order, your eyes wander to tables near yours to take a look at what other people have ordered on their plates. It all looks good!

You ask for the server's recommendation between your two choices. You take their suggestion to order. When your plate arrives, your eyes widen, and you stretch to make space for all the good food. It's fragrant, colorful, generously piled high, and the first bite? You close your eyes to savor the flavor. You imagine how you could describe this culinary experience to get your other friends to come along. It's so good that you know you'll be coming back.

After you pay the bill, you write a review: 5 stars, of course! You'll definitely be coming back and you can recommend this place to anyone who loves unusually good food that puts a smile on your face. You think of all of your friends and family who might like to come to this restaurant with you. This really is a good restaurant. "What's their brunch like?" you muse as you weave out the entrance. As you leave, you are making plans to return as soon as possible.

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 19:17

"Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments."

 REFLECT

- Which aspect of this verse feels hopeful to you today? Why?
- What might God want to say to you about goodness?
- You might want to write your reflections in your journal.

 PRAYER

God, sometimes I can use the word “good” so much that I’m not always sure I really know what it means anymore.

At times, I think that I want to believe that you and other people are good. When good things happen, it’s easy to believe in your goodness. Other times, there is a lot of bad stuff out there and it feels discouraging. Sometimes I’m not the best I can be and I actually contribute to the bad, which is definitely not good.

God, would you share your goodness with me in a way I truly experience so that I can know you are for real?

 ACTION

Engage your senses.

Cook or purchase your favorite meal. You can choose to eat alone or invite others to join you. Pay special attention to what makes you so happy to eat this favorite meal. Really enjoy eating this food. Allow gratitude to well up and notice what you’re thankful for when you eat.

Are the flavors delicate? Spicy? Well-balanced? How do you know? Close your eyes when you chew and swallow. What do you notice? Take a deep breath before each mouthful. What aromas stand out to you? What don’t you taste? Make a mental note as you enjoy the meal.

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

Week 4 : Day 3

 STORY

Imagine this:

You’re a kid, jumping, smiling, playing, not “adulting” in any way. It’s summer—nearing the start of school, but there’s still time before you get back to the books. You’ve been away for an extended summer vacation at a camp for kids who are just like you. It’s been so much fun. You made new friends at camp and you made promises to keep in touch when you go back to school. You and your new friends did everything together and you loved every minute of it.

Now, it’s time to come back home.

This summer was the first time you stayed away from home for more than a week (like

you normally do at your grandma's house). This summer was the first time you dove off the high diving board and swam without floaties on your arm and you only choked on the lake water a couple times. This summer you tried strawberries that you picked from the woods and they were so delicious, you actually wrote your parents a letter about it.

Even now, you can feel the pride welling up about how you were brave during the thunderstorm. The next morning you had pitched in to help clean up all the branches and sticks that blew down from the storm. You remember how your cabinmates made up games to see who could collect the most firewood. You used to hate sharing your room with your siblings, but now that you've experienced camp life, having a buddy to share the space with is really fun.

As you ride the bus away from camp, you flex your muscles and admire the tan you got. You fidget absentmindedly with the countless circles of colorful friendship bracelets around your wrist. You picture the faces of your camp friends and smile. You imagine hugging your family for the first time again. You feel really happy.

When you are back in your room at home, it feels foreign. All of your toys and blankets feel old, dull, childish. It's hard for you to imagine when you played in this room--all those weeks ago-- that you felt comfortable when you were in here. It's different now. You can tell that something in you has changed. And it's a really good feeling.


You can hardly wait to see your camp friends next summer. You fall asleep tonight with a smile on your face as you dream about camp life and how it's changed your life.

 SCRIPTURE

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

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

 REFLECT

- When have you had a life changing experience?
- Why do you think this life changing experience has had such a significant impact on you?
- What do you wish could be different about you?
- What would it look like for you to have your life completely altered for the best for you and those around you?

 PRAYER

God, there are parts of me that feel weak and immature. I feel sad that I've messed things up in the past because of how I've acted. Sometimes when I look back at how I've lived in the past, I feel embarrassed, sometimes ashamed, at how I acted. I want a fresh start. I want to be someone who feels new, renewed, refreshed. Help me believe

the truth so that I can be made new.

 ACTION

Get Creative.

Collect something old from your recycling or that you were going to throw away. Give it a new lease of life. You may want to go online for ideas of what to make or you could come up with something on your own.

This might be a longer project to do over the weekend.

Do you have an old dresser that's scuffed and missing drawer handles? Get that old thing cleaned up! You may need to strip paint or old finish from the wooden surface before sanding it and bringing the wood grain alive again with a fresh coat of stain. You could need a trip to the hardware store to pick out new handles to match the lighter stain color or simply to replace missing handles.


This might be a simple project to do in an evening.

Do you have some toilet rolls, dryer lint, and candle wax? Look up directions and make fire starters. Do you have a broken or chipped bowl? Take time to finally glue it back together. Have you been missing a button on your shirt for months? Get your sewing kit out and sew the button back on.

How does it feel to go through this process of making something old, new or useful again? What thoughts or ideas come to mind when you consider what's old in your own life?

You might want to write your reflections in your journal when you finish.

Week 4 : Day 4

 STORY

Imagine this:

You have just finished a really fun, memorable time away with your family. You are ready to come home. You've been away for a week and your mind has begun writing your to do list for when you land. Any of the relaxation that might have happened while you were away begins to fizzle as you anticipate returning to normalcy.

You and your family are traveling via taxi to the airport and just as you arrive, you get a bad feeling in pit of your stomach. You don't know this for sure, but you have a feeling that something awful will happen and you'll be stuck at the airport forever like in that Tom Hanks movie. All you want is to be able to get home.

When you wander up to the check-in desk, a clump with all of your luggage and your restless family, the news comes. Departure screens flash "canceled" all around you. And before you've hardly even produced your ID to check-in for your flight, the person at the desk shakes their head and begins apologizing.

You won't be able to fly out from here tonight. No one can. A storm has blown in. The airport has canceled flights because of bad weather. Your armpits begin to gather sweat. You can feel your blood pressure rise as your heart rate increases. Your mouth goes dry.

The staff behind the desk assures you they are doing all they can do, but unfortunately, everyone has to "sit tight" until the storm passes.

You don't know what this "sit tight" means for your family and you don't even know if you have enough clean underwear to last through the storm. It could be days or hours. You know you're acting unreasonable, so you pause and take a breath. You take your family to a less-crowded corner of the airport and come up with a game plan to manage this unpleasant, stormy surprise.

Just when everyone in your family is ready for the change in plans, and ready to bear the unbearable uncertainty, an airline employee approaches, walking confidently and smiling at you.

"We would like to offer you and your family two free nights to stay in our luxury suites hotel. All meals, accommodation, and access to the pool and spa facilities are included. We apologize for the inconvenience of your canceled flight and the stormy weather, we want to offer this free gift for you."

"What's the catch? Is this really free?" you ask.

The airline staff smiles again as you nod in shock, trying to understand how you're so lucky.

They hand you the vouchers and check-in information for the hotel and begin to guide you toward a shuttle they have arranged which will take you straight to the hotel from the airport. As you and your family get to the doors, you see that it's a shiny, black limousine waiting for you.

 SCRIPTURE

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

 REFLECT

- What in your life feels like death?
- What in your life feels like life?
- What might God be inviting you to turn away from so that you can have life in abundance?
- What would it mean to you to have your life turn around in a moment, all because of a free gift?

 PRAYER

God, I want to live fully alive. I love the idea of not having despairing death ahead of me. But, I just don't understand how I can have all of this life for free? Why would you want to give me this gift? The Bible says you know all of my thoughts before I even think them. If that's true, and you know all of the bad things I've thought and all the bad things I've done that have put me on a path toward death...and you still want to freely give me a future of life instead! God help me surrender my lack of understanding.

Help me to turn away from how I've been living in a harmful way. Show me the way to go that allows me to receive the free gift you have for me. If it's true that Jesus Christ has paid the price of death so that I could have life for free, then I want to believe that. I want to receive that full life, that free gift from you, Jesus.

 ACTION

Relational moment.


Consider a faithful friend or family member. Someone whom you can always count on, who has sacrificed things in their life so you could have something good.

Consider this: How do you know they are good? What have you experienced that has convinced you of this? How has your life changed because they've treated you so well?

Use what you know about your friend or family member and make or purchase a gift that will really bless them. Then, give the gift in a way that they know there are no strings attached.

After you give them the gift, you may want to take 5-10 minutes to journal about the experience from the perspective of gift-giver. How might giving this gift to create a connection between you and your loved one? How might this interaction reveal how God felt to give up Jesus as a gift to you?

Week 4 : Day 5

 STORY

Imagine this:

You're in the middle of watching a new movie. It's at a crucial moment. You are about to discover something interesting from the character's childhood to understand why they keep making the same mistakes over and over.

Out of the corner of your eye, you think you see movement outside of the dining room window. You turn to the window, but don't see anything. You focus your attention back on the movie. Then, you think you hear a noise outside. Could it be a knock at the front door?

You pause the film to listen. You don't hear anything. You hold your breath in case it's a really small noise drowned out by your breathing. You realize it feels like a pretty

dramatic response to hold your breath, but you are watching a film and you're really into it.

You're just about to push play again, when you hear a knock at the door. It's a light, friendly knock. And this time, the knocking is accompanied by a booming hello, equally friendly. It's your best friend!

You set the controller down, brush off some of the popcorn that escaped your mouth and landed in your lap, and try not to trip over your blanket.

"I'm coming!"

You are excited to hear your friend's voice at the door. You unlock the door and swing it wide open to welcome your friend. You make eye contact and give your best friend a massive hug and "hello!"

You've not seen your friend for a long time and you're excited to catch up. You start getting a drink and snacks for your friend and you can't stop smiling to be with your friend again.

Later in the night, you realize you forgot to finish watching the movie. You were so distracted and delighted to be with your friend that you didn't even feel like you were missing anything. You wonder what would have happened if you were determined to finish the movie and ignore the door, instead of opening it. You shrug the thought off your mind with deep gratitude that the knock at the door caught your attention.

 SCRIPTURE

Revelation 3:20

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they 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 today about your goodness? About how much you love me? About the new life you want me to live?
- 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.