

Weekly Devotional : Week 6

March 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/>

Week 6 : Day 1

 STORY

Imagine this:

You're back in time. The internet just came out. You're in elementary school. Today is a "Computer Lab Day!" The lady in the library, who is also in charge of the Technology Lab has come into your classroom to tell the teacher that she's just switched on all of the computers. This means computers will be warmed up and the lab will be ready for your class in about 15 minutes.

Everyone in the classroom is giddy because they like playing games with race cars that drive faster, the more quickly you type, or living life as a fish avoiding being eaten by larger fish, osprey, or the dreaded fishing line, or the pioneering days of riding in a covered wagon, building bridges to cross the river and hoping that your sister doesn't drown this time or that you don't end up with dysentery. The computer lab is one of your favorite places.

But, the internet is a new thing. "It's a research tool," your teacher declares with a smile. Mrs. S. begins to explain that the "world wide web" is great for learning because it has an almost infinite catalog of information that's bigger than the biggest library in the world. This new technology will probably stick around for the foreseeable future, so it's important that you learn how to use it wisely.

You will be researching ancient Greece for your term project. In the few minutes before you go to the lab, your teacher has you brainstorm as many questions as you can think

of about what you want to know about ancient Greece.

As you're lining up at the door of your classroom, your teacher reminds you to listen really well to the library lady, whose name is Ms. Kelly.

"Ms. Kelly knows the way the world wide web works. She'll show you how to navigate to different resources that will help you on your research paper. Ms. Kelly will even show you how to know if what resources you find are true or not. If something is 'true' what's the research word we use to describe it?...Raise your hand...Yes, John?"

"Credible!" your friend John shouts and you give him a high five along with several other classmates.

"That's right. Ms. Kelly will show you today how to determine whether the sources you find in your research are credible. She's an expert about this, so you can trust her to teach you the best way to use this incredible tool....Okay...Ready to go?"

And then you head out of your classroom, down the hall, single file, peace sign held high in the air to remind everyone to be quiet. You arrive in the Technology Lab and see all the computers, you feel the warmth of the humming motors, that warm dust-burning scent, and you're eager to learn all you can from Ms. Kelly.

 SCRIPTURE

John 14:1-14

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God[a]; believe also in me. ² My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going."

⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

⁶ Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really know me, you will know[b] my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

⁸ Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

⁹ Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. ¹² Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."

 REFLECT

- What part of scripture feels the most challenging? Why?
- What might God want to say to you about Himself as He says He's the way, the truth, and the life?
- You might want to write your reflections in your journal.

 PRAYER

God, there are so many experts, so many loud voices who distract me and seem to fight for my attention. How am I supposed to know that you are the voice I'm listening to?

I feel worried that I might hear something wrong. Give me courage to trust your voice. Give me courage to trust the peace you've given to me is real and for me. Give me a supernatural gift of faith to believe you are the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Help me believe this is true and help me receive the good gifts of the fruits of the spirit from time spent reading and learning from the Bible. Show me the way, God. I want to believe I can hear from you. Amen.

 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 6 : Day 2

 STORY

Imagine this:

You're out on the lake, fishing. The sun is just coming up, silvery shards of light peek through the sleep silhouettes of trees along the shoreline. The water appears smooth, like glass. You paddle a couple strokes to move out of the patch of weeds and cattails. As your small boat shifts, it leaves a slow wake of tiny ripples.

You cast your line out again in the new space, just like your Auntie Mona taught you. You wait. Holding your pole in one hand, lazily watching the line, you hold your thermos of hot coffee in your other hand and take a sip. Its nutty chocolate fragrance is a harmonious contrast with the wet sand and fish scent lingering in the boat's morning air.

You hear a loon call. You smile remembering how Auntie Mona would make up stories about all the wildlife waking up in the morning, talking about the wild parties they had the night before. You remember her smile, and all the details she taught you from years of summers at the cabin with good ol' A.M.

You take another sip of coffee and smile at all the times you didn't catch any fish because you talked too loudly and scared the fish away, but your auntie took you out again the next day so you could learn. She had buckets of minnows and buckets of patience to make sure you felt confident on the water, maneuvering the boat with the paddles and the motor.

She showed you patience in her example, her voice only ever above a whisper, her face always shining in a peaceful grin. As you watch the loons swim toward you you feel a sense of gratitude for what you learned in your youth. You wait for them to approach. You wait for your line to pull.

As you wait for something—anything—to happen, you reflect on how what you learned about patience and enjoying beauty in nature with gratitude to the maker of it all has allowed you to slow down. And how it's allowed you to have perspective on the challenges you're going through with your work, or your neighbor.

Just when you click the lid of your thermos open to take another sip of coffee, your line pulls! Your pole bends as you check it—so, you set the hook with a confident yank and begin the thrill of the steady click of reeling in a big one!

Even though you don't need the reminder—you haven't needed it for years—you still hear Auntie Mona's voice teaching you to "keep the tip up!" You check that yes, indeed, your line is not going to snap, and it's not too high, either. As you reel and pull the line toward the boat, there's a splash as a shiny green gaping mouth wiggles violently toward you. You lift the fish up out of the water and into the net your buddy's holding for you, all in one smooth motion.

"Thanks, Auntie Mona," you whisper with gratitude at the summers she spent teaching you.


"What a great catch!" your buddy smiles and helps unhook the fish.

"Yeah! That'll be a nice walleye breakfast for us over the fire, eh?"


 SCRIPTURE

2 Timothy 3:16-17

¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God[a] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

 REFLECT

- Which aspect of this scripture feels hopeful to you today? Why?
- What might God want to say to you about learning and being equipped? About the Bible?
- You might want to write your reflections in your journal.

 PRAYER

God, would you show me where you were in my childhood? What was I learning? Are there things that I've not learned that I could have but missed when I was young? God, I was a kid, learning all kinds of stuff, but I didn't know what would be helpful to remember back then. So, I just need help to know what I should know.

And, sometimes I like reading, but I'm not always certain about what I'm reading in the Bible, so that makes it difficult. Please help me understand the Bible. Help me to know how to live life that's pleasing to you, that's honoring to you, that helps me live a full life that you promise. Help me trust you. Amen.

 ACTION

Engage your senses.


Go out to the nearest body of water you can find. Allow yourself a few minutes to take in all of the sensory experiences. Your only purpose in these minutes is to notice.

What color is the sky? What texture is the water? What scent comes from the trees or wildflowers? What taste is in the air or from your last meal? What songs are birds singing or squirrels chirping? What does the shore feel like?

As you notice the sensory details, allow yourself to be a curious observer of any memories that are triggered by any of the senses you're experiencing.

Then, when you can, set a timer for 5-10 minutes and write a journal entry to reflect about this sensory experience.

Week 6 : Day 3

 STORY

Imagine this:

You're in a museum. It's the kind of museum that has exhibits on the history of your area, including fossils and famous people who were born here over the years. You've come to the museum with some family friends. Between all of you, there are several kids. You've come to learn about history, but all of the kids have come to go on the treasure hunt. There's a high stakes prize available.

Even though you think the prize might only be one of those pressed pennies, you love the kids' enthusiasm as you begin the treasure hunt, so you play along to help them find the clues.

The first few clues come easily to the older kids and the younger ones catch on soon afterward. But once they get about halfway through the clues, their excitement wanes.

They say things like, “It’s not fair. I think somebody stole the clue. It’s not here like they said it should be.”

You can tell they are really frustrated, and probably would enjoy a little snack, and you suggest to them that you believe all of the answers will be in the museum, as promised. They argue that pieces are missing, or that the rest of the clues are hidden outside and just out of view for kids to even see them.

You ask the kids if they’d mind if you would help them look. They agree—because they really want the prize, no matter what it takes! As you begin searching with them, you’re able to interpret the clues differently from the kids, so you ask them questions to help them discover the clue.

They quickly find the next clue and their excitement for the quest renews just as quickly. They are ready to discover the next treasure. You work together with the kids, asking them questions, helping them to see the clues from a different perspective, and then eventually, they reach the end and have discovered all of the clues.

When the clues are lined up together on the treasure map, it reveals that they get to have an ice cream sundae in the cafe!

“Jackpot!” one of the kids shouts.

Others whistle and jump and giggle with glee as they anticipate the ice cream.

Once they each collect their ice cream sundae prizes, they’re smiling. You ask if they had fun on the treasure hunt, and they answer with a chorus of resounding yesses.

“We thought that the clues weren’t leading us to the right place or that they were missing. But, then you helped us and it turned out all the clues were right here in the museum. We just needed your help to find them.”


You nod with the rest of the adults as you stifle laughter watching the kids all smearing sugar joy across their faces.

 READ

“We do not blindly seek God or wait for him to speak to us first for God has already spoken and there is nothing further that we need to know which has not been revealed to us. Let us receive the sublime treasure of the revealed word.”

–Evangelii Gaudium

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

- When have you had an experience of not believing you had the resources you needed?
- Why do you think you didn't believe the answers were in your reach?
- What problem or "treasure hunt" do you wish you had the answer to or could understand better?
- What would it look like for you to respond to this situation by asking God to show you the way?

 PRAYER

God, there are so many things I just don't understand. I read the Bible when I'm feeling stuck, but some days it just doesn't feel relatable. Thank you that you've put everything I need in this book, the Bible. Give me a desire to read it more deeply, more relationally, in more of an authentic way believing that I could connect with you through the words on the pages. And help me to understand this book. Help me to receive the treasure you've prepared for me through revealing the truth in your words in the Bible. Thank you, God. Amen.

 ACTION


Get Creative.

Grab a pen and scrap of paper. Whatever you have in front of you is great. It doesn't have to be fancy. Draw an "x" on the page somewhere to mark where the "treasure" is. This treasured "x" can represent anything you've been praying about, but not seen an answer to. Pretend you're making a treasure map for yourself as a kid. What are things along the way that would be fun to encounter? Draw pictures of those things on the path toward getting to the answer. It doesn't have to be perfect or be logical. Consider how this treasure map could be a fun journey.

You might want to ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you make this treasure map.

Once you've finished sketching out your treasure map, perhaps 5-10 minutes, you might want to write your reflections in your journal when you finish. You may choose to journal prayers asking for guidance on which way to follow in order to find the answers or get to the "treasure."

Week 6 : Day 4

 STORY

Imagine this:

You're going through some old boxes you've had in storage. You find boxes of old trophies and photos. Boxes of antique clothes that could actually be worth something. "Note to self: come back for these to sell on marketplace," you whisper.

Another box is labeled CDs and you laugh at how quickly that technology came and went, and how you've actually got a modern record player going in your living room right now. They're labeled, "LETTERS." Your curiosity causes you to pause. You wonder aloud, "What letters could these be?"

As you unfold the box flaps, you see several stacks of envelopes with cursive addresses on them. Each stack is a couple inches tall, perhaps 15-20 envelopes. Each stack is bundled together with a piece of twine, a bright ribbon, or a strip of colorful material.

It feels a little invasive to open the letters and read them, but they are boxes in your own storage so they must belong to you. And, they look really old, so it couldn't possibly be anyone living that they belong to.

You look at your watch—you came to look through the boxes to see what you could sell, but you suppose you've got enough time for a letter-reading diversion.

You pick up the first stack with a dark red velvet ribbon tied in a loose bow. You gently untie the ribbon, open the top envelope's yellowing flap, and pull out a folded piece of paper completely covered in cursive handwriting. Some of it is challenging to read, but you can tell the person writing loved the person the letter was written to.

You replace that letter and open another envelope. The same thing again: the letter shared heart longings, celebrations of the day, hopes for futures together, and mundane things, too. But even in the everyday catching up, there was an intimacy you could tell that the writer had toward the addressee.

"Nobody writes like this anymore!" you exclaim in wonderment to your friend as you share your findings.

"Listen to this..." you say as you begin to read another letter to your friend. You both marvel at the connection that even the two of you have with the writer of the letter.

"How can words be so moving?" you ask each other.

 SCRIPTURE

John 5:35-40

³⁵ John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light.

³⁶ "I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to finish—the very works that I am doing—testify that the Father has sent me. ³⁷ And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, ³⁸ nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. ³⁹ You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

 REFLECT

- If it's true that Jesus has the answers, how would you like to respond?
- If it's true that Jesus worked miracles, how might this change how you live your life today?
- How might your life change if you wrote letters back to God in response to the letters in the Bible?
- What doubts might God be inviting you to turn away from so that you can follow Him into the truth?

 PRAYER

God, if it's true that your word is a love letter to me, then I want to experience your love when I read it. The Bible has stories of genuine connection and intimacy that points to you—that's what Jesus says in this passage. So, help me see what you and your word is pointing to. Sometimes words are hard for me and I miss stuff, so please help me not miss it. Maybe it feels sort of silly to ask for this, but God, I want there to be arrows (flashing would be helpful) that point to you, that point to the answer, that show me the way into truth and the way to live life fully alive. Thanks for being with me. Amen.

 ACTION

Relational moment.


Take a moment to write a letter to a loved one or an old friend. Share what you did earlier in the day and what you plan to do later on. Tell this person what you appreciate about them, what you see that reminds you of them, and recall a shared memory that was important for your relationship. You might want to even write the various mundane items that you can see from where you're writing the letter.

Even if your handwriting isn't perfect, use a pen to write, not the computer. Handwritten notes convey part of the writer's personality. Allow the recipient the gift of receiving fun snail mail that also has some of your personality.

And then...actually send the letter!

You may want to journal a line or two about how it felt to write and send a letter to someone.

Week 6 : Day 5

 STORY

Imagine this:

You are getting ready to leave for a work trip that will mean you're away for a few weeks. It's longer than normal and you want to make sure that your home responsibilities are taken care of. You talk to the neighbors about helping your family to mow and water the grass. You talk to your cousin two blocks away to check on your guinea pigs during the day when everyone else is at work or school and you give him a

set of keys.

Even though this trip is for work, you're excited to go away because you know it's going to help you move forward in the direction you think you're made to go with your work and life. It is a great opportunity.

When you were in a work meeting yesterday, a colleague asked if you could quickly finish up a few things before you head out. So, today you're working on finishing as much as you can.

Between all of the life admin and the office admin and then the packing and travel logistics, you're not sure you can finish everything. You know that you'll be able to do work while you're away since it's a work trip. But it feels good to clear the decks, so you're clearing as much as you can.

Your phone rings. It's a friend who doesn't know yet that you're going away. Your friend wants to talk about the next season of epic sports watching, but you don't have capacity to talk about that right now, since you're getting ready to fly in the morning.

You gently, but firmly explain that your mutual friend will be able to plan your sports get togethers and that you trust them both to do a really good job planning it all. You also mention that your brother has been wanting to get involved, too, and you told him all your ideas at dinner last night, so he'll be a great resource.

"I've got to go, but I'm leaving you and the watch party group in very capable hands with my brother. Trust me—it'll be fine."

 SCRIPTURE

John 14:15-31

¹⁵ "If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them."

²² Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?"

²³ Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

²⁵ "All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of

everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

²⁸ “You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. ³⁰ I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, ³¹ but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.

“Come now; let us leave.

 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 trusting you? About having a relationship with me? About how much you love me?
- 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.