

Weekly Devotional : Week 9

April 2 – April 8, 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 9 : Day 1

 STORY

Imagine this:

You're wandering through one of those membership warehouse stores for your monthly bulk staple items and to stock up on the seasonal treats, too. You always get the dinosaur-shaped chicken nuggets for when your little nephew or granddaughter comes to visit. Thirty pounds of sweet potato fries should be enough for the upcoming sports watching marathon parties you host on the weekends. You'll put those bags of fries in the chest freezer in the garage when you get home.

You find a couple unique items, too. Golden kiwi fruits and a small vat of spice mix to sprinkle on everything both make it into your cart. There was a sample of both of these and you were sold. You loved hearing the ideas of how to add the spice mix for marinades, on baked potatoes, in summer chopped salads, for soup bases. And, the golden kiwi has skin you don't have to peel! It's not fuzzy at all. The person offering samples gave you different ideas of ways to eat your kiwis and you're hooked. You know these two impulse buys will be staples in the future. And you also know others who need to hear about it so they can experience all of this culinary enlightenment.

As you round the bend to go to the checkout, you feel pleased with what you've found to stock up on and you're excited about new discoveries, too. All of a sudden, you see an item on an end cap with a spotlight on it. It is just what you need! You feel silly, but you've even prayed about being able to afford this item because it's normally out of

your price range and you really wanted it. And here it is, right in front of you, with a spotlight shone on it.

You pull out your phone and take a picture, immediately texting it to your closest couple of friends who you know love a great deal, “Look what I found today at Cost Club!” You grab two of this item and feel quite satisfied with yourself and you even say a quick prayer of thanks to God for helping you find it at such a good deal.

While you wait in the line to pay, your friends text you back with celebratory emojis and dancing toddler gifs. You reply to tell them you’ll call them on the way home to fill them in on all the details and let them know where exactly you found the item you had hoped for, so that they can enjoy it, too. As you pay, you can’t keep in the excitement: it practically bursts out of you in a note-so-socially-appropriate-manner as you explain to the cashier and the person packing your cart about your tremendous find and excitement. As you wander back to your car, a giddy hop in your step, you think of all of the people you need to call or text today to let them know of all these amazing finds you had today at Cost Club. Everyone needs to know about it and you’re determined to be the one who brings this good news.

 SCRIPTURE

John 8:12

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

 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 light of the world”?
- You might want to write your reflections in your journal.

 PRAYER

Jesus, you say that you are the light of the world. You say that I don’t have to walk in darkness and that you will lead me with light. But, sometimes I feel like I can’t switch on the light. Where is it? Help me see this light. There are a lot of things in the world and in my family and in my neighborhood that feels really dark and hopeless. I even feel like my next steps in life are shrouded in darkness. I feel like I can’t see beyond this current moment, beyond right now. Would you reveal yourself to me in a new way I can understand that helps me experience you as the light to guide me into life? Thank you for being patient with me, Jesus. 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 9 : Day 2

 STORY

Imagine this:

A few months ago, you moved into a new city. There are many things you miss about where you lived. One thing, however, that you miss particularly is a restaurant chain that you loved going to on lunch breaks during the weekdays and for a treat on Saturdays where you used to live. You always have wanted to go there on Sundays, but they aren't ever open.

Since moving here, you've asked everyone you meet if they know about this restaurant and why it's not where you live now. You've even called the headquarters of the restaurant. Almost every day you tell someone about how you love this restaurant and have so many fond memories with friends over the years, prior to moving here.

You decide to start a petition of potential customers of this restaurant if they could build a new location for the restaurant near where you live. You post about it on all of your social media avenues, you talk about it at networking events, you even write a press release about your campaign, and you share with anyone who will listen.

As you share with more and more people about the great quality of their juicy sandwiches, their super secret special sauce, and their chunky steak fries, you get more and more passionate about figuring out how to get a new location where you are. You meet lots of people who have never been before and you keep trying to explain to them about how wonderful the food is and how everyone in their families and friend groups would love going there.

Some people don't understand and they think you're a bit of a fanatic, but others are on board because they've had food at restaurants in this same chain when they've traveled somewhere outside of your city. Even though the headquarters don't yet have a plan for bringing on of their locations to your city, they are answering your emails and phone calls and they seem to appreciate all of the free publicity you're giving them.

You're holding onto hope that your favorite restaurant will soon be in your city. It's not happened yet, but you're determined to keep sharing with people until the restaurant changes its mind and you can sit amongst your new friends while you laugh and eat your favorite sandwich with super secret sauce and reminisce on how worth it it's been to campaign to get this location near you and your new home.

 SCRIPTURE

Matthew 28: 18-20

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

 REFLECT

- Which aspect of this scripture feels hopeful to you today? Why?
- What might God want to say to you about sharing your faith journey? About telling others that you are reading the Bible? About your curiosity about things of God?
- You might want to write your reflections in your journal.

 PRAYER

God, sometimes I worry what people will think of me if I share with them about what I believe you've done in my life. You are more real to me today than you ever have been and I want to be able to share this hope with others. And I confess, there are days when I just don't know whether I have what it takes to keep sharing even when people don't believe. Give me courage, God, to share, courage to keep following you, and courage to speak the truth about my own faith experiences no matter how others respond. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for guiding my conversations with people I encounter. In Jesus' name. Amen.

 ACTION

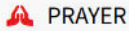
Engage your senses.

Invite a few friends or family members together to go to your favorite restaurant—or order in. It can be easy to get stuck in a rut while routinely eating the same meals. Explain that you'll all be sharing food in order to try new foods. Each person will order something out of the ordinary for what they normally eat. When it all arrives, turn it into a buffet style, and sample each dish.

What did you each enjoy eating that you wouldn't normally choose? Would you order it again? Why or why not? What is something you thought you wouldn't like that you were right about? Once everyone has sampled each out-of-the-ordinary meal. Have a conversation about what you observed about each one. How did it feel to have such an unusual variety?

When you can take some time to write a journal entry to reflect about this sensory experience. It doesn't have to be a long entry: simply set a timer for 5-10 minutes.

Week 9 : Day 3



PRAYER

Imagine this:

You are a medical research scientist. Your special interest focus is a rare strain of cancer, but you've spent the last 30 years learning, experimenting, testing, to find a cure for cancer. You've been watching one of your experiments with increased curiosity over the last couple months. The cells have been behaving very differently from how you'd expected.

The behaviors of the cells and tissue are very different from anything else you've ever seen in relation to cancer growth, cancer treatment therapies, and it's got you wondering. What if you have discovered a cure for cancer? You feel a bit giddy, but you try to temper your excitement. What if you made a mistake in the experiments and you're not able to prove it with an additional control group of testing?

Something in your gut makes you feel like you've hit the jackpot of hope here, though. You look at your spreadsheets of recorded data, you compare notes with this experiment to studies completed by other medical and chemical scientists. Everything you have ever learned in your field is like an arrow pointing toward hope, toward the light at the end of the cancer tunnel—toward life without cancer as a real possibility in your lifetime.

As you continue observing and notetaking, doubts and fear creep in and cloud your judgment. If you tell people about your discovery, will they even believe you? If you tell your company, will this advance medical treatments for cancer patients? Or, will it be shut down by someone in the drug companies who is afraid of losing money?

You're aware of this fight in your soul, mind, and heart. You really believe what you've discovered is a real chance at a cure for cancer that would literally transform the world, but then, you're worried about people's reactions and how much change it would cause in the medical industry.

There are so many considerations to make about who and when you share your findings and about how you go about doing it. If people try to keep you quiet or call you a fool, will you still keep sharing? Is it ethical to share what you've discovered if it's still in its early stages and not peer-tested and peer-reviewed, yet? It's such a life changing discovery that you don't want to get people's hopes up if it doesn't end up changing their lives like you think it can.

You feel stuck. You feel scared. You feel a bit ashamed. You don't want to keep this possible cure to yourself, but you don't know how much this could rock the boat of society and what the impact might be. And yet, hundreds, if not thousands, of faces of patients who have contributed to your research for decades play through your mind like a movie. All of these faces, these people, could have their lives changed from a death sentence to longevity of thriving life. And still...you wonder.

 READ


“Darkness cannot drive out darkness. Only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate. Only love can do that.”

-Martin Luther King, Jr.

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 the darkness of doubt?
- Why do you think this doubt experience has had such a significant impact on you?
- What do you wish could be different about your situation?
- What would it look like for you to have courage to speak up?

 PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I receive your love and I choose to believe I am your child. Give me the gift of faith, please so that I can trust you and believe who you are is true. Holy Spirit, I breathe in your light and I breathe out darkness. Help me to use my voice to share the hope of who you are and to share what has encouraged me in my relationship with you. Give me courage to be the person you've made me to be. In your name, amen.

 ACTION

Get Creative.

Find a variety of materials like papers or glass or plastics or fabrics. Each material should be some degree of translucent. You may want to gather some friends or family for this experiment. Bring a good lamp into an area where you can all gather.

Take turns holding all of the materials, one at a time, in front of the light. Notice how the light changes as it shines through each different material. Notice how the details of the material change or become more visible when held up to the light.

Once you've spent what feels like enough time considering and discussing all of the materials and their relationships to the light you might want to spend 5-10 minutes to write your reflections in your journal when you finish.

Week 9 : Day 4

STORY

Imagine this:

There is a salt shortage in your part of the world. It's hard to believe that this could ever be possible, but you love salt so much that you've always had a stockpile of it. Over the years, your friends thought you were crazy to have so much salt, but you simply collected it and stored it in your basement dry goods pantry.

You feel surprised that your salt collecting could be a gift to other people. Collecting salt has been a hobby you enjoyed since you were a child—your parents both loved spending time in the kitchen. For so long you've kept it to yourself, merely enjoying it mostly on your own, having found myriad varieties to enjoy from all over the world, but now there is more use for you to share it with people around you.

It occurred to you that you won't be able to share your salt collection with everyone in the world, but you can ration it for a lot of the people in your life. You consider your friends, family, neighbors, work colleagues, and wonder about who might need a bit of your salt. Rather than giving it out all at once, you decide you need a system.

Every day, you carry a few small containers of salt with you wherever you go. As you chat to people, you consider whether they need salt. Sometimes you want to give them a gift of a little encouraging salt for their dinner later and other times you see a real need and give them a big chunk of salt that can last them for a while.

All through the salt shortage you do this. You give away some salt every day. What surprises you most is how your salt supply never seems to be depleted and you appreciate the flavor that your salt brings even more than you ever have.

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 5:13-16

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

REFLECT

- If it's true that you are the salt of the earth, how would you like to respond?
- If it's true that you are the light of the world, how would you like to respond?
- What might God be inviting you to turn away from so that you can bring salt and light into every interaction you have?

- What would it mean to you to have your life and how you live it be a gift to everyone you encounter?

 PRAYER

Breathe out: God, I let go of my doubts and discouragement.

Breathe in: Jesus, I receive your inspiration to do good work with hope.

Breathe out: God, I let go of my darkness and hesitation.

Breathe in: Holy Spirit, I receive your guidance to bring you into daily conversations.


 ACTION

Relational moment.

Consider someone in your life who you know is going through a hard time. Ask God how you might give them a gift of “light” and “salt” to encourage them. Perhaps you send flowers. Maybe you bring them a meal. Or, maybe you invite them over for a movie marathon.

Whatever you end up doing for this person, reflect on how you feel after making this connection. You may want to record your thoughts or prayers for this person in your journal after your time together.

Week 9 : Day 5

 STORY

Imagine this:

Your favorite show has just announced that its third season is available in a month. You are so excited that you tell all your friends about it. You want to make sure they don't miss it. You arrange watch parties in person and online.

You don't normally gather big groups of people together, but you just love this show, so you feel compelled to make sure others find the joy in it. For one party you make a big pot of chili. For another gathering you invite everyone to bring their favorite cookies and you provide the milk. For a third get together you make it a pot luck and have everyone bring their favorite comfort food to share. And when you have an online watch party with friends who live too far to come over to your house, you always raise a glass or mug to cheers each other for being together.

Some of the people who come aren't convinced right away by why you love the show so much. You explain your interest, your attachment to the characters, the people you've shared moments with while watching it together before. You invite them to just come and see and experience it all firsthand, what you enjoy. And, most of the people who aren't sure do come and leave having had a good time.

Each time you meet, it strikes you as such a simple thing. You tell people about this show you love. You gather them together, whoever can come over. You share in eating

some delicious food, sometimes simple and other times “on theme” with the show.

But, even in its simplicity, you can tell something under the surface is happening with everyone who comes. It’s happening with you, too. Each time you meet and watch the show, you want to invite more people to experience this laughter and togetherness. Each time you don’t want the time together to end. Each time you gather, people who weren’t friends at the start find something in common and connect.

Often you have a lot of dishes to do, but everyone takes turns chipping in, and it makes it fun. It’s easy to be together. Sometimes it can feel overwhelming to clean, tidy, prepare the food, confirm the invitations, and do all of this logistical preparation, but once everyone is there, it’s such a gift. Being together for something as simple as watching your favorite show is always worth it in the end.

 SCRIPTURE

1 Peter 3:15

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

 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.