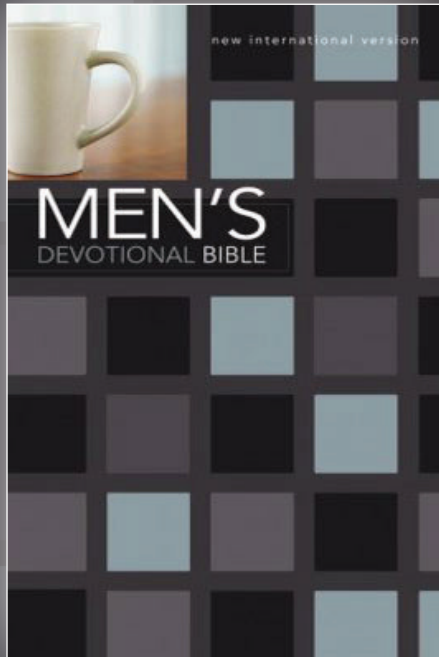


14-Day Plan

MEN'S

DEVOTIONAL BIBLE



MEN'S DEVOTIONAL BIBLE

14-Day Plan

This 14-day devotional plan provides engaging, practical devotions written by men for men. Each day's reading includes an application question for reflection to put God's Word into practice in your everyday life.

All devotions drawn from the *NIV Men's Devotional Bible*

Day 1

The Full Eight Seconds

Genesis 32:22-32

That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."

But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

The man asked him, "What is your name?"

"Jacob," he answered.

Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel,[a] because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

Jacob said, "Please tell me your name."

But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

So Jacob called the place Peniel,[b] saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel,[c] and he was limping because of his hip. 32 Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.

Day 1

The Full Eight Seconds

What's the secret to being a good bull rider?"

When a newspaper reporter asked a Montana cowboy that question, he pushed back his hat and grinned: "You've just gotta want to hang on worse than the bull wants to throw you off."

Jacob might have preferred eight seconds on the back of a bull to the situation he faced. As he traveled to Canaan—a journey that would reunite him with Esau, his brother—Jacob carried not only his possessions but also a heart full of guilt and sin. He'd taken his brother's birthright and blessing and had lived ever since in constant fear that Esau would seek revenge. Feeling desperate and overwhelmed, Jacob spent a night alone to take advantage of a little peace and quiet.

Instead, he got the fight of his life—a wrestling match with God!

Have you experienced something similar? Maybe you're troubled with a stressful situation at work, a dispute at church, a disagreement with a friend or a struggle within your family. So you seek a place that will give you a moment or two of peace or stability, only to find that the emotional and spiritual load you've been carrying has settled firmly on your shoulders. And rather than clinging to the One who can provide real relief, you find yourself making the situation worse by dwelling on the burden and letting worry get the best of you.

Sometimes you have to put everything else aside, reach out to God and hold on with everything you've got. The only way you can really escape the burden of sin and guilt is by embracing the One who defeated these burdens—along with death. Make no mistake—the God who created the world, who holds the stars in check and who knows the most minute issues that you struggle with, cares. He loves you and is waiting for you to trust him with your cares and concerns—present, past and future.

To paraphrase that wise Montana cowboy, "You've just gotta hang on to God more than sin and guilt want to pull you away."

In what situations are you tempted to let go of God? Why?

Day 2

Superhero

Deuteronomy 31:1-8

Then Moses went out and spoke these words to all Israel: “I am now a hundred and twenty years old and I am no longer able to lead you. The LORD has said to me, ‘You shall not cross the Jordan.’ The LORD your God himself will cross over ahead of you. He will destroy these nations before you, and you will take possession of their land. Joshua also will cross over ahead of you, as the LORD said. And the LORD will do to them what he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, whom he destroyed along with their land. The LORD will deliver them to you, and you must do to them all that I have commanded you. Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the presence of all Israel, “Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the LORD swore to their ancestors to give them, and you must divide it among them as their inheritance. The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”

Day 2

Superhero

One of the hallmarks of American culture in the 20th century was its fascination with the superhero. From comic-book sales to blockbuster movies to the graphic novel genre, entire industries have played into the attraction we have to individuals who are somehow possessed of powers not enjoyed by mere mortals. Superman, Spiderman, Batman, the X-Men, the Fantastic Four, the Avengers and other fictional characters capture our collective imaginations as they battle the super-villains their creators dream up to fight them. The urge of a boy to wear his underpants on the outside of his pajamas and tear around the house fighting phantom bad guys is an inherited character trait passed down proudly from father to son.

So what is it about a superhero that's so appealing? Bravery. Power. Strength. Ingenuity. The ability to fly. The fact that they usually get the girl. The fact that they can seemingly get out of any jam they find themselves in. Who wouldn't want that kind of existence?

Thinking of that context, reread today's passage. Joshua is, in effect, getting his superhero's license from Moses. Now, it's unlikely that this involved a cape and a mask, but Moses here tells Joshua that, with God's power behind him, he will be able to deal with adversity and conquer his foes.

Moses tells the people that their new leader, Joshua, will take them forward into Canaan. Their old leader, Moses, encourages Joshua in front of the people, "Be strong and courageous . . . The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you . . . Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged" (Deuteronomy 31:6,8). With that reinforcement as a backdrop, Joshua moved forward. Fear couldn't hold him back. He believed God. If you knew that you couldn't fail, what would you do differently? Pursue a promotion at work? Further your education? Ask someone to marry you? Risk repairing a broken relationship?

The fact is that, when God goes before you, you can't fail. If you're living within God's will you don't need to be afraid. You may endure a few shots along the way, but with the world's only real Superpower behind you, you can't ultimately fail. Take the risk. Live with passion. Listen to his assurance: "Be strong and courageous. . . Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."

How has fear kept you from reaching your dreams?

Day 3

Mighty Warriors

1 Chronicles 11:22-25

Benaiah son of Jehoiada, a valiant fighter from Kabzeel, performed great exploits. He struck down Moab's two mightiest warriors. He also went down into a pit on a snowy day and killed a lion. And he struck down an Egyptian who was five cubits[a] tall. Although the Egyptian had a spear like a weaver's rod in his hand, Benaiah went against him with a club. He snatched the spear from the Egyptian's hand and killed him with his own spear. Such were the exploits of Benaiah son of Jehoiada; he too was as famous as the three mighty warriors. He was held in greater honor than any of the Thirty, but he was not included among the Three. And David put him in charge of his bodyguard.

Day 3

Mighty Warriors

The list of David's mighty warriors in 1 Chronicles 11:22 introduces us to Benaiah, whose exploits included overcoming two of Moab's best men. He also killed a lion in a snowy, slippery pit. Perhaps most amazingly, he took on an Egyptian tall enough to be a starting center for the Chicago Bulls. This seven-and-a-half-foot giant wielded a spear with a shaft as sturdy as a lead pipe while Benaiah had only a wooden club.

Even so . . . Benaiah "snatched the spear from the Egyptian's hand and killed him with his own spear. Such were the exploits of Benaiah son of Jehoiada . . . He was held in greater honor than any of the Thirty" (1 Chronicles 11:23–25).

It was not a Ph.D. degree that brought honor to a person in those days. Honor did not necessarily flow to the person with money or leverage or media access. Honor came as a result of doing exploits for the king.

Who is doing exploits for God today? Where is the enemy being driven back? That is the great yearning of all spiritually minded people. They are not enchanted with polished sermons and slick organizational technique. Where are the mighty men and women anointed by God to truly make a difference?

What is it really that stops us from becoming mighty warriors in the Lord? God has not changed. He is still superior to anything the enemy can throw against us.

No personal or church situation is too hopeless for the all-sufficient power of the Holy Spirit. God will be no more eager to act tomorrow than he is right now. He is waiting for us to take his promises seriously and go boldly to the throne of grace. He wants us to meet the enemy at the very point of attack, standing against him in the name of Christ. When we do so, God will back us up with all the resources of heaven.

—Jim Cymbala

What would it take for you to trust God's promises more fully and thereby become a "mighty warrior in the Lord"?

Day 4

The Wrong Crowd

Nehemiah 13:1-9

On that day the Book of Moses was read aloud in the hearing of the people and there it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever be admitted into the assembly of God, because they had not met the Israelites with food and water but had hired Balaam to call a curse down on them. (Our God, however, turned the curse into a blessing.) When the people heard this law, they excluded from Israel all who were of foreign descent.

Before this, Eliashib the priest had been put in charge of the storerooms of the house of our God. He was closely associated with Tobiah, and he had provided him with a large room formerly used to store the grain offerings and incense and temple articles, and also the tithes of grain, new wine and olive oil prescribed for the Levites, musicians and gatekeepers, as well as the contributions for the priests.

But while all this was going on, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxesking of Babylon I had returned to the king. Some time later I asked his permission and came back to Jerusalem. Here I learned about the evil thing Eliashib had done in providing Tobiah a room in the courts of the house of God. I was greatly displeased and threw all Tobiah's household goods out of the room. I gave orders to purify the rooms, and then I put back into them the equipment of the house of God, with the grain offerings and the incense.

Day 4

The Wrong Crowd

Remember when you were a kid and your parents warned you about the dangers of hanging out with the wrong crowd at school? With their years of wisdom, your parents knew that you are who your friends are. And if you're now the parent saying this same thing to your kids, you know from experience the reality of this adage.

Several times in the Old Testament God specifically warned the Israelites not to associate too closely with foreigners. Yet elsewhere in Scripture God encourages us to love everyone—other Christians, difficult neighbors, even our enemies. So how do these two commands fit together?

Go back to a parent's perspective. God didn't want his people forming alliances with people who held value systems that were the complete opposite of his character. The foreign nations surrounding Israel worshiped many gods, and their religious ceremonies included immoral rituals. God knew how easily influenced humans are, and he clearly didn't want his people involved in these practices.

Just as a parent guides an adolescent through the stormy waters of peer relationships, God reminded Israel to stay focused on him. The same holds true for us. God wants us to love everyone around us. But he wants us to form our closest friendships with people who hold values that are in line with God's character. People who are headed in the same direction in life. People who love God and who help us love him better.

If the phrase "you are who your friends are" reflects the truth, what do your friends say about who you are? If you've hung onto a friend who drags you down spiritually or one who leads you to act or think in ways that aren't healthy, maybe you need to set some new boundaries. Make it your goal to change that relationship, either by making a new effort to influence this friend for Christ or by cutting down on your association with him.

Perhaps you simply need to invest in new friends who share your core beliefs. Initiating deeper friendships with other men who love Christ is never easy. We're guys, after all. But if you're persistent your efforts will pay rich dividends.

Do you have friends who pull you down spiritually? How can you limit or reshape these friendships to change how they affect you?

Day 5

Called Before Birth

Jeremiah 1:1-8

The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, one of the priests at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin. The word of the LORD came to him in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah, and through the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, down to the fifth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah son of Josiah king of Judah, when the people of Jerusalem went into exile.

The Call of Jeremiah

The word of the LORD came to me, saying,

*“Before I formed you in the womb I knew[a] you,
before you were born I set you apart;
I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”*

“Alas, Sovereign LORD,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am too young.”

But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD.

Day 5

Called Before Birth

A student of architecture entered a national contest for building design. When a panel of renowned architects awarded the student's design "Honorable Mention," she felt utterly depressed and defeated. She was, after all, at the top of her class. She had worked long hours on an innovative and beautiful design. She should have placed better.

At lunch on the last day of the convention, she sat looking at her model over an uneaten sandwich. She noticed an old man looking at her creation too. Not knowing who had designed the building, the man remarked, "This one, I think, is the best of the lot." Hearing those words, the student went home elated.

Why? Although the competition's judges had deemed her work the runner-up, one old man liked it. And that one old man was Frank Lloyd Wright, probably the greatest architect of the time.

Jeremiah felt like a loser at first, too. As a self-assessed second-rate prophet from a small country, he didn't think he could measure up to his assignment as God's spokesman. But God reminded Jeremiah that he possessed a divine formation, a distinctive calling, a chosen vocation. Even before Jeremiah's birth, God had prepared him to be God's voice to God's people.

God wants us to hear a similar message. He calls each one of us. Even before we're born, the Creator sets us apart for a special purpose. In fact, the apostle Paul claims that God's plan for us started long before we were born: "He chose us in him before the creation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4).

God's calling means that we never need to feel inferior or insecure. No matter how tough life becomes, how difficult work gets, how many doubts we have—or even how far we fall—God promises, "I chose you for this, and I'll never fail you."

Do you recognize God's plans—what He wants you to do for Him?

Day 6

A Man's World

Jeremiah 38:14-28

Then King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah the prophet and had him brought to the third entrance to the temple of the LORD. "I am going to ask you something," the king said to Jeremiah. "Do not hide anything from me."

Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "If I give you an answer, will you not kill me? Even if I did give you counsel, you would not listen to me."

But King Zedekiah swore this oath secretly to Jeremiah: "As surely as the LORD lives, who has given us breath, I will neither kill you nor hand you over to those who want to kill you."

Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "This is what the LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'If you surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, your life will be spared and this city will not be burned down; you and your family will live. But if you will not surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, this city will be given into the hands of the Babylonians and they will burn it down; you yourself will not escape from them.'"

King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "I am afraid of the Jews who have gone over to the Babylonians, for the Babylonians may hand me over to them and they will mistreat me."

"They will not hand you over," Jeremiah replied. "Obey the LORD by doing what I tell you. Then it will go well with you, and your life will be spared. But if you refuse to surrender, this is what the LORD has revealed to me: All the women left in the palace of the king of Judah will be brought out to the officials of the king of Babylon. Those women will say to you:

*"They misled you and overcame you—
those trusted friends of yours.
Your feet are sunk in the mud;
your friends have deserted you."*

"All your wives and children will be brought out to the Babylonians. You yourself will not escape from their hands but will be captured by the king of Babylon; and this city will[a] be burned down."

Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "Do not let anyone know about this conversation, or you may die. If the officials hear that I talked with you, and they come to you and say, 'Tell us what you said to the king and what the king said to you; do not hide it from us or we will kill you,' then tell them, 'I was pleading with the king not to send me back to Jonathan's house to die there.'"

All the officials did come to Jeremiah and question him, and he told them everything the king had ordered him to say. So they said no more to him, for no one had heard his conversation with the king.

And Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard until the day Jerusalem was captured.

Day 6

A Man's World

After all the ill-advised moves he had made in earlier situations, in this passage King Zedekiah did a few things right. First, the king went to Jeremiah, God's representative, for needed advice. He was in a desperate situation, with the armies of Babylon on their way, and his advisers were anxious to know the king's next move.

They were furious when Jeremiah advised the king to give up and abandon their homeland without a fight. In these days of brutal warfare, no nation trained its leaders to simply relinquish ground to the enemy without raising a hand against them. And the officials in this ancient government weren't inclined to do so either. But God had spoken to Jeremiah and reassured him that his people would be safe and protected if they went quietly into exile. God had even promised them that he would restore them to their land after a certain period of time. So that's what this prophet advised.

The next thing that Zedekiah did right in this passage was to stick to his word. Despite having abused the prophet in the recent past, he promised Jeremiah protection and pledged to keep their conversation secret. Even though Jeremiah told him exactly what he didn't want to hear, the king stayed true to his word. Jeremiah turned out to be a man of his word as well. He returned the king's favor, honoring his request that he speak not a word about their conversation to the other officials.

A man's word is vital. If you're with a group of guys, say from your neighborhood, church group or place of employment, it's important that you can rely on your friends and trust them to be men of their word. If one of the guys gets caught in a lie or divulges information given in confidence, it takes a long time for that person to rebuild a level of trust with the group. If you're the offended party, you'll be careful what you say around that person for a long time, until you're sure you can trust him again.

Follow the example of Jeremiah and Zedekiah who, despite their differences, despite the difficult circumstances in which they found themselves, acted with honor and integrity.

Can you think of any other aspect of a man's character that's more important than honor and integrity?

Day 7

Restoration Inside and Out

Ezekiel 36:24-38

“For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God. I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you. I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field, so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine. Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices. I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign LORD. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, people of Israel!

“This is what the Sovereign LORD says: On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt. The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. They will say, “This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited.” Then the nations around you that remain will know that I the LORD have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate.

I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it.’

“This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Once again I will yield to Israel’s plea and do this for them: I will make their people as numerous as sheep, as numerous as the flocks for offerings at Jerusalem during her appointed festivals. So will the ruined cities be filled with flocks of people. Then they will know that I am the LORD.”

Devotion continued on next page...

Day 7

Restoration Inside and Out

Did you know that heaven isn't the Christian's final destination?

The Bible makes it clear that when Jesus comes again we'll receive new bodies and that God will restore the earth. The echoes of this promise are heard in Ezekiel's proclamation of a coming Messianic age. We can call the "new" earth our final home. We won't float on clouds, strum harps of gold or sing some never-ending worship song. Rather, we'll find ourselves in a very real place, more real and alive than this world could ever be.

The prophet Ezekiel challenges the stereotypes of God's restoration. God will purify and recreate what's inside of us. He will give us a new heart and a new spirit (see Ezekiel 36:25–26). Certainly we should embrace and cherish these promises.

However, Ezekiel's prophecy of restoration doesn't end with our bodies. God will also restore the earth: "The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. They will say, 'This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited'" (Ezekiel 36:34–35). Ezekiel also describes the physical abundance and fruitfulness of the renewed earth (see Ezekiel 36:29–30).

God accomplished the purification of sins in the death of his Son, Jesus. But he hasn't restored the world yet. That great work still lies ahead; still today we wait for God to fulfill the second half of Ezekiel's prophecy.

As we wait for that glorious day when God will make all things new, we do well to remember that God won't forget the physical world he has created. His work of restoration moves from the inside out.

Why won't God abandon the world He has created?

Day 8

Alone Ranger

Mark 6:45-56

Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray. Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, 50 because they all saw him and were terrified.

Immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

Day 8

Alone Ranger

What do you do to stay in shape? Hit the gym every morning? Train for a road race? Bike to work?

Interestingly, we live in a world that encourages men to make their bodies strong but neglects their spirits. As a result, we too often work to build up our biceps but completely ignore our souls. We typically think of masculine strength as physical, but what if true strength comes from inside—from your soul and its connection to God? When was the last time you worked out to strengthen that part of your being?

Most of us know the stories of Jesus walking on water and feeding thousands. But we easily gloss over the way Jesus sought solitude to build up his spiritual strength. Yes, even Jesus needed to rest and renew. In fact, Jesus established a rhythm: He engaged and then disengaged; he served and then withdrew. In those quiet times Jesus took care of his soul by connecting with God and drawing life from him.

If Jesus demonstrated the importance of withdrawing into solitude, how much more do we need to set aside times of respite in our lives? Of course, our culture doesn't help. Life moves so quickly that we can forget to tend our souls. But if you ignore your soul or pretend that you don't have one, you'll face problems. Just as your body sends you all kinds of uncomfortable signals when you neglect it physically, so will your soul. Obsessions, irritations, addictions, broken relationships—often these troubles point to a neglected soul.

Take time to be alone and make yourself utterly available only to yourself and to God. Connect with him—and in doing so take care of your soul.

What signals does your soul send you when you neglect its care?

Day 9

Multitasking

Luke 8:40-56

Now when Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed him, for they were all expecting him. Then a man named Jairus, a synagogue leader, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with him to come to his house because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying.

As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years,[a] but no one could heal her. She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped.

"Who touched me?" Jesus asked.

When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you." But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me."

Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."

While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," he said. "Don't bother the teacher anymore."

Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed."

When he arrived at the house of Jairus, he did not let anyone go in with him except Peter, John and James, and the child's father and mother. Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. "Stop wailing," Jesus said. "She is not dead but asleep."

They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But he took her by the hand and said, "My child, get up!" Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. Her parents were astonished, but he ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.

Day 9

Multitasking

Do you have a classic, one-track male mind? Many guys not only pay attention to just one task at a time but often focus on the wrong thing! While we can take some comfort in knowing that great power comes from concentrated effort, most of us also realize that when we zero in, we tune out the rest of the world. Our family members know they have to climb over the newspaper or step directly into our line of vision in front of the television set before they can get our attention. The question is, when the most important people in our lives interrupt us, is it really an interruption?

Jesus continually faced competing calls for his attention. When a man of influence approached him with urgency and humility to request help for his sick child, Jesus set out to offer assistance. The ever-present crowd made progress difficult. Suddenly, in the midst of a throng of people, Jesus stopped and asked, “Who touched me?” (Luke 8:45). Of course, many people had bumped and brushed against him. But Jesus sensed a different kind of touch. Someone had reached out in faith.

But why did Jesus stop? The woman’s healing had already occurred. Jesus stopped to draw attention to her plight and relief because she needed to realize that she wasn’t an interruption or unimportant to Jesus; she mattered. She needed to hear someone call her “Daughter,” affirm her faith and send her home in real peace. (Luke 8:48). With his compassionate words, Jesus expanded and deepened her healing.

The world often devalues good things by calling them unnecessary interruptions. But Jesus invites us to come to him like this woman did. He assures us that we’ll never be an interruption. He reminds us to trust in him. The timing of his response might seem odd, but we’re not God. His timing is perfect. We can simply rest and live in his perfect compassion. And we can pass along that compassion by treating others as Jesus treats us.

In what ways do you communicate to those around you that they’re important?

Day 10

Standing Tall

Acts 4:1-22

The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is

"the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.'^[a]

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name."

Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

Day 10

Standing Tall

At a well-known company's national sales convention, a heralded speaker delivered a stirring motivational talk. However, he punctuated his speech with profanity and frequently used God's name in vain. Finally, a Christian salesman in the audience couldn't stand it any longer. He rose from his seat, stood on his chair and shouted, "Please leave God out of it." With that he sat down. The embarrassed speaker cleaned up the rest of his speech. But after the session more people waited in line to shake the hand of the Christian man than that of the speaker.

In your own experience, don't you find this to be true? In the face of an uncomfortable situation, many people are thinking the same thing. It's a safe bet that dozens of people in the crowd that day listening to the speaker were squirming in their seats as the profanity rained down. But it took one man to make the stand and speak up, leaving others to wish they would have done the same.

The leaders of the infant church displayed even greater courage than this outspoken salesman. In the face of powerful, influential and educated men, these "ordinary" men stood toe to toe with political and religious forces that sought to silence them. They didn't cower, give in or give up. Instead, they stood bold and heroic, astonishing their adversaries, who knew only that these men had been with Jesus.

Living a life that pleases God isn't always easy or popular. Speaking valiantly for Christ and courageously living a righteous life require living out our convictions and commitments as faithful men. Standing tall for what's right, despite the foe or odds, exacts a high price. In fact, we face war. We can prepare for the battle only by spending time with Jesus—the unshakeable source of courage.

In your life there will be opportunities to speak up and defend what you know to be true. When the next challenge arises, remember that salesman standing on his chair. Resolve today that you will not be like one of those who were content to sit squirming in their seats.

Who do you know that courageously lives a righteous life?

Galatians 5:1-15

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion, whoever that may be, will have to pay the penalty. Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

Life by the Spirit

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh[a]; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

Day 11

Detours

Drivers in colder regions of the country proclaim that their states have just two seasons: winter and road construction. If you travel in these areas during the summer when road work is taking place, you'll be convinced that the main route actually consists of a long detour with occasional stretches of the original highway. You know you're in trouble when the detour has detours!

These side trips off the beaten path often leave motorists disoriented, and those of us who loathe asking for directions might arrive at a destination we never planned to reach. Detours test our confidence that we know where we're headed. Detours get us off track. Sometimes we end up completely lost.

The apostle Paul advised the Galatian believers to ignore detours that false teachers wanted them to take. These "teachers" wrongly emphasized that while it was crucial to know Christ, God's grace also required certain actions and qualifications. These included meeting specific Jewish requirements, like circumcision and other aspects of tradition. These false persuaders incorrectly taught that the only way to get to God involved a detour through Judaism.

Distressed over the wandering of the Galatian Christians, Paul urged them to ignore the detours and get back on the main trail. Rather bluntly, Paul observed, "You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth?" (Galatians 5:7). Paul knew from his own background that the law was like a maze. God offers his followers, instead, a straight road of life in Christ. Trying to equate a relationship with God to keeping rules results in losing the way. Detours of any kind that try to "add to Christ" actually result in losing Christ.

Jesus left no doubt about the road that believers must travel. No detour can take us to the place where Jesus takes us. "I am the way," he proclaimed. "No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

What spiritual detours have you been tempted to take lately? Which ones did you choose to follow? Which ones did you resist?

Day 12

The Waiting Room

Hebrews 6:13-20

When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, “I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.”] And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.

People swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hopeset before us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

Day 12

The Waiting Room

Waiting might well be the hardest single thing we ever have to do. We wait in traffic. We wait in the doctor's office (in the waiting room!). We wait to hear news—good or bad.

We're not patient people. Most of us resemble a child at Christmastime, eagerly anticipating the time to open presents. Each hour seems like an eternity. When the designated time arrives, we can't move fast enough to get to the Christmas tree and tear open all those tantalizingly wrapped gifts.

But try as we might, we can't make time go any faster. Waiting is a part of our modern life. No matter how fast-paced and hectic our daily schedules may be, we still run up against times and places where we have no choice but to stop and sit or stand in line.

The Bible often connects waiting with faith. Sometimes Scripture even uses the two words interchangeably. While we might not like it, waiting serves an important role in our Christian life. The work God does within us while we wait is just as important as whatever it is we're waiting for. Of course, none of us finds waiting easy. In fact, it might bring pain and will almost certainly try us and test us. Waiting demands patience and exacts a price. It's the toll on the road that each of us must pay.

God promised Abraham a blessing: "I will . . . give you many descendants" (Hebrews 6:14). But to receive his blessing, Abraham had to wait—day after day, year after year. In time God did fulfill his promise. And Abraham's waiting turned out to have been his greatest blessing; he was to become the father of the Jewish nation.

We also hear the promises of God and long for God to fulfill them. Yet we often wait. If Abraham's story teaches us anything, it's that God proves himself faithful again and again. As guys, we want something to do—some action to take. But sometimes our part is simply to wait, with a confident, disciplined and patient assurance that God will keep his promises. He will come through. While such times aren't easy, in the end we can honestly reflect that "it was worth the wait." Indeed, waiting can result in our greatest blessing.

For what are you waiting on God right now?

Day 13

In Two Worlds at Once

1 Peter 1:3-12

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

Day 13

In Two Worlds at Once

Most of us inhabit at least two worlds. For example, we live in one world of home and family and another of work. We have other “worlds” too, like the burger joint where we grab a quick lunch before we move on to our next world.

Even in the first century the apostle Peter understood this concept. He makes frequent references to “this world” and “the eternal,” explaining that the way we respond to events in this life produces lasting effects in the eternal world, so that what happens here influences us there.

This shouldn’t be surprising. We know, for example, that a nutritious breakfast in the morning affects the way we approach the rest of our day. And we understand that despite our efforts to keep the worries of work from following us home, our family members can usually sense when we are preoccupied with our jobs. So it shouldn’t seem strange that the way we live in the physical world affects our experience of the spiritual world.

Notice how effortlessly the apostle connects these two worlds for us. He commends those who love Christ without ever having seen him, for such faith leads to a life filled with “inexpressible and glorious joy” (1 Peter 1:8). He assures believers who successfully sustain fiery trials that they’ll enjoy invaluable faith as an outcome of this painful process (see 1 Peter 1:7). To Christians suffering persecution and other troubles, Peter promises a magnificent eternal inheritance (see 1 Peter 1:4).

Does that eternal, spiritual world seem distant to you? Or does Scripture’s portrayal of this profound reality motivate you to endure what otherwise might be too difficult for you to bear?

If you’ve been discouraged lately by opposition or setbacks in this life, give thought to the inheritance waiting for you.

What physical worlds (home and work, Sundays and weekdays) do you struggle to connect?

Revelation 21:1-27

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,”] for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death”] or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

The New Jerusalem, the Bride of the Lamb

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. The angel measured the wall using human measurement, and it was 144 cubits thick. The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth ruby, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth turquoise, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass.

I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

Day 14

The End Is In Sight

The marathon runner crests the last hill and glimpses the finish line. His eyes widen while his frenzied heart beats even faster. His race is nearly done. So he shakes the sweat from his head, grunts as he accelerates and gives one last kick at the end—sprinting toward the finish line. What inspires such effort from someone so clearly fatigued? How can he muster even more energy when his lungs already burn? The prize at the end of the race makes each ache and every pain worthwhile.

Of course, the apostle John, now an old man, isn't running any marathons. Yet inwardly his heart continues to race. Before him hangs the finishing tape of his apocalypse, the entire Bible, the Christian faith and history itself. Just across the finish line awaits the prize that makes every pain he's endured worth it in the end. But what is the prize?

We might be tempted to conclude, "No more death or mourning or crying or pain" (Revelation 21:4). That's the prize! Or we might posit, "The Holy City, Jerusalem" shining like "a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal" (Revelation 21:10–11). We might expect that the prize is being reunited with our Christian friends and loved ones. While all of these are certainly treasures, however, a far greater treasure awaits, the one that confers value on each of these lesser prizes.

The treasure of heaven is God himself! He's the prize we race after all our lives. God's presence with his people wipes away their tears of mourning (see Revelation 21:3–4). God's glory causes the city to shine (see Revelation 21:11). The glory of God illuminates the New Jerusalem and attracts the praise of the nations (see Revelation 21:23–24).

Imagine John returning to his daily life after catching a glimpse of God's glory at the finish line. Do you think that, following that experience, he could yawn and then waste his time with the trivialities of this world? No! In his heart this aged saint had run the race of faith with incredibly renewed vigor and abandon. He had seen the prize.

By faith you can also gaze at the prize as you meditate on this portion of Scripture. Then run! Chase after the treasure of heaven—God himself!

What aspect of heaven excites you the most? Is it being with God and Jesus, or is it something else?