

NIV

WOMEN'S

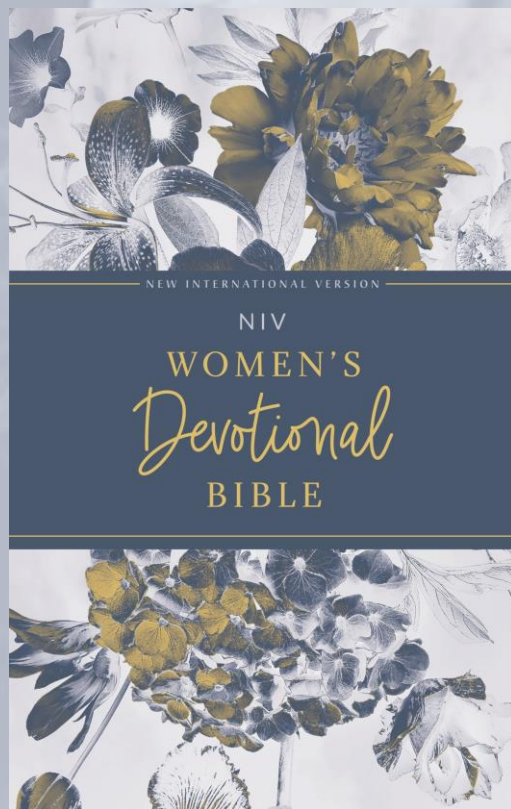
Devotional

BIBLE

14-Day Plan



NIV Women's Devotional Bible 14-Day Plan



This 14-day devotional plan features insightful devotions written for a woman just like you. Each devotion includes three guided reflections to help you apply Scripture to your daily life.

All devotions drawn from the *NIV Women's Devotional Bible*.

Day 1

God's Image Bearers

Genesis 1:27–31

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground — everything that has the breath of life in it — I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning — the sixth day.

Day 1

God's Image Bearers

Imagine the scene. Holding her hair back with one hand, the woman kneels and leans forward to drink from the clear pool of water. As her cupped hand reaches for the clear liquid, she draws back, startled. Who is the long-haired stranger staring back at her?

Perhaps even since the time Eve first caught sight of her reflection in the Garden of Eden, women have dealt with the question of image. Polls consistently reveal that the majority of us are dissatisfied with our appearance. Confronted with a barrage of airbrushed photos of supermodels and celebrities adorning magazine covers, the average woman thinks she is too short, too fat, too unattractive, too imperfect. How can we ever measure up with the media's standards of perfection?

The first chapter of the Bible supplies the answer. We were created in the image of one paradigm of perfection: our Creator. Our height, weight and skin color may indicate our human origins, but our soul and spirit reflect our Sovereign God.

When a child is born, it's not unusual for someone to claim she's the very "image" of a relative. But what does it mean to be created in the image of our heavenly Father? An image is a likeness or resemblance—a reflection as seen in a mirror. Scripture teaches that Jesus Christ is the "image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). As we grow in faith, we who believe are gradually "being transformed into [Christ's] image" (2 Corinthians 3:18). When we become like Jesus, we begin to look more and more like our heavenly Father.

God created us to convey the distinctive imprint of his divine nature to a world often blinded to his existence. Even our differences reflect the One who delighted in creating a world of dazzling diversity: peculiar penguins and majestic eagles; towering redwoods and dwarf pines; blondes, brunettes and redheads...every person created with the individual imprint of the Creator's hand to bear his image. So the next time you pass by a mirror, pause a moment to gaze in wonder at the designer original whom God loves so dearly—you!

Day 1

God's Image Bearers

Reflection

- How do you see God's image reflected in the lives of others you admire?
- What factors from the past have damaged your sense of self-worth?
- Think of three ways in which you can beautifully reflect the characteristics of your Creator by imitating Christ.

Day 2

Openhearted and Openhanded

Deuteronomy 15:1–11

At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts. This is how it is to be done: Every creditor shall cancel any loan they have made to a fellow Israelite. They shall not require payment from anyone among their own people, because the Lord's time for canceling debts has been proclaimed. You may require payment from a foreigner, but you must cancel any debt your fellow Israelite owes you. However, there need be no poor people among you, for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you, if only you fully obey the Lord your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today. For the Lord your God will bless you as he has promised, and you will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. You will rule over many nations but none will rule over you.

If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need. Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: "The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near," so that you do not show ill will toward the needy among your fellow Israelites and give them nothing. They may then appeal to the Lord against you, and you will be found guilty of sin. Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.

Day 2

Openhearted and Openhanded

There is much suffering in the world—very much. Material suffering is suffering from hunger, suffering from homelessness, from all kinds of disease, but I still think that the greatest suffering is being lonely, feeling unloved, just having no one. I have come more and more to realize that it is being unwanted that is the worst disease that any human being can ever experience. In these times of development, the whole world runs and is hurried. But there are some who fall down on the way and have no strength to go ahead. These are the ones we must care about.

Let us be very sincere in our dealings with each other and have the courage to accept each other as we are. Do not be surprised at or become preoccupied with each other's failure; rather see and find the good in each other, for each one of us is created in the image of God. Jesus has said it beautifully: "I am the vine, you are the branches." The life-giving sap that flows from the vine through each of the branches is the same.

Be kind in your actions. Do not think that you are the only one who can do efficient work, work worth showing. This makes you harsh in your judgment of others who may not have the same talents. Do your best and trust that others do their best. And be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies.

In loving one another through our works we bring an increase of grace and a growth in divine love.

Be the living expression of God's kindness:

kindness in your face,
kindness in your eyes,
kindness in your smile,
kindness in your warm greeting.

—Mother Teresa

Day 2

Openhearted and Openhanded

Reflection

- Whom do you have trouble accepting? Are there people that you find yourself judging?
- How have you shown that you care for the downtrodden?
- List three practical ways you will follow Mother Teresa's example of loving others by being openhanded to those less fortunate than you.

Day 3

Being Misunderstood

1 Samuel 24:1–7

After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, “David is in the Desert of En Gedi.” So Saul took three thousand able young men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Craggs of the Wild Goats.

He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave. The men said, “This is the day the Lord spoke of when he said to you, ‘I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.’ ” Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul’s robe.

Afterward, David was consciencestricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. He said to his men, “The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord’s anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the Lord.” With these words David sharply rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.

Day 3

Being Misunderstood

Clara Barton, dubbed “the angel of the battlefield,” had a reputation for refusing to hold a grudge against anyone. As founder of the Red Cross, she was maligned. People labeled her leadership style as authoritarian and used Congress’s charter as leverage to force her to resign from her own organization. Once, a friend tried to get her to recall a cruel thing that had happened to her years before, but Clara claimed to have forgotten the incident. “Don’t you remember the wrong that was done you?” the friend hounded. Clara answered calmly, “No, I distinctly remember forgetting that.”

We’ve all been misunderstood or mistreated. No matter how hard we work at doing things right, there may be someone who doesn’t see things the way we do or who doesn’t like the way we do things. Maybe it’s a husband, child, co-worker, parent or friend. They may not hear what we’re trying to tell them, see what we’re trying to show them or appreciate the intentions behind our actions. The philosopher Goethe said, “So long as you live and work, you will be misunderstood.” But Clara Barton’s philosophy is helpful: Choose to forget the insults and wrongs.

David seemed to live by this philosophy too. He didn’t deserve to be persecuted by King Saul. He had served the king well. Yet here we find the two men at odds in a desert oasis, meeting unexpectedly in the back of a cold, damp cave. With a single, well-placed thrust of his sword, David could have killed Saul. But he recognized that Saul was God’s anointed, so David chose to forget Saul’s wrongs and not lay a hand against him.

How do you respond when you’ve been misunderstood? Can you leave matters in God’s hands and choose to forget? Or will you take a bit of vengeance here and a slice of repayment there? Can you be content to wait for God to set things right on his timetable rather than yours?

The next time you feel misunderstood or mistreated, remember that you’re following in some pretty big footsteps. King David was persecuted for doing God’s bidding and did not retaliate when he was attacked. Jesus, the sinless God-man, was persecuted and died for our sins, yet he willingly forgave from the cross those who had tormented him. What will you do the next time you’re wronged?

Day 3

Being Misunderstood

Reflection

- In what ways have you been mistreated or misunderstood for doing the right thing?
- What opportunities have you had to retaliate? How can you respond with blessing instead?
- Who misunderstands or persecutes you? Pray that you will learn to forgive and bless those who hurt you.

Day 4

Overwhelmed With Grief

2 Samuel 19:1–8

Joab was told, “The king is weeping and mourning for Absalom.” And for the whole army the victory that day was turned into mourning, because on that day the troops heard it said, “The king is grieving for his son.” The men stole into the city that day as men steal in who are ashamed when they flee from battle. The king covered his face and cried aloud, “O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!”

Then Joab went into the house to the king and said, “Today you have humiliated all your men, who have just saved your life and the lives of your sons and daughters and the lives of your wives and concubines. You love those who hate you and hate those who love you. You have made it clear today that the commanders and their men mean nothing to you. I see that you would be pleased if Absalom were alive today and all of us were dead. Now go out and encourage your men. I swear by the Lord that if you don’t go out, not a man will be left with you by nightfall. This will be worse for you than all the calamities that have come on you from your youth till now.”

So the king got up and took his seat in the gateway. When the men were told, “The king is sitting in the gateway,” they all came before him.

Meanwhile, the Israelites had fled to their homes.

Day 4

Overwhelmed With Grief

Have you ever tried to comfort someone who refused to be comforted? Or maybe you were the one whose sorrow was so deep that no words or actions could penetrate your grief. We've all seen or experienced the gut-wrenching sorrow that causes us to want to deny the pain and turn back the hands of time. Sometimes all we can do is utter the name of the person we've lost.

Such was David's grief when he heard of Absalom's death. He stopped everything and, in true Eastern fashion, wailed for his rebellious son, even though Absalom was killed in a coup to steal his father's kingdom. Nevertheless, David was so grief-stricken that he was unable to cope with the responsibilities of reclaiming the kingdom. In fact, his grief was so debilitating that his closest aides warned him that if he didn't pull himself together and rejoice that his armies had conquered his enemies (including his son), his subjects would grow disheartened. As a father, David had every right to feel grief. However, as the leader of a nation, King David had to rise above his grief and carry on for the sake of his people.

The death of a child is beyond tragic. It is the deepest grief and sorrow. And there are other losses worth grieving: the death of a marriage, the end of a friendship or the loss of your health. Then comes the anguish. You want to blank out the present and look to the past. You deeply want to turn back the clock and reverse what has happened. You can't eat, sleep or work. In the freshness of the pain, it might seem you can never again function.

Maybe you are overwhelmed by a devastating grief right now or are trying to encourage someone else in a similar situation. Maybe you need to think about what David did. Embrace your personal grief, but remember your responsibilities to others, even though it may be the hardest thing to do.

God has not promised immunity from sorrow, but he has promised that he will be present with us through it: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matthew 5:4).

Day 4

Overwhelmed With Grief

Reflection

- What event or events in your life have nearly overwhelmed you with grief? Describe what happened.
- What responsibilities forced you to face your pain and function again?
- How did God come alongside to comfort and strengthen you in your sorrow?

Day 5

Make a Difference

Chronicles 22:10–12

When Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she proceeded to destroy the whole royal family of the house of Judah. 11 But Jehosheba, f the daughter of King Jehoram, took Joash son of Ahaziah and stole him away from among the royal princes who were about to be murdered and put him and his nurse in a bedroom. Because Jehosheba, f the daughter of King Jehoram and wife of the priest Jehoiada, was Ahaziah's sister, she hid the child from Athaliah so she could not kill him. 12 He remained hidden with them at the temple of God for six years while Athaliah ruled the land.

Day 5

Make a Difference

Can one woman really make a difference in a community? What about in an entire nation? You might think the answer is no. But think again. When you read the story of Jehosheba in 2 Chronicles, you'll realize that the answer is a wholehearted yes.

When Jehosheba realized that Athaliah was determined to destroy the royal line of Judah, she bravely hid her nephew Joash in the temple until he was old enough to succeed to the throne. When Joash was seven years old, he ascended to the throne and later repaired the temple and tore down the altars to Baal. More important, he preserved the Messianic line. Jehosheba made a difference in the life of another person; but she also made decisions that affected the outcome of a nation, and ultimately, it made a difference for all of humanity. Because of Jehosheba's courage at this time in history, "our Lord descended from Judah" (Hebrews 7:14).

In the eleventh century, a woman of noble birth impacted a nation. Princess Margaret was exiled with her family when the Danes overran England. Educated in Hungary, she returned to England during the reign of her great-uncle, Edward the Confessor. As one of the last remaining members of the Saxon royal family, she fled north to the Royal Scots Court during the Norman Conquest. Beautiful, intelligent and devout, Margaret won the heart of the Scottish king, Malcolm Canmore, and married him in 1069. She is credited with instigating the reform of the Church of Scotland, which had reached a low point in its history. In her private life, Margaret avidly prayed and gave lavishly to the poor. Her position allowed her to free many Anglo-Saxon prisoners.

You may not see yourself as a woman of influence. You may feel shy about sharing your faith with your kids, friends, family or co-workers. But there are many ways you can make a difference. You can refuse to give in to peer pressure or refuse to give up on a prodigal. You can speak out in the voting booth or on the editorial page. When you stand up for God's standards, you might be surprised—like a small pebble thrown into a large body of water, your words, actions and prayers can ripple outward if you muster up the courage to take a stand.

Day 5

Make a Difference

Reflection

- What women in your community are having a great impact?
- Over whom do you have the most influence?
- As you reflect on Jehosheba and Queen Margaret, determine how you can inspire those around you for the kingdom of God.

Day 6

Like a Tree

Psalm 1:1–6

*Blessed is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
and who meditates on his law day and night.
That person is like a tree planted by streams of
water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither —
whatever they do prospers.*

*Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the
judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
For the Lord watches over the way of the
righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.*

Day 6

Like a Tree

What gives you delight? You know, that sense of unparalleled joy, that amazing degree of enjoyment and pleasure, even to the point of rapture. That's how the dictionary defines delight. But how do you define delight? Is it playing with your children or grandchildren, reading a good book, walking on the beach at sunset or working on scrapbook pages? Maybe you delight in running through rain-washed streets in the early morning or hiking in the mountains on a sunny autumn day. Maybe your delight is playing games or listening to music.

The psalmist defines delight as immersing oneself in the law of the Lord. He sings of the person who finds joy in listening to God's voice in Scripture, who discovers with pleasure "the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God" (Romans 11:33). For this person, meditating on the Scriptures is not a duty that fulfills a certain obligation, but it is willingly devoting spare time, staying up late into the night immersed in the Bible.

And what is the result of this constant delight in God's Word? One becomes like a tree planted by a river. You've seen them—tall, vital trees, well-watered because they are rooted deep in the stream. This tree is resplendent with foliage in rich shades of green. It's a tree that can withstand biting frost, harsh winds and blazing sun.

A person who delights in God's Word will prosper and have integrity, will speak truthfully and exhibit stability and strength. This is the person who will reflect the face of God like a river reflects the sun in dappled waves. This one is truly blessed.

The book of Psalms is a wonderful place to introduce yourself to the idea of delighting in God's Word. The poetic music of the psalms is rich in metaphors and images that let your imagination soar with the grandeur, majesty, wisdom and unsurpassing love of God. You will see him as a rock, a fortress, a strong tower, a nurturing mother and so much more. He rides on the wind and shows himself in the starry heavens. Delight yourself in singing along with the psalmist and plant your roots deep in the nourishing living water of God's Word.

Day 6

Like a Tree

Reflection

- What three adjectives would describe your interest in the Scriptures? Is “delightful” on your list?
- Does the idea of delighting in God’s Word attract you to the Bible? What other things motivate you to spend time in God’s Word?
- How is your spiritual life growing like a prosperous fruit tree? Find a picture of a beautiful tree to use as a bookmark to remind you of Psalm 1.

Day 7

Things God Hates

Proverbs 6:16–19

*There are six things the Lord hates,
seven that are detestable to him:*

*haughty eyes,
a lying tongue,
hands that shed innocent blood,
a heart that devises wicked schemes,
feet that are quick to rush into evil,
a false witness who pours out lies
and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.*

Day 7

Things God Hates

Hate is a severe word. It expresses an intense hostility or extreme dislike. Many children use the word without thought, and most parents admonish them, “We don’t use the word hate.” But inevitably the harsh word slips out: “I hate vegetables!” “I hate my little brother!” Many adults aren’t much better, and the word slips out all too easily: “I hate it when she gets all the glory.” “I hate that man’s singing.” “I hate skinny models.” “I hate to do laundry.”

What do you hate? What things do you avoid at all costs? For some the thought of a certain activity causes intense agitation. Perhaps your first auto accident occurred during a blizzard. To this day, you hate getting behind the steering wheel when the fluffy flakes appear. Everybody hates something. And strange as it may seem, the Bible says that even the all-loving God hates some things.

It may seem strange to us to read the words “hate” and “God” in the same sentence. If God is love, then what does he hate? Solomon lists the top seven things God hates: (1) a prideful sneer, (2) fraud, (3) bloodshed, (4) conspiracy, (5) evil intent, (6) perjury and (7) inciting division among God’s people. Bible commentator Matthew Henry wrote, “God hates sin; he hates every sin; he can never be reconciled to it; he hates nothing but sin,” but apparently these sins are especially repugnant to him.

This list possesses a common thread; it includes sins particularly harmful to others. Since human beings are God’s special creation, he is exceptionally sensitive to sins that cause grief for others. The list also crescendos: the first six sins place emphasis on the seventh. It’s bad for you to sin, but it is “detestable” to start a chain reaction—causing others to sin too.

What are the top seven things you hate? The psalmist said, “Let those who love the Lord hate evil” (Psalm 97:10). To love God is to hate what he hates. Instead of despising veggies or hating to drive on icy roads, go a little deeper. Really think about what’s on God’s “hate” list. Then banish those things from your house and your heart.

Day 7

Things God Hates

Reflection

- What on God's list of things to hate surprises you?
- Ask God to show you if you have ever practiced anything on this list. If so, what? (Be honest.)
- How will you banish the things on God's list from your life?

Day 8

Remember

Isaiah 17:7–14

In that day people will look to their Maker and turn their eyes to the Holy One of Israel. They will not look to the altars, the work of their hands, and they will have no regard for the Asherah poles and the incense altars their fingers have made.

In that day their strong cities, which they left because of the Israelites, will be like places abandoned to thickets and undergrowth. And all will be desolation.

You have forgotten God your Savior; you have not remembered the Rock, your fortress. Therefore, though you set out the finest plants and plant imported vines, though on the day you set them out, you make them grow, and on the morning when you plant them, you bring them to bud, yet the harvest will be as nothing in the day of disease and incurable pain.

Woe to the many nations that rage — they rage like the raging sea! Woe to the peoples who roar — they roar like the roaring of great waters! Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters, when he rebukes them they flee far away, driven before the wind like chaff on the hills, like tumbleweed before a gale. In the evening, sudden terror! Before the morning, they are gone! This is the portion of those who loot us, the lot of those who plunder us.

Day 8

Remember

It is amazing that we can inhabit creation on this marvelous planet—in the midst of the changing seasons, with natural wonders surrounding us—and not always be aware of our Creator. Yet it happens. The momentum of life picks up, the to-do lists lengthen, the needs around us scream for attention, and before we know it, we have forgotten what is most important.

It's not a new problem. Throughout the Old Testament, God used prophets like Isaiah to confront his people about this very thing. God reminded the people to be mindful of him, to remember their history, to keep their priorities in line—but they had trouble listening. Therefore, their efforts came up empty. They spent time doing what they thought was important, but they harvested only unexpected suffering. Anything they planted and nurtured without consulting the Gardener would come to ruin and disease. Isaiah prophesied that when they forgot that God was their source of life, they would harvest only dead vines and shriveled fruit.

Centuries later, Jesus brought this same metaphor home to his disciples: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener...I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:1,5).

No matter what we do, whether it's planting a vineyard, starting a business, raising children or running a ministry, if we do not consult God, if we are not connected to the Vine, we will not yield a harvest.

It's essential to remember that God is the One who causes us to bear fruit. When life is off kilter, what reminders can you plant in your life to bring you into his presence? Ancient Jews practiced several reminders of God's presence. Their daily rituals and yearly feasts symbolized and celebrated their history with God.

It's important to practice daily and weekly habits that remind us of God's presence. Simple things can help us grow in our faith life: meditating on God's goodness while in the carpool line, posting a Scripture verse in the kitchen, listening to worship music while getting ready in the morning or taking a prayer walk each day. Be creative in the ways you find to stay connected to the Vine.

Day 8

Remember

Reflection

- Think about a moment when you were especially aware of God's presence in your life. What did that feel like?
- What do you have in your home that can be your morning and evening reminder of God's presence and power?
- What difference does it make in your day when you are mindful of God's presence?

Day 9

Walk Humbly

Micah 6:1–9

Listen to what the Lord says: “Stand up, plead my case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say.

“Hear, you mountains, the Lord’s accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the Lord has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel.

“My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me. I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. My people, remember what Balak king of Moab plotted and what Balaam son of Beor answered. Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord.”

With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Listen! The Lord is calling to the city — and to fear your name is wisdom — “Heed the rod and the One who appointed it.

Day 9

Walk Humbly

Picture a courtroom. The judge enters the room, his long robe flowing. From your angle, you can't see his face. But when he sits down at the bench, his identity is finally revealed. God is the judge. And his people are on trial.

The charges are as follows: They have turned away from God. They have forgotten his merciful help and deliverance from the past. They have taken his blessings for granted.

What can they do to find favor with God? Is there a sacrifice they can make? What penance is required? The people have tried to pacify him with offerings, large and costly. But Micah reminds us that God sees the heart. He knows these are not genuine, humble expressions of repentance. He sees that the sacrifices are an attempt to replace approaching God honestly.

Look over the list of requirements in today's passage. Do you deal with people and situations in a fair and honest way? Do you extend mercy even when it hurts to do so? Thankfully, what God requires is not a catalog of regulations and sacrifices. Instead, he simply issues a call to live in relationship with him. Day by day.

Attempting to appease God with offerings doesn't work. Like the Israelites, we are so often tempted to go through the motions and "pay God off." Giving tithes, attending church regularly and teaching are all good things, but they cannot take the place of identifying so closely with God that we almost automatically do that which is closest to his heart: Act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God. That's what obedience really is. And obedience, which can sound like a dutiful word or a grudging business exchange, should be a joyful word. It becomes so when we stop calculating the cost of doing what God commands and instead respond with abandon to the One who loves us.

God sees the motives hidden behind our every word and action. He tells us to come humbly, as children. Stop hedging. Stop making excuses. Just listen and follow. Let him show you who he really is. Above all, love him. Simply love him most of all.

Day 9

Walk Humbly

Reflection

- What are some ways you have tried to sacrifice to God without having an obedient heart?
- In what concrete way can you extend justice and mercy today?
- What changes do you need to make so that you fulfill the call to walk humbly with God?

Day 10

Press Toward Jesus

Matthew 9:20–21

Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.” Jesus turned and saw her. “Take heart, daughter,” he said, “your faith has healed you.” And the woman was healed at that moment.

Day 10

Press Toward Jesus

Kelly looked at herself in the mirror and sighed—a sigh of total, utter exhaustion. She felt much older than her 36 years. It felt as though she had been struggling with insomnia, muscle pain and fatigue forever. One doctor diagnosed her with Epstein Barr. Another with depression. Another simply said she didn't have a diagnosis. One seemed to hint that she was making up her symptoms.

Kelly knew God was in control, but it was hard to trust on days like this when all she wanted to do was crawl under the covers and sob. “God, where are you?” she cried. “How much longer do I have to go through this?” Kelly was desperate, so she leaned on Jesus. No, he didn't miraculously heal her. But he graciously helped her each and every day as she leaned on him for strength.

The woman who touched Jesus' cloak must have felt the same sort of desperation. The Bible says she had been bleeding for 12 years. Not only was she suffering physically, she was also probably suffering emotionally. In Jewish society, such a woman would have been labeled “unclean.” Because of this status, she would have been considered an outcast. The loneliness and isolation must have felt overwhelming. No wonder she pressed through the multitude of people who were following the Messiah. She must have believed that touching him was her only hope.

Imagine her breathless expectation as she reached toward Jesus...and her overwhelming relief when she realized that he had, indeed, relieved her suffering. What joy must have flooded her the very instant she touched the hem of his cloak!

Are you feeling desperate like these two women? Do you cry for relief from a lingering illness? If so, take comfort in the fact that Jesus is near and that he is the Great Physician. Sometimes, he heals in an instant, as he did in this story. At other times, he heals over a period of years or he waits to heal, allowing us to press into him so that he can “strengthen [us] with power through his Spirit in [our] inner being” (Ephesians 3:16). At still other times, he does not heal. Then, like Paul, we learn that “[God's] power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

The ways in which God ministers to people are as varied as the people he touches—but he is always faithful to bring peace and joy, even in midst of our suffering. Today, press close to him. You'll experience his power.

Day 10

Press Toward Jesus

Reflection

- Describe an area of your life in which you feel truly desperate.
- How have you felt isolated from others because of your circumstances?
- Press into Jesus in prayer. Ask him to restore you to fellowship with him and fellowship with believers. Ask him to heal you physically, emotionally and spiritually. If he chooses not to heal you this day, ask him to strengthen you with his power instead.

Day 11

Too Busy

Luke 10:38–42

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed — or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Day 11

Too Busy

We face the same choice that confronted Martha. We can dismiss the implications of Jesus' words for us, especially when our time is limited and we are juggling so many other demands. Or we can face our need and begin working to know God better. Whatever we decide, we must not forget who puts this challenge before us and the depth of his concern. The real choice is not whether we will become thinkers or doers. We are called to be both. But we will be better at both if we heed Christ's call to dig deeply into the heart of God. This never means stepping out of life to devote ourselves to something abstract and useless; rather it means to plunge into the very essence of life. We were made for this, and it is only as we grow in our understanding of God that we will satisfy the deepest longings of our hearts and find the meaning we ache for.

But even more, we need to know him. Mary and Martha learned the hard way, and we do too. If my own struggles have taught me anything, it is that my greatest need is to know God better, and I am not alone. To be blunt, life is simply too demanding and overwhelming at times to think I can manage without knowing the one who rules the winds and waves that batter my little vessel. We ask too much of ourselves to try to trust a stranger. Neglecting our need to know him better is, as Dr. Packer so wisely warns, "to sentence ourselves to stumble and blunder through life, blindfolded, as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you." We hurt ourselves if we shrug our shoulders and walk away.

It is time we started. There is much to do and more to learn.

Not even a lifetime will be enough to know God completely. But our smallest efforts will be richly rewarded, for "the time it takes to dig deep into the heart of God is often repaid by striking a vein of gold or an oil gusher. The effort is repaid with joy and power beyond all expectation."

—Carolyn Custis James

Day 11

Too Busy

Reflection

- Do you consider yourself to be more like Mary or Martha?
- How did this devotional help you to realize that you can be both a thinker and a doer?
- What can you set aside right now in order to still your mind and hands long enough to listen for God's voice? Deliberately sit still for a few minutes and ask him to reveal himself to you in a new way.

Day 12

When Words Fail

Romans 8:26–27

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

Day 12

When Words Fail

Beads of perspiration form on your brow, your heart flutters, your mind swims. An endless loop replays in your head: the scathing, screaming argument with your mother; the prognosis from the doctor; a schedule so full you can't calm your thoughts enough to fall asleep at night.

You've probably been there at some point in your life: You rush before God like an eager child bursting into a room full of toys only to find that you have no idea how to begin to pray. You don't know if you should be asking for guidance, protection or forgiveness—or all of the above. And what about how to order your list? And should you say special words? How does this prayer thing work?

Maybe you've finally got a minute to yourself, so you grab your Bible, look up to the ceiling and think, Now what? That list you've been building in your mind goes blank. The phone rings. The TV blares from another room. The dog barks. Anything . . . everything interrupts the moment. Help! How do you pray when words fail?

Enter the Holy Spirit. He perceives our heart's agony and comforts us in our weakness. He knows our spiritual battle often burns hottest when we fight within ourselves. We wrestle with how to prioritize our prayers. We struggle with imposing our human agendas on a holy God. We cross our arms, grit our teeth and mentally stomp our feet when things don't turn out as we desperately prayed they would. Life's frustrations can mute us spiritually: "We do not know what we ought to pray for" (verse 26). But God does not stop hearing us when we're dumbstruck before him. Both in silence and when our words flow in a jumbled torrent, the Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf to the Father. He does know what to pray for.

The next time your spirit groans with a weight heavier than you can bear, trust that even when you might not be able to find words to pray, God clearly hears your cries through the intervention of the Holy Spirit. He knows your heart, your thoughts and your greatest needs better than you do yourself. Though your words may fail, your intercessor will never fail you.

Day 12

When Words Fail

Reflection

- Describe your prayer life. Do you struggle with it or does it flow naturally? Is it structured or hit-and-miss?
- Have you ever been at a loss for words during a time of prayer? How did the Holy Spirit intercede on your behalf? (For example: in song, in tears or in inexpressible ways.)
- Examine your heart. What things in your life have you been unable to express to God? Now, let the Holy Spirit lift these struggles from you and carry them before the Father.

Day 13

Love Songs

1 Corinthians 13:1–3

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not selfseeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Day 13

Love Songs

Quick. Name a song about love. Did you name a song that is popular now? Did you name a song that was “our song” with your first boyfriend? How about the last song that was played at your senior prom? Did you name a song by Elvis Presley? The Beatles? Elton John? Whitney Houston? Celine Dion? Taylor Swift? How about these favorites: “The Rose of Tralee” by C. Mordaunt Spencer (published in the 1800s) or “Lavender’s Blue” from the 1600s. Love songs have been around for a long time, and most cultures memorialize love through song.

But what song would you name if you were asked to name some songs about faith and hope? You may be able to name some great hymns. You may also think of some contemporary worship songs. But you may struggle a bit with the titles. For some reason, love songs outnumber faith songs or hope songs. Why is that?

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul listed some attributes that fall into the great, but not greatest, category of things to sing about: faith and hope. But nothing can compete with the greatest attribute of all: love. In God’s book, love is the ultimate gift. If you’re going to be known for anything, let it be love. Your lifelong goal should be to embody the diverse characteristics of love found in 1 Corinthians 13.

Unfortunately, the English language is limited to only one word to describe the many types of love. As a result, our understanding of genuine love is inadequate; we tend to confuse one kind with another. The Greek language, however, has several words for love, such as eros, meaning romantic love, and philia, or friendship. And there are others. But Paul used the Greek word agape to describe love that is divine; this type of love originates with God. It is eternal; it never fails. Verses 4–7 describe the many facets of this preeminent type of love: patience, kindness, perseverance and hope.

Here’s a challenge for you: Live today seeking the greatest of all attributes. Try to express the heart of Biblical love in all that you say and do. Let today be your love song to everyone you encounter.

Day 13

Love Songs

Reflection

- How has God shown his love for you in a very tangible, personal way? How can you show him you love him in return?
- Review verses 4–7. Which aspect of love is the most difficult for you to express?
- How will you show love to those you encounter today?

Day 14

Eternal Perspective

2 Peter 3:8-14

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

Day 14

Eternal Perspective

These verses from 2 Peter state clearly that earth's time clock is ticking. The world as we know it will come to an end one day. It may or may not occur in our lifetime, but it will occur one day because God has promised that it will. The important question is: How are you going to live until then? How will you spend your days?

Perhaps you or someone dear to you has been diagnosed with a life-threatening illness, and you know their life is winding down. Suddenly your perspective has shifted. What once seemed important no longer seems quite so important. We begin to ask the question Peter asked in verse 11: "What kind of people ought you to be?" We return to the realization that our relationships should come first—our relationship with God, our relationships with our family members and with fellow believers, friends and co-workers.

Thinking about the end of the world can seem frightening or depressing, especially when the signs can't be ignored: the deterioration of morality, growing violence and terrorism, unprecedented natural disasters, war, disease and famine throughout the earth. Watching the nightly news is enough to cause even the most optimistic woman to stay in bed and pull the covers over her head. The truth is that Peter is not asking us to dwell on end-time events but to consider how we will live our lives, right here, right now, while looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth.

How do we keep an eternal perspective while living on earth? Here are a few suggestions: Start each day by praying that God will use you for his purposes. Make it your ambition to please God in everything you do—whether you are packing your children's lunches, running a company or volunteering at church. Each night, thank God for the opportunities he's given you to serve him by serving others.

Living a holy and godly life not only ensures that you are at peace with God and with others; it also ensures that you are ready for whatever may come.

Day 14

Eternal Perspective

Reflection

- If you knew the world would end tomorrow, how would you reprioritize your life?
- How do you keep a positive outlook during discouraging times?
- How will you go about making your life more godly and holy as you look toward eternity?