

Weekly Devotional : Week 11

April 16 – April 22, 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 11 : Day 1

 STORY

Imagine this:

You are a foreigner in a country that's so different from the one where you were born. You have been here for a few months and you often do or say something that reinforces that you're an outsider. You wish you could return to your home, but you can't. Because of your beliefs and because of the political situation, you cannot go home. In fact, much of the infrastructure and buildings is all gone. The home you grew up in is no longer standing.

You've tried joining groups and classes at the library and local community center, but you haven't made friends yet. You know that you're safer seeking asylum in this country, and yet your heart longs to be elsewhere: to be home.

Today you're reflecting on how far you've come since you had to leave the country when all of a sudden, there is a knock at your door. Nobody has knocked on your door for months. You cautiously approach the door and peek through the window. It's your neighbor!

You open the door with a smile to greet your neighbor—the nicest lady you've ever met. You eagerly invite her in and begin preparing a pot of tea. She seems happy to be here with you and she reaches into her bag and pulls out a box of cake.

“I just baked this morning and I knew I had to share it with someone!”

You thank her for coming over. She probably doesn’t know that she is the first person you’ve hosted in your home since fleeing your home country. You feel a little awkward and out of practice, but tea is the answer to everything, right? And your neighbor is chatting merrily to you about the weather and about the local happenings.

For the first time in months you feel normal as you both sit at the table in the kitchen when the south facing window streams light through it and brightens your smile. You set the place with special napkins you were able to bring with you and with a couple mismatched plates and forks from the community center for the cake. As you pour cups of tea, you sigh with joyous relief at having a friend to share life with. You just know that this neighbor is a gift and the beginning of a really sweet friendship.

There’s something special about how she looks at you and asks questions, that you know she cares. For the first time, you feel like you have a place to belong. You savor this moment in each other’s company. And you laugh at the simplicity of the situation: tea and cake creates friendship.

 SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 2:11-22


¹¹ Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands)— ¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

 REFLECT

- What part of scripture feels the most challenging? Why?
- What might God want to say to you about Himself and relationships? About kingdom citizenship?
- You might want to write your reflections in your journal.

 PRAYER


Holy Spirit, come. Thank you for being with me here. Thank you for giving me citizenship in the kingdom of God. Help me when I feel lonely to know that I belong to you and in your kingdom. And, Jesus, would you give me eyes to see those who feel like they don't belong? Help me to be a good friend to people who are on the fringe of society. Lord, use me to connect with people in my life who feel out of place.

 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 11 : Day 2

 STORY

Imagine this:

The seasons have changed and you feel excited because you can start playing your favorite sport. You've signed up to try out for the team. You know you'll make it because it's not a competitive league—it's just for fun, but the community still needs to pick enough players to fill each team. Today is the day you go to your local community center or school to sign in and begin practicing together before the teams are created.

You can feel the buzz of everyone's excitement to get back out there to play. You marvel at the variety of people who all share the passion for the same sport. All shapes and sizes, but all massive amounts of enthusiasm.

The president of the season's sports club assigns drills for practice. This is a simple way to see where people's strengths are and help the club determine an even spread of teammates in each position. Each team in the league will aim to have players who are best at defense, best at offense, and flexible in-betweeners.

As you play and interact with each of your potential teammates and opponents, you can't help but smile when you see how each person's skills and talents are necessary in combination to make a powerhouse team.

At the end of the session, the club president reads off a list of who will play on which team for the season. Your name is called, you raise your hand and smile as you jog over to where your team is gathering. You high five each other and cheer. While other people continue to be assigned to teams, you elbow a couple of your new teammates and compliment them on a trait you noticed during the practice session.

You each nod in agreement about how good your team is and how excited you are to play together. This is going to be a fun season.

 SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 12:27

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

 REFLECT

- Which aspect of this scripture feels hopeful to you today? Why?
- What might God want to say to you about following Jesus? About belonging? About the role you play?
- You might want to write your reflections in your journal.

 PRAYER

God, I have to admit that there are times when I don't feel like I belong. There are times when I feel like what I have to offer or what I like to do or what I feel confident in, just doesn't seem to fit with the crowd I'm in. Would you show me what I have to offer and where I can use my gifts in this community? Thank you that you've made me to function best within the context of community. Thank you that I don't have to become someone different in order to fit in. Help me to be courageous and use my gifts where I am. In Jesus' name. Amen.

 ACTION

Engage your senses.

If you can, go to a public place with a journal. Perhaps you go to a restaurant or coffee shop. Choose somewhere that you can sit and observe what's happening for an hour or so.

Set a timer for five minutes and write everything you notice about what you can feel. Set the timer again and keep your hand moving as you write down notes of everything you can see. Do the same again for what you taste, what you smell, and what you hear.

Once you've taken notes about all five senses you experience in the present moment, you might take a few minutes to make notes of any other details you've become aware of in the last 20-30 minutes.

After you feel like you've noted enough, 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 11 : Day 3

STORY

Imagine this:

You are in the middle of rolling out a project in your job or school or community. You've been personally invested in this project for several months now and you're thrilled that you can announce its progress and bring it out into the public view.

As you prepare for the project to actually be released, you realize there are a few pieces that you'd not considered yet. These thoughts coming to mind about what you've missed feels a little embarrassing. You feel a little scared because what you've been working on for so long is nearly there, but...you can't finish it on your own.

Now you realize you need some more help than you started out with. You have a minor panic as you make a list of where your gaps are and what you need to do to be ready with confidence. You decide to call your mentor to alleviate some of your panic.

While you share your situation with your mentor, she brings up some great points—as always! She helps you see your blind spots and together you come up with a game plan. It's only taken about 20 minutes to come off the ledge of the “nearly finished” panic.

Now you know: “I need a team to roll this out.” And you no longer feel stupid about asking for help, but you realize that it's actually better to do things together.

You know there's still a lot of work ahead to carry out the game plan, but at least you know what's next. And at least you aren't working on this alone anymore.

READ

“I can do what you cannot do and you can do what I cannot do. Together we can do great things.” – Mother Theresa

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 feeling like a “spare part”?
- Why do you think this experience of loneliness or uselessness has had such a significant impact on you?
- What would it feel like to have a sense of your purpose alongside someone else who also knows their purpose?
- How might you share your purpose with someone else? How might you help others find their purpose with confidence?

 PRAYER

God, thank you that you made me how and who I am. Thank you that there are things that you’ve created for me to do specifically. Thank you for how you’ve created me to see things and say things only the way I can. Highlight the areas in my life where I’ve been living or working “alone” where I don’t have to, where I need someone else, where I can connect with others who might feel lonely, too. Show me what is only mine to do and give me courage to do this. Thank you for meeting with me, Jesus. Amen.

 ACTION

Get Creative.

Get your rainbow colors out—colored pencils, crayons, felt tip markers or pens. On a piece of paper, write your name in the center in red and draw a red circle around it.

Next, think about the people who are the closest to you. Perhaps these are members of your immediate family or really close friends. This is likely only about three to five people. Write their names around yours. Draw circles around each of their names—this time, in orange.

Now consider people who you see and connect with frequently, like in a community group or small group, or a class. Who are the people who aren’t your closest people, but who you happily share your life with with some regularity. Write their names in the third layer of circles, this time in yellow.

Next, think about the people who you will call every month or so to check in. They are your people with whom you can pick up no matter how long it’s been—you connect and get back where you left off. Write their names in circles in the next tier and use green.

Now think about people in your community. These aren’t people you talk to that often, but they are your people, nonetheless. Maybe they are new to your workplace or church or in a class you’ve just started. Use blue for their names and circles in the fifth layer.

Finally, consider the people who you see regularly, but don’t really know. Maybe this is a neighbor down the street, your regular bus or taxi driver, or the person who always works on the day you pick up your grocery order in store. This could also be relatives

who you don't know well, but who still are on your mind with some regularity, regardless of how emotionally or geographically distant your relationship is. Use purple for this outer layer of names and circles.

Are you missing anyone? Take a moment to add any names in their respective layers of circles and colors. What do you notice about the people who are in your life? How close do you feel to each of these people? How do certain levels of relationship help you to be more yourself?

Spend 5-10 minutes writing your reflections in your journal when you finish.

Week 11 : Day 4

STORY

Imagine this:

You are in school. You are a kid who likes talking to most of the other kids in your class, but you don't always feel like you belong. You tell yourself that you are part of every group and that you don't have to be exclusively a certain type of kid. You like being friends with different people.

There is a new kid in school. Everyone else seems to like this kid really well. You feel like they are choosing to spend time with this new kid instead of sitting with you during break times. You notice lots of your classmates talking about something cool about this new student. You start to feel a little jealous that your friends want to spend time with someone other than you.

You haven't even had a chance to talk to this new kid because you're so busy connecting with everyone else. Eventually, it's been a couple of weeks and you still haven't hung out with the new kid. It seems like everyone else knows all about the new kid except you.

Finally, during lunch, you notice this kid is sitting by themselves, so you decide to wander over and sit with them. You ask if you can share the table and eat lunch together. "Of course!"

As you talk, you realize that this is a really cool person you want in your life. And as you listen, you learn that you are both similar in how you like to connect with people: you like people to feel included.

The irony of the beginning of your friendship with this new kid is that you both felt like you were avoiding each other because both of you had classmates telling you how cool each other was, but you weren't able to hang out yet.

It feels funny now that it's out in the open. You both decide to be intentional about spending time together and seeing how you can be good friends to the other kids in your class. Instead of feeling dismissed or competitive, you notice how good it feels to

have a friend who cares like you do. Even as a kid yourself, you know this is something special to cherish.


 SCRIPTURE

John 15:15

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

 REFLECT

- If it's true that Jesus calls you His friend, how would you like to respond?
- Where might God be inviting you into a new level of friendship?
- What would it mean to you to have your life characterized by friendship with Christ? How might you live differently with deeper knowledge of this friendship?

 PRAYER

Jesus, teach me what it means to be friends with you. Show me how I am to live my life differently and how I could be your friend in this life. I am asking for a new revelation in understanding our relationship through the context of friendship. And I want wisdom for how to be a better friend to the people in my daily life, too. Help me be the friend you are to me to the friends in my life. In Jesus' name. Amen.

 ACTION

Relational moment.

Ask God to reveal to you someone who would find joy in spending time with you. Reach out and arrange an opportunity to spend time with this person. Ask them how you could be a better friend to them in this season.

You may also ask God to reveal to you someone with whom you'd find joy in spending time. Reach out and arrange an opportunity to spend time with this person. Tell them how grateful you are for your relationship and share specifically why you feel this gratitude for them.

You may want to record your thoughts or prayers for your time with this person / these people in your journal after your time together and record what felt especially life-giving, what your friend said would encourage them in your friendship, and what you're grateful for in your friend.

Week 11 : Day 5

 STORY

Imagine this:

You are tired. It's been a long week with extra activities and meetings. The last thing you want to do is go to see your friends at small group. Especially if that one particular person is there that can be frustrating to be around. You just don't feel like you have the energy to make it there.

Normally, you attend small group without fail. Normally, you find it really uplifting. Normally, people who annoy you don't wear you out, but today feels different. You just feel empty. You feel like you have nothing to give and you even feel like it could be a negative weight that would bring down the whole tone and feelings of the group. You don't want to be the downer.

You decide you'll order a pizza to be delivered. You decide to get in your cozy clothes. And as you decide what series of shows you're going to binge watch, the doorbell rings. At first you're excited, "Oh, wow! The pizza is already here?! That was so fast! A big tip is coming your way—and a 5 star review!"

When you open the door, you can see it's not pizza, but it's one of your friends from small group. They come into your home without asking and you feel a little bit put out because you were planning to have a quiet night in—all by yourself. You didn't want to be around people.

But, this is your friend, who you actually do like, so you decide to let it pass and get over yourself.

Your friend shares some hard things happening in their life and you feel at a loss for words, but do your best to listen. Then, you have something pop into your head. It doesn't really seem like it's something you could come up with, but it's encouragement for your friend, so you decide to tentatively share it with a shrug.

Your friend nods, asks if you will pray for them, and if you could come to small group with them tonight. You sigh deeply with some disappointment that you don't get a night on your own tonight, but agree that you'd like to be able to support your friend. You start praying for your friend and after a few seconds, you notice something shift in your heart and how you've been feeling. You feel lighter, more hopeful, happier.

You pray a simple prayer, hesitating since you're still not quite sure if you're doing prayer correctly. What you pray doesn't even feel like it'll do much, but you say it out loud for your friend, anyway.

Then, the doorbell rings. It's pizza this time. It's your friend's favorite toppings—who knew?! And you share a meal together. It feels nicer than eating alone, actually. And then, your friend looks at their watch—time to go to small group. "I'll drive!" your friend says, and you agree. You grab a notebook and your keys and head out together.

 SCRIPTURE

Hebrews 10:24-25

²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

 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 sharing my relationship with you with others? 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.