

## Weekly Devotional : Week 8

March 26–April 1, 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 8 : Day 1

 STORY

#### Imagine this:

You've had a long day. It's been a great day, but you're tired. You started early, were super productive, had lots of fun with your friends, but now the day's light is gone. It's time to go home. Normally you're only out during the day when there's lots of light. Tonight is different.

Normally during the day, you feel safe to walk anywhere you need to. Office to store. Store to car. Car to your front door. But at night, everything looks different. And tonight, everything feels different, too. You don't know why but you get a shivery, eerie sensation running up the back of your neck. Suddenly, you feel fear.

You decide to walk a few steps anyway. You tell yourself you're brave and strong and that you're just being silly to make up all of these creepy things with your tired mind. But, something in your heart stops you. You just get a sense that you need to wait and that you need to not walk alone tonight, so you turn around toward where you'd come from.

Now, you hear someone shout at you, but you don't recognize their voice. You hold yourself upright, adopting the confident stance, and you remind yourself of the moves you learned in self-defense all those years ago. Your body is tense as you search the street, hoping your friends are still around. A thought flashes through your mind of how unprepared you feel if something were to happen. You make a mental note to

search for self-defense classes you can sign up for to refresh your skills.

You pick up your pace. You can sense that someone is following you. You catch your breath as your tired imagination train speeds through unpleasant scenarios. And then, you hear another voice calling your name. It's a friendlier voice.

You look ahead of you and see a police officer. At first the uniform startles you—you panic, thinking, "What have I done wrong?" And then you realize it's your neighbor Steve. He's one of the kindest, strongest people you have met. He's safe, too.

Steve asks you why you look so worried. You share with him how you feel uncomfortable walking alone tonight, but you can't point to exactly why you feel that way. He offers to walk you into a nearby cafe that's still open and wait with you while you order a taxi—he's due a dinner break, anyway.

As you go through the door and enter the cafe, you hear another voice call your name. This one is friendly and familiar, too. It turns out that a few of your office friends came to this cafe to decompress after the long day. You smile, feel at ease, and as it happens, one of your friends is also a neighbor and you end up riding home together. Safe and sound.

 SCRIPTURE

**John 10:1-10**

"Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup> The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." <sup>6</sup> Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

<sup>7</sup> Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. <sup>9</sup> I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.[a] They will come in and go out, and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

 REFLECT

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

 PRAYER

God, there are times I feel scared about thieves stealing from me. And times when I feel scared about evil sneaking around me. I don't want this fear to take over. I want to walk in the peace and love you promise to me so that fear doesn't shut me down. Please show me what it looks like to walk in faith, to know your voice, to recognize fear without taking it on, and help me to listen to you so that I know your truth. Thank you for keeping me safe, Jesus. In your name. 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.

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## Week 8 : Day 2

 STORY

**Imagine this:**

You are offered an amazing opportunity to use your skills and talents, to do something you're really equipped to do and passionate about. As you say yes and step into this role and opportunity, you start to look around at all of the others around you. They all look more experience, more equipped, more worthy of the role than you.

You try to give yourself a boost by remembering that you were intentionally chosen by the higher-ups for this opportunity. That helps a little, but not fully.

As you train for the role and start practicing using them in this new setting, you stumble, you make mistakes, and you doubt. You even get angry at yourself and others around you. Fear tugs at your identity and whispers lies to you about how unqualified you are, how undeserving of this opportunity you are.

You remember how excited you felt when this opportunity first presented itself. You knew with certainty and a thrill that this was meant for you to do it. It was so clear and all the arrows pointed to it.

Now, you're acting in courage, and you wonder if you made a mistake.

Fortunately, your manager in this organization is really friendly, competent, and approachable, so you go to them.

You say, "I'm not good enough. I think you made a mistake to choose me for this role. I've messed up some stuff in my past, and...there's probably someone else that would be better for you to have in this position instead of me. I'm sorry," you feel emotional,

“but, I think I have to step away.”

Your supervisor listens intently and smiles compassionately as you share your fears. Then, your supervisor speaks. And they tell you all of the reasons why you are made for this role, why you are qualified, and remind you of why they chose you. They even take out a piece of paper from their notepad and write a little “permission slip” for you to trip new things outside of your comfort zone.

You shared more vulnerably than you’d anticipated, but you actually feel a bit better. You thank your supervisor and return to your desk, permission slip in hand. You stick the slip up on your cork board, so you can remember that you belong here, right where you are. And, no matter how you feel on any given day, you know that this permission slip will help you remember why you’re here.

 SCRIPTURE

**Isaiah 6:1-10**

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. <sup>3</sup> And they were calling to one another:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty;  
the whole earth is full of his glory.”

<sup>4</sup> At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

<sup>5</sup> “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.”

<sup>6</sup> Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup> With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

<sup>8</sup> Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

<sup>9</sup> He said, “Go and tell this people:


“Be ever hearing, but never understanding;  
be ever seeing, but never perceiving.”

<sup>10</sup> Make the heart of this people calloused;  
make their ears dull  
and close their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,  
hear with their ears,  
understand with their hearts,  
and turn and be healed.”

 REFLECT

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

 PRAYER

God, I think you're calling me into something new. Something holy, something bigger than me, and looking at who I am, what I've done, and what I have to offer...I feel at a loss. I acknowledge the doubts in my mind and I realize this is shame telling me I'm not good enough and that I'm not a real part of what's happening. And I feel really sad about that. God, would you show me where I've sinned and fallen short? And, then would you forgive me? I want to have a pure heart. I want to live a life worthy of the calling I've been given. Help me to notice my fears and doubts and when shame holds me back. I give it all over to you and trust you're with me, making a way.

 ACTION

**Engage your senses.**

Invite a few friends or family members together. Build a fire in your backyard or in your fireplace. Watch how the flames dance over the wood and char it black. Take a deep breath and smell the variety of scents of the burning wood. Maybe you roast marshmallows or barbecue sausages to eat together—notice how they taste being cooked over a woodfire. Feel the warmth penetrate your bones into your soul. Listen to the crackle and pop as wood sap sizzles and dry logs give way to the fire's consumption. Enjoy this time together with people around you.

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

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## Week 8 : Day 3

 STORY

**Imagine this:**

Last week felt like a pretty good week. You've been growing in your friendships with people. You feel like you're starting to understand a bit more of who God is—you're more connected to God than you've ever felt before.

But now? It's been a rough few days.

You've not felt you've been treated fairly by a few different people—some family close members whom you know well have said and done really hurtful things. And then, some other situations have just not gone well: like needing to ask for a refund for a product that didn't work and you felt like you had to argue to make a case.

You had an argument with your neighbor about where and how you park your car even though it's not any different from how or where you've been parking for years. You received a letter in the mail from two bills that service companies claim haven't been paid, but you know you paid them. When you called the customer service line, after waiting on hold for two hours, the representative was really rude to you and it was a struggle to even explain what happened.

You were tempted to be rude back to all of the people—half of the time you definitely were! The other half of the time you tried to be nice, but wondered, offended, why people were so mean.

And now, it's morning of a new day. You choose to feel hopeful, but before you're even out of bed, your alarm beeps and falls onto the floor. You take a deep breath and say a whispered prayer that it's not broken since you just bought it...it's scratched, of course.

You shuffle to the kitchen and attempt to make a cup of coffee, which you do successfully, but you spill the first cup on yourself, which burns because it's so hot. Then, your cracked phone starts beeping with what you figure must be several messages in a row. You check. Through the cracks you can see that your co-worker has sent you a series of ranting messages because supposedly you've done something wrong in a report and ruined her chance of a promotion.

"Ahhhhh!" you cry out, "Why is every human in the world against me?"

 SCRIPTURE

**Ephesians 6:10-18**

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. <sup>13</sup> Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. <sup>14</sup> Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, <sup>15</sup> and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

<sup>18</sup> And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

 REFLECT

- When have you had an experience of a struggle that felt like it was against flesh and blood, but was really a spiritual struggle?
- What kind of impact has this experience had on you?

- What do you wish could be different about your situation?
- How might you respond differently with a spiritual perspective of the struggle that's going on?

 PRAYER

God, I think there are days I forget to get dressed. I'm just walking around naked, unarmed, and completely vulnerable. Would you increase my awareness to your presence? Jesus, could you show me how to get dressed so I'm protected in the spirit?

Help me to stand firm in you and resist the devil so he has to leave. Help me prioritize repairing and keeping good relationships with people. Help me recognize that my struggle isn't really against the people in my life, but against spiritual darkness and evil enemies of my soul.

Thank you LORD, that you equip me to wear truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and give me a desire for reading your word so that I can hold the sword of the spirit with confidence. No matter what today brings, I lift my day to you. May I grow in relationship with you, Father God. In Jesus' name. 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. Spend a few moments sketching yourself in your very own armor of God outfit.


As you draw the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the sword of the spirit, and so on, invite God to show you how you can get dressed every day like this.

There is no wrong way to sketch this self-portrait. What it looks like in the end isn't what matters. Instead, it's about the process of what happens when you put pen to paper as you invite God to reveal more of Himself to you today.

Once you've spent what feels like enough time, perhaps 5-10 minutes, you might want to write your reflections in your journal when you finish.

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## Week 8 : Day 4

 STORY

**Imagine this:**

You've just made a huge life decision. You are packing your home into boxes. It's exciting. This new opportunity has come up. You had your small group pray for you about this and you've had peace about it for weeks, actually. You're really confident that you've heard from God about moving forward and saying a wholehearted, "yes!" to moving.

Now, you've been packing for a couple of hours. You skipped lunch because you were on a roll with the packing tape and didn't want to lose momentum. Your stomach growls at you for dinner and you think about which pizza to order for delivery. Pepperoni is the obvious choice, but you wonder if you try the special offer with all the toppings for only a dollar more.

You finish taping this box of winter clothes, smooshing the sweaters flat. Now, you grab your phone and place an order on the pizza place's app. It's too much food, but it's a good deal and you'll be able to save some for the next day or two. You've always liked cold pizza for breakfast. It's weird, but all your friends have accepted your weirdness and your affinity for cold pizza, and you completely for who you are.

Suddenly, you slump down on the sofa, phone in hand, order just placed.

"What if I never get to see my friends again?" You wonder how you'll be able to stay in touch. You wonder if you'll be able to make new friends, if anyone will even like you, if your current friends will forget about you.

"What if this is the wrong decision?" You whisper this, feeling fear at its possible truth.

Now, you hear a thought that you think is valid at first, "What if you heard wrong? Did God really say it'd be okay to move away from your friends and family and everything you know? You don't really want to do that."

You feel a burning sensation prickle through your body.

*What is wrong with me? Why did I ever think this is a good idea? I've made the wrong decision about moving. I'm so stupid. I always screw up my life. I can never do anything right. I never hear from God—who do I think I am that I ever thought I could?*

By the time the doorbell rings and your pizza arrives, you feel miserable and can hardly answer the door to receive it. As you walk to the door, your mind is on a loop of these self-condemning thoughts about how wrong of a decision you've made.

But when you open the door, the pizza delivery driver smiles such a genuine smile that surprises you. Something in you shifts. You can see your situation from a different perspective. You smile back and decide to call your friend from small group to talk about how you're feeling. When your friend answers you begin sharing all of these doubts that have swarmed your mind. Saying them out loud, they sound so silly.

You invite your friend over for pizza since you ordered so much. They can arrive in just a few minutes. It feels good to share with a friend. All of a sudden a rush of hope and peace settles over you and you smile again.

 SCRIPTURE

**Genesis 3:1-13**

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"



<sup>2</sup> The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup> but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

<sup>4</sup> “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. <sup>5</sup> “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

<sup>6</sup> When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. <sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

<sup>8</sup> Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup> But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”

<sup>10</sup> He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

<sup>11</sup> And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

<sup>12</sup> The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

<sup>13</sup> Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

 REFLECT

- If it's true that God walks with you daily through daily life, even when you feel ashamed, how would you like to respond?
- If it's true that the devil lies to you and deceives you constantly, how would you like to respond?
- 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

LORD God, it's so easy for me to get lost in a decision-making process. Either I overthink myself into analysis paralysis, or I go into blind confidence mode and just decide without any prayerful consideration or seeking wise counsel.

Could you help me find the balance, the sweet spot of asking for help and following through with faith? I don't want to give doubts or satan's deception any foothold to

climb in my life or any place to take root in my heart.

I don't want anything to come between us, LORD. Please show me where I've gone wrong today, LORD, and I want to repent. I am sorry for my sins. I really need you, Jesus, to forgive me. I receive your forgiveness. Thank you for restoring our relationship and setting me free from lies and sin. Today, I choose to follow you and know you and trust you more deeply. In Jesus' name. Thank you, LORD. Amen.

 ACTION

**Relational moment.**

Invite a friend over for a meal together. Perhaps this friend is from your current small group or a previous one you've been part of. Ask them to listen about any decisions you're mulling over.


You may want to share some of what you're learning this week or something you're struggling with or celebrating. You might even want to ask for prayer or offer to pray for your friend.

As you anticipate calling a friend to invite them for dinner, what are you aware of? Do you feel anxious to call them? Does it feel normal to call your friend? Do you worry about what they'll think of you if you share how you're really feeling in life?

After your friend comes over, reflect on how you feel after making this connection.

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## Week 8 : Day 5

 STORY

**Imagine this:**

You have a really busy today. Your to do list is a mile long. You've got 25 things to do in the next 24 hours and it all feels impossible. So, you're going to do the best you can, you reassure yourself, and you're going to just get through everything as quickly as possible and—what does your friend always say? *Hope for the best! It'll be fine?* You're going to hope for the best today.

You jump in your car and set off with a clear focus. You're going to the grocery store first so you can get ingredients to make a cake to bring for the baking competition fundraiser tomorrow. On your drive, someone cuts you off in traffic, slowing you down. You shout at them words that you wouldn't want a toddler to repeat.

Immediately, you regret what you've said and say sorry under your breath even though you know the other driver won't be able to hear you.

The traffic is uncharacteristically slow today, though, and you can't figure out why everyone won't get out of your way. You have places to be. The traffic light turns yellow as you approach, so you speed up and just miss the red light. There's a clear path, so you step on the accelerator and go a few notches above the speed limit.

When you get to the grocery store, you snake around the lanes and there's nowhere close to park...except the parent-child / expectant mother spaces. You don't have a child with you today, but sometimes you do when you go to the store, so you're sure nobody would mind. You're not so bad that you'd park in the disabled space.

You zoom around the store and grab ingredients for your competition cake, but then you see a really beautiful cake in the bakery. You reason that you don't really have time to bake a cake and it's all for charity anyway, so you decide to buy the already made cake for the fundraiser—nobody will know the difference.

You pick up a few other items while you're in the store, trying to be efficient, and then you go to the self-checkout, pay and go on your way. You carry on throughout your day with each of your errands for a few hours of supersonic speed and high-anxiety.

By the time you get home, you're exhausted, fed up of being around horrible humans, and you're so glad that you decided not to bake a cake for the competition because you don't know where you'd find the time or energy. When you unload your car, you notice a couple of food items in your shopping bag that weren't on your list.

"How did they get in here?" you wonder aloud, scanning your receipt unable to find them. You really can't be bothered to go back to the store and return them.

Then something hits you. You've been rushing all day, rude to other drivers, inconsiderate parking, unpleasant and avoiding people in every store, you're planning to cheat at the fundraiser competition with your pre-made cake, inadvertently stolen from the grocery store, and who knows what else?

You realize you've been selfish and giving in to temptation all day long. Then, you hear a whisper of a thought: *Is this how you want to live your life?*

Another thought immediately rushes in to dismiss it. Who cares? You're busy. You've got important stuff you have to do. People can get over it.

You have a sense within your spirit that you have a decision to make about how you want to live your life. Rushing into temptation and compromise? Living honestly with integrity? *It's not black and white, though*, you sense another thought slithering in your mind.

"But, what if some things are black and white?" you pause and consider what you've just accomplished all day by rushing.

 SCRIPTURE

**James 4:5-10**

<sup>5</sup> Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? <sup>6</sup> But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:

"God opposes the proud  
but shows favor to the humble."

<sup>7</sup> Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup> Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

 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 talking to 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.