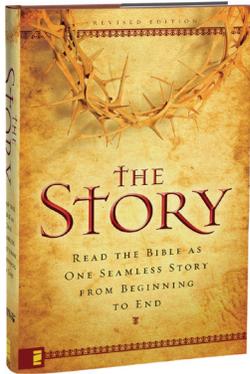


T H E S T O R Y

FOR INDIVIDUALS

The Story is your opportunity to encounter God in his Word like never before.

The Story is a collection of the basic stories of the Bible that tell the whole story from beginning to end. Through *The Story*, you will get a bird's eye view of the Bible.



Using this guide, you will be reading two chapters of *The Story* per week. Each chapter of *The Story* has been divided into three daily readings, so you will do six readings a week. These readings have been designed to help you focus on and apply the truth of God's word. Each day includes references to other passages that you can look up in a traditional Bible.

The Story for Individuals is designed to help you understand and then respond to God's word. Bring your notes from your personal time in *The Story* with you to your small group meetings, and share your insights with the members of your group.

CREATION

DAY ONE – THE STORY OF CREATION

Today's reading: Page 1 through break on page 4

This reading covers: Genesis 1-2

Summary: God shows the incredible nature of his creative ability.

Consider this:

What strikes you most about God's creative ability? How does his creativity apply to your life? As the creator of all, what does God have at his disposal as he leads you?

For further reading: Psalm 148; John 1:1-18; Colossians 1:15-20

Prayer:

Father, you indeed are the creator of all things. Help me to see your hand in everything around me. Help me to marvel at your beauty and reflect on your wisdom. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY TWO – THE FALL

Today's reading: Page 4 through break on page 6

This reading covers: Genesis 3-4

Summary: By pursuing their story instead of God's story, Adam and Eve enter into sin.

Consider this:

How does knowing that Adam and Eve were confronted by a very real enemy impact your understanding of Satan? How do you understand the choices that are placed before each of us every day?

For further reading: Isaiah 14:12-15; Ephesians 6:10-20; 1 Peter 5:8-9

Prayer:

Father, help me remember that I live in the midst of a great battle. Help me to see this battle in the great and small choices placed before me every day. In these choices, help me to choose to follow you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY THREE – THE FLOOD

Today's reading: Page 6 through end of chapter

This reading covers: Genesis 6-9

Summary: Due to man's complete rebellion, God chooses to start again.

Consider this:

How bad must things have been for God to destroy the world? How bad are things today? What do you need to do to live like Noah in the midst of dark times?

For further reading: Matthew 5:14-16; Romans 3:10-18; Hebrews 11:7

Prayer:

Father, again today we live in dark times. Thank you for sending Jesus as the light. Use me to shine light in this world and make a difference for you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

GOD BUILDS A NATION

DAY ONE – GOD’S FAITHFULNESS

Today’s reading: Page 11 through middle of page 15

This reading covers: Genesis 12-21

Summary: God shows himself to be a faithful promise maker.

Consider this:

What has God asked you to do recently? What would it cost you to obey? Consider Abraham’s age when he was called out of Ur, when he was promised a son and when he had Isaac. What factor does age play in God’s calling? Do you feel too young or too old? God would like you to put away your personal feelings of inadequacy and simply follow. What was Abraham’s motivating quality?

For further reading: Hebrews 11:8-10, 17-19

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, instill in me the same kind of faith that moved Abraham to obey when you called him to another place, the same kind of faith that helped him follow your commands, even at great loss to himself. Help me to truly know your commands by reading your word and meditating on its content. Let me not be deceived by false teachings and misleading instruction. Grant me discernment so I might know the truth from the lie and then give me the ability to follow truth. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

DAY TWO – FULLY COMMITTED

Today’s reading: Middle of page 15 through break on page 17

This reading covers: Genesis 22

Summary: Abraham’s test proves he is fully committed to God.

Consider this:

What impressed God most; Abraham’s sacrifice or his obedience? List several ways you can demonstrate your faith in God through obedience and sacrifice. What was God’s ultimate sacrifice? What was Jesus’ ultimate act of obedience? How does all that affect your walk with God?

For further reading: 1 Samuel 15

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, I have been so consumed with the things I want and the way I would like life to be that I have forgotten what my salvation cost you. Forgive me and now turn my life around so that I am able to shed my self-centered behavior and focus on you and your plan for my life. Help me put away my fears and by faith accept your will. As I step forward in obedience, encourage me with blessings beyond what I could ever imagine. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

DAY THREE – GOD’S PLANS

Today’s reading: Break on page 17 through end of chapter

This reading covers: Genesis 23-36

Summary: God’s plans will succeed in spite of our shortcomings.

Consider this:

How long did Isaac and Rebekah wait for God to give them a child? (See Genesis 25:20 and 25:26) What have you been praying for that seems to be taking a long time to be fulfilled? What might you do to hurry things along? Why is this not a good idea? Why is it better to wait on the Lord’s timing? What price did Jacob pay for his deceitfulness? What lesson can you learn from what he did to his brother and to Laban?

For further reading: Proverbs 19:21

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, my timing is so different from yours. Please, help me to look at things as you do. Grant me patience without painful trials. Help me to trust you for the fulfillment of my prayers and not to become weary with waiting. Encourage me in some way. As a human, I need little gifts of encouragement so that I will not give up. Increase my faith so that I might truly trust you, not only with the present but also with my future. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

JOSEPH FROM SLAVE TO DEPUTY PHARAOH

DAY ONE – FAITHFULNESS

Today's reading: Page 23 through the break on page 27

This reading covers: Genesis 37-41

Summary: Joseph demonstrates faithfulness to God regardless of circumstances.

Consider this:

Think back on your life and any time you were in a struggle between faithfulness and sin. Was there a time when you chose specifically one way or the other? What were the circumstances? How did it turn out? Did the experience bring you closer to God? Or did it place a wedge between the two of you?

Using circumstances as an opportunity to practice our faithfulness to God helps us to build a history of faithfulness over time. Turn this memory into an opportunity to learn from your experience. How would you handle that same decision today?

For further reading: Lamentations 3:22-24

Prayer:

Father, thank you for proving your faithfulness to me every day. Help me to choose to be faithful to you, no matter my circumstances. Through the experiences in my life, may we create a history of faithfulness together. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY TWO – PROVISION

Today's reading: Break on page 27 through break on page 33

This reading covers: Genesis 42-49

Summary: Though often behind the scenes, God provides for his people.

Consider this:

How specific are your prayers? Do you write the scenes in your head and then direct God to do it your way? Has God ever completely surprised you with an answer to prayer so creative you knew you never would have thought of it?

While we are worrying and fretting over the concerns of our day-to-day tasks, God is working behind the scenes to take care of our needs. We cannot always see what he is doing. What do you need today that you can give to Him? Is there a better way to word your requests so that your humility to God's plan will be more evident? Will you consider inviting him to provide for you and give up your director's chair?

For further reading: James 1:17, Philippians 4:6-7, 1 Corinthians 2:9

Prayer:

Father I know you see the full picture of my life. I thank you that I can rest in the fact you always know

what is best. Please help me to give you my cares, and trust that you are working behind the scenes to take care of my needs in the best way. Help me, please, to trust you to provide whatever is needed in your way and in your time. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY THREE – SOVEREIGNTY

Today's reading: Break on page 33 through end of chapter

This reading covers: Genesis 50

Summary: God is sovereign and is working out his plan.

Consider this:

Do you have God on a shelf where you can reach him when you want him? Is he stuffed neatly in the closet where you can close the door to keep him from being heard at the wrong times? Or is God at the center of your life?

Is he patiently knocking on the door of your heart, waiting for an invitation to begin his work in you, or is he in charge of every day? Are you enjoying and embracing his sovereignty in your life, or are you trying to tell him what to do?

The Author of your story wants to write each chapter. He wants to watch your character develop in the image of his son. Are you willing to give him permission? God is in control. Will you rest in that?

For further reading: Romans 8:28, Jeremiah 29:11

Prayer:

Almighty God, Loving Father, I am humbled by your majesty and might. I am humbled by your sovereignty. I am eternally grateful for your love for me. You always want what is best, and you always know what it is. You always know the best way that it should happen. I want to trust you to work out your will in your way in my life. Help me to do that Lord. Every day. Starting today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DELIVERANCE

DAY ONE – GOD’S CHOICE

Today’s reading: Pages 35-38

This reading covers: Exodus 1-4

Summary: God chooses an unwilling and unqualified leader in the person of Moses.

Consider this:

Because of his privileged Egyptian upbringing, Moses was not liked by the Hebrews. (Remember the response when he tried to defuse an argument between two workers: “Who made you ruler and judge over us?”) After committing murder, he was exiled from Egypt. By his own admission, he was a poor communicator. He hardly seemed a prime candidate to spearhead Israel’s deliverance. Yet God chose Moses. What does that tell you about God’s ability to know a person’s true potential? What promise did God give Moses to bolster his self-confidence? (See Exodus 3:12) Have you ever felt unwilling or unqualified to serve or follow a calling from God? What promise does God give you?

For further reading: 1 Samuel 16:6-13; Isaiah 41:10-13; Acts 4:8-13; 1 Corinthians 12:4-12

Prayer:

Holy Spirit, show me what you want me to do for your kingdom. Help me overcome my self-doubt. Give me confidence, knowing that you will be with me every step of the way. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

DAY TWO – GOD’S DELIVERANCE

Today’s reading: Pages 39-44

This reading covers: Exodus 5-14

Summary: God’s deliverance shows his authority over all things and all people.

Consider this:

Why did so much suffering take place before the Israelites were allowed to leave Egypt? Doesn’t it seem unfathomable that with all the miracles Pharaoh witnessed, he still would not concede to God’s authority? Have there been times when you’ve doubted God’s authority or questioned why certain things happen? How does this story affirm your belief that God is totally in charge?

For further reading: Isaiah 55:8-11; Romans 8:28; Psalm 111

Prayer: Sovereign God, thank you for being in charge of my life. Amen.

DAY THREE – GOD’S PROVISION

Today's reading: Page 45 through end of chapter

This reading covers: Exodus 15-17

Summary: God meets our needs daily to keep us close to him.

Consider this:

It seems as if the Israelites constantly worried about their future, doubting God would provide. Is that something you have trouble with as well? Each day the people gathered only enough manna for that day (except on the sixth day). What lesson was God trying to instill by not allowing them to stockpile? Think of your essential needs. Think of how God graciously provides them.

For further reading: Matthew 6:25-34

Prayer:

Lord, thank you so much for providing everything I need here on earth. Help me never to take these gifts for granted or to worry about how you will supply them. Help me put my full trust in you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

NEW COMMANDS AND A NEW COVENANT

DAY ONE – 10 COMMANDMENTS

Today's reading: Pages 47-50

This reading covers: Exodus 19-31

Summary: God's people respond to his commandments.

Consider this:

God has kept the Israelites through many tough times in Egypt and while escaping slavery. When God gives them his commandments, they respond in one voice saying, "Everything the Lord has said we will do." In what ways has God kept you through tough times and struggles? Have you ever said to God, "Anything you say I will do?" In what ways have you followed God into the unknown like the Israelites into the desert?

For further reading: 1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for keeping me and sustaining me in tough times. I pray I will do anything you say and follow you into the unknown in the knowledge that you will protect me and bless me. In your name I pray, Amen.

DAY TWO – SHORT-LIVED COMMITMENT

Today's reading: Page 51 through break on page 53

This reading covers: Exodus 32

Summary: The temporary nature of our commitment.

Consider this:

Chapter 5 begins with God telling Moses to remind the people how he has kept them safe from Egypt and carried them "on eagles' wings". He says if they will keep his covenant they will be blessed. Why do you think the Israelites would continue to forget how God kept and protected them? Why would they have a tough time keeping his covenant? Why would they have the most difficult time keeping the first and second commandments with worshipping idols and other gods?

For further reading: Daniel 3:16-18; Isaiah 40:30-31; Psalm 61

Prayer:

Lord, please help me to sustain my commitment to you and not have it be short-lived. Please help me to keep your commandments and put nothing else before you. Help me to renew my strength and soar on wings like eagles. In your name, Amen.

DAY THREE – GOD’S PRESENCE

Today’s reading: Break on page 53 through end of chapter

This reading covers: Exodus 33-40

Summary: Moses expresses dependence upon the presence of God

Consider this:

Moses proclaims God to be a “compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.” Where have you seen God exhibit these qualities in your own life? Moses also talks about the “sin of the parents.” What do you think about your legacy to your children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren in terms of sin? Finally, Moses’ face is radiant because he has spoken with the Lord. After speaking with God, how has your life been changed? Can people see this change just as they could see Moses’ glowing face?

For further reading: Romans 5:6-8; 2 Corinthians 3:7-18

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for your compassion and grace. Thank you for your love and faithfulness. Please take away my sin and help me to leave a legacy of righteousness to my children and grandchildren. Please have people see the radiance in my face after speaking to you. Please let them see the way you change me. Thank you, Lord. Amen.

WANDERING

DAY ONE – INGRATITUDE

Today's reading: Page 57 through break on page 59

This reading covers: Numbers 10-12

Summary: God's people continually complain about their circumstances.

Consider this:

The Israelites complained about the food, the journey, the lack of water. Miriam and Aaron complained about Moses and his Cushite wife. Now it is time to deal with your own complaints. Do they have to do with lack of possessions? Place of residence or work? Other people? Circumstances? What was God's reaction to the Israelites' complaints? What can you do to eliminate the complaints in your life?

For further reading: 1 Corinthians 10:1-12; Hebrews 13:5-6

Prayer:

Thank you, Lord, for all you have given me: the blessings, because they are more than I ever could have imagined, and the afflictions, because they are less than I deserve. They have brought me closer to you. Whenever I start to complain, bring to my mind the example of the Israelites. Help me to be grateful in all situations and to bring honor to your name. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY TWO – REBELLION

Today's reading: Break on page 59 through middle of page 67

This reading covers: Numbers 13-25

Summary: God's people refuse to enter the Promised Land.

Consider this:

Sometimes we get ahead of God, as Abraham did when he decided to have a child with Hagar instead of waiting for the son God had promised through Sarah. Sometimes we lag behind God, like the Israelites did when they refused to enter the Promised Land because they were afraid. They chose to believe the negative report rather than the good news given by Joshua and Caleb. So, whether we get ahead of God or behind Him, the reason is still the same; lack of faith.

Consider a time when you missed God's blessing because you doubted his word. Perhaps you are standing at a crossroads right now. If God is calling you to move, what's the delay?

For further reading: Hebrews 11

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, help me to see the path you want me to take. Let me not move too quickly or too slowly, but show me how to be always in your will. Help me to step ahead with boldness. Increase my faith so that I will not doubt but will trust you with every step. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY THREE – MOSES' FINAL DAYS

Today's reading: Middle of page 67 through end of chapter

This reading covers: Numbers 27 and Deuteronomy 1-34

Summary: Moses reminds the people of what is before them; the choice of life or death.

Consider this:

Are you up to the challenge? As you stand at the threshold, can you step ahead with confidence? Can you envision the blessing that awaits you on the other side? One of God's greatest reminders appears many times in Scripture. He focuses on the main reason we hesitate. Fear. He repeats over and over again in Scripture, "Fear not."

For further reading: Numbers 14:1-9; Hebrews 10:35-39

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, fear is my greatest enemy right now. It comes from within. That is where you must work — within me, to eliminate fear and to instill a boldness that will move me to obey you, no matter what the cost. Deal mercifully with me, Lord, as I choose to obey you. Pave the way. Make my paths straight. Grant me the assurance I need to continue on. In Jesus' name, Amen.

THE BATTLE BEGINS

DAY ONE – THE FAME OF GOD

Today's reading: Page 73 through break on page 75

This reading covers: Joshua 1-2

Summary: Rahab demonstrates that God is well-known for what he has done.

Consider this:

The spies entered Jericho secretly and were hidden from the king by the prostitute Rahab. What other choices could Rahab have made regarding the spies? What was the risk she was taking by hiding them in her home?

God had a reputation even in this pagan land. Rahab was aware of the mighty power of the Israelites' God. She says, "... for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below." (Joshua 2:11) How did Rahab know about the God of the Israelites? What specific details did she know?

How do people around you know you have a mighty God? What evidence of God do they see in your life? Based on what you tell others, do they respect and fear the mighty power of your God? Do they also know of his love? What can you do to help them see God as the Savior he is?

For further reading: 2 Corinthians 2:4-16

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, you are mighty to save. Thank you for witnessing in the lives of Christians. Like the children of Israel long ago, will you make yourself known through me to those around me? In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY TWO – COMPLETE DESTRUCTION

Today's reading: Break on page 75 through break on page 81

This reading covers: Joshua 6-11

Summary: God's people completely destroy the cities they conquer as they take the land.

Consider this:

Distractions from God take many forms. We can find value in money and belongings. Distractions can be people, jobs, television, even really good and worthwhile activities.

What do you need to rid yourself of, in order to ensure complete devotion to God? What do you need to give up to keep your heart true to God? Our God is a jealous God, and is not willing to share with anything that may take our focus from him. Is God dealing with you in an area of devotion? What changes might you need to make?

For further reading: 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

Prayer:

Father God, you are my one true God. You are my creator, redeemer, savior, and friend. You are worthy of all my devotion. Please remove the distractions of the world around me. As I go through my day, help me to keep things in perspective so that you are always in the front. Demolish the strongholds in my life that take me away from you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY THREE – MAKE A CHOICE

Today's reading: Break on page 81 through end of chapter

This reading covers: Joshua 23-24

Summary: Continual, absolute allegiance to God was needed to live in this new land.

Consider this:

Joshua is about to die. He calls his people together and reviews where God has taken them and what God has done. Do you ever review your own history and let yourself be reminded of where God has taken you? It is good to remember the things God has taught you and recall the events that have built up your faith in years past. The more we build our faith, the stronger our faith is for the next trial.

Living our lives is like living in the Promised Land. One trial after another will come our way. Just like the Israelites, we need complete allegiance to God in order to live the best way we can. End your time today pledging your allegiance to God. Take the time to read Joshua 24:15 as a further reading. Use the verse as your pledge of allegiance. Write your prayer out in your journal as a reminder of your pledge.

For further reading: Joshua 24:15

Prayer:

Father God, today I pledge my allegiance to you. As for me and my household, we will serve you. I choose to love you first and to do my best to live the way you desire. Please help me with my questions and failures. You are my God, and there is no other. In Jesus' name, Amen.

A FEW GOOD MEN...AND WOMEN

DAY ONE – ONE GENERATION

Today's reading: Pages 85 through break on page 86

This reading covers: Judges 2-3

Summary: Our faith truly is only one generation away from extinction.

Consider this:

A few sentences into this chapter, we read a startling revelation, “After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel.” Could such a thing happen in your lifetime? What responsibility does God place on you as a parent, grandparent or simply as a Christ-follower to insure children grow up learning about God? Would you say you are a good role model? What types of Christ-focused activities take place in your family?

For further reading: Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Mark 10:13-16; 2 Timothy 1:3-7

Prayer:

Dear Father, thank you for the children you have placed in my care. By my teaching and by my example, help me foster in them a love for you that will last a lifetime. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

DAY TWO – WILLING BUT UNQUALIFIED

Today's reading: Break on page 86 through break on page 92

This reading covers: Judges 4-8

Summary: God shows himself strong when we allow him to work through us.

Consider this:

Like so many of God's heroes, Gideon, a simple farmer from a “weak clan” hardly seemed qualified. Yet, God chose Gideon for an important purpose. Take a moment to think about God's purpose for your life. Can you identify with Gideon who asked for signs and proof before committing? Are there areas in your life where God is calling you to step out in faith?

For further reading: Proverbs 16:3; Isaiah 26:1-8; Mark 10:23-27; Hebrews 11

Prayer:

God, today and every day use me for your purpose. Through your Spirit, give me confidence to know that with your help I can accomplish your goals. In Jesus name, I pray, Amen.

DAY THREE – STRENGTH ISN'T EVERYTHING

Today's reading: Break on page 92 through end of chapter

This reading covers: Judges 13-16

Summary: Although Samson was gifted by God, his heart was not fully devoted to him.

Consider this:

What is your overall impression of Samson? Although physically strong, how was he weak? We are told his strength came "from the Spirit of the Lord." Yet it seems apparent God's Spirit was absent in his heart. What can we learn from seeing the results of Samson's sinful lifestyle? At the end, Samson was given his strength back resulting in the defeat of Israel's enemy. What did Samson do to receive God's help?

For further reading: Romans 8:1-12; Ephesians 6:10-18

Prayer:

Holy Spirit, with your help, I put on the whole armor of God. Come, live in my heart so I may stay strong and live a life that glorifies you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

THE FAITH OF A FOREIGN WOMAN

DAY ONE – COMMITMENT

Today's reading: Page 99 through middle of page 100

This reading covers: Ruth 1

Summary: The book of Ruth paints a beautiful picture of absolute commitment.

Consider this:

Naomi is in the middle of the darkest point in her life. There is a famine in the land. Her husband and two sons have died. Ruth does not leave Naomi during this tough time. What does this show about Ruth's character? What do you think this faithfulness did to Ruth and Naomi's relationship? Can you name some friends or family who would exhibit the same qualities if you were going through a tough time?

For Further Reading: Philippians 2:1-11

Prayer: Lord, please make me as faithful and consistent with my character as Ruth. Thank you for my friends and family who have this same level of commitment and love. Thank you and in Jesus name, Amen.

DAY TWO – RESPONSIBILITY

Today's reading: Middle of page 100 through bottom of page 103

This reading covers: Ruth 2-4

Summary: Boaz shows selflessness in carrying out his family responsibilities.

Consider this:

Under Jewish Law, there were only two men who could still marry Ruth. Boaz was one of them. Naomi's other relative was more concerned with making the easy choice than the right one. Boaz made the right choice. What is a choice in your life with which you struggle? Do you make the right choice or the easy one? What are some strengths of Boaz' character? Is there someone you admire who has a great sense of responsibility like Boaz?

For Further Reading: Proverbs 19:1; Romans 5:1-5; Philippians 4:8

Prayer:

Lord, please make me like Boaz and mold my character like his. You love his integrity and responsibility to do what is right rather than what is easy. He is a man of his word. Make my work as solid as his. Please mold me and shape me in your image. I pray this in your son's name, Amen.

DAY THREE – GOD’S STORY

Today’s reading: Bottom of page 103 through end of chapter

This reading covers: Ruth 4

Summary: The end of Ruth’s story reminds us of the ongoing nature of The Story.

Consider this:

Ruth and Boaz had a son named Obed who was the grandfather of David and ancestor of the Messiah, Jesus. What does this blessing to Naomi tell you about what happens when God restores us? Why do you think the eventual line of Jesus was born out of this story? Even the King of Kings, Jesus, had ancestors with tough times and famines in their life stories. Can you recognize some similarities with your story and the story of Jesus’ family?

For Further Reading: Luke 1:26-33; Galatians 3:26-29

Prayer:

Jesus, thank you that you can relate to the times of darkness in my life. Your family had tough times but God continued to give them a hope and a future. Help me see your light; that it would be a hope and a future in my times of struggle and darkness. Thank you for being intertwined in my story. Amen.

STANDING TALL, FALLING HARD

DAY ONE – HEARING GOD

Today's reading: Page 105 through break on page 109

This reading covers: 1 Samuel 1-4

Summary: Samuel needed help learning to hear the voice of God.

Consider this:

Three times the Lord called on Samuel and three times the boy ran to Eli the priest. The fourth time, Samuel responded instead to God.

How many times do we turn to friends for answers instead of communicating with God himself? Why do we think callings come from human means rather than from God? How can we recognize when God is calling us to service, and what is our source of confirmation?

For Samuel, it was verbal communication with the Lord. Even in that day, it was a rare thing to happen, that a man should actually hear the voice of God. Today, we have the Scriptures. No human should have any excuse for not knowing the will of God. It is clearly written in the Bible.

For further reading: Psalm 119; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us your word in Scripture. Help me to use it for guidance, for restoration and for praising you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY TWO – FOLLOWING THE CROWD

Today's reading: Break on page 109 through break on page 113

This reading covers: 1 Samuel 8-10

Summary: God's people reject him as their leader so they can be like everyone else.

Consider this:

The Israelites wanted to be like everyone else. They wanted to be like the world. They wanted a king to rule them instead of God. By this choice, they were choosing the world over God. They could not have both. Think about a situation in which you made a choice to please man while your choice would obviously displease God. How would you change that in the future?

For further reading: Matthew 6:24; James 4:4-10

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, it is so easy to be a man-pleaser. But so often that is a choice that leads us farther away from you. Help me draw near to you so that you will draw near to me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY THREE – GOD’S WAY

Today’s reading: Break on page 113 through end of chapter

This reading covers: 1 Samuel 11-15

Summary: Saul failed to do things God’s way and it cost him his crown.

Consider this:

Saul became afraid when Samuel didn’t show up to make a sacrifice before a great battle. Saul decided not to wait. He himself made the sacrifice, even though this was outside the Lord’s will. Saul was acting out of impatience. Like Saul, we sometimes get ahead of God even though it is contrary to his word and his call. Saul assumed everything would be all right if he went ahead and made a sacrifice in Samuel’s absence. But only Samuel had the right to do it.

Saul also failed to destroy all the Amalekites. He wanted to preserve the best. Saul was operating out of greed. Sometimes we make bad decisions out of greed. Saul destroyed the useless and kept the best. He disobeyed God. This man who feared people was not afraid of God. Saul feared crowds, he feared armies and in future readings you will see that he also feared David. But for some reason, he did not fear God.

For further reading: Isaiah 55:6-9

Prayer:

Lord, help me to be a true delight to you. Let me be strong in obedience, no matter what the cost. Help me put away my fears, my impatience my greed and live only by faith. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

FROM SHEPHERD TO KING

DAY ONE – DAVID CHOSEN

Today's reading: Page 117 through break on page 121

This reading covers: 1 Samuel 16-17

Summary: God looks into the heart and chooses David as the future king.

Consider this:

God sees directly into our hearts and can judge our motives.

Think of someone with whom you have a hard time. Perhaps you are angry at this person or consider them to be an adversary at work or in the family. The best way to change our hearts toward another is to honestly and sincerely pray for that person. Not about that person, but for that person.

Make sure your prayer has nothing to do with changing the one with whom you struggle. In fact, it is a good thing to ask God to change you. Sometimes, it really is about us. God can see straight through to our hearts.

For further reading: Psalm 139

Prayer:

Father today I want to pray for _____. I ask that you would bring great blessing into their life today. I pray for your peace upon them. I pray for a rich anointing for the job that they have to do. Rain grace down upon _____. Help me, Lord, to learn all I need to learn. Teach me how to see others through your eyes. Change my heart. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY TWO – GOD IS MY STRENGTH

Today's reading: Break on page 121 through break on page 126

This reading covers: 1 Samuel 18, 19, 24, 31; 2 Samuel 22; Psalm 59

Summary: David expresses his faith that God will protect him from Saul.

Consider this:

David was a hero to the people, but Saul's jealousy made David an enemy of the king. His men encouraged him to do away with Saul when he had the chance. David insisted the plan was God's, and God would carry it out.

Have you ever gone ahead and taken justice into your own hands, rather than waiting for natural consequences to move the circumstances along? Do you have an attitude of right/wrong that you feel justifies your stand on certain things? Can you learn a lesson from David here? How can you apply it today?

For further reading: Psalm 59

Prayer:

Father, help me to know when to act and when to wait. I want you to be in control, but sometimes I move ahead. Keep me from moving forward with things that need time. Keep me from getting ahead of

you, Lord. Help me to have the faith I need that you will take care of me and the circumstances that surround me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY THREE – DAVID HONORS GOD

Today's reading: Break on page 126 through end of chapter

This reading covers: 2 Samuel 6 and 1 Chronicles 17

Summary:

David cares for the ark. God promises a son will succeed him.

David brought the ark back to safety in Jerusalem and had plans to build a house for the Lord; a resting place for the ark. God intervenes through the prophet Nathan, telling David his job is not to build a place for the ark.

That task will fall to David's son.

Consider this:

Timing is everything with God, and yet time is nothing to God. God's promise to David reveals what God will do. It also reveals what David should not do. How is your to-do list? What is God's priority? How does it compare with your priority? Spend some time on an important issue in your life, journaling the need and what you are hearing from God regarding the timing. Also consider whose responsibility it is to get the job done. Is the job really yours? Or is it God's?

For further reading: Esther 4:9-17; 2 Peter 3:8; Proverbs 19:21

Prayer:

Father, help me to keep my priorities in perspective. Help me to spend my time on the things that really matter to you. I want to give you everything on my list or in my head today, so I may work for you in accomplishing your will in your time. In this way, I honor you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

TRIALS OF A KING

DAY ONE – REPENTANCE

Today's reading: Page 131 through bottom of page 134

This reading covers: 2 Samuel 11-12; Psalm 51

Summary: David repents after realizing the depth of his sin (Psalm 51).

Consider this:

Does sin always bring negative consequences? What were some of the consequences of David's sins? What is your definition of repentance? One definition might be the turning away from sin and toward God. David's psalm reveals some of the emotions his repentance brought: guilt, regret and contrition, as well as a sense of cleansing and restoration. David writes, "Against you, you only, have I sinned." Despite how our sin affects others, why is sin first and foremost an offense against God? God used the prophet Nathan to confront David about his sin. What should our role be regarding accountability with fellow Christians?

For further reading: Isaiah 59:1-3; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:23; Galatians 6:1-3; 1 John 1:9-10

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, I come before you acknowledging those things I have done that separate me from you. I am sorry. Through the death and resurrection of your son on my behalf, I ask for forgiveness. In his name I pray, Amen.

DAY TWO – FORGIVENESS

Today's reading: Bottom of page 134 through top of page 138

This reading covers: Psalm 32; 2 Samuel 18

Summary: David expresses gratitude for God's forgiveness (Psalm 32).

Consider this:

David writes, "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away...your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped..." David's words about guilt ring true, don't they? We've all felt shame and remorse due to our sinful actions. How does the assurance of God's forgiveness free us and bring peace? Have you ever been negligent in expressing your thankfulness to God for his gifts of salvation and forgiveness? How should knowing that God forgives you affect your relationships with those who have wronged you?

For further reading: Psalm 103; Matthew 18:21-35

Prayer:

Father God, how amazing is your love for me that you remember my sins no more. In Christ's blood, I'm forgiven. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! Amen.

DAY THREE – TRUST

Today's reading: Top of page 138 through end of chapter

This reading covers: 1 Chronicles 22, 29; Psalm 23

Summary: David communicates his trust in God (Psalm 23).

Consider this:

Do you sense that as David's life was coming to an end, he felt closer to God than he ever had? One way he showed his joy and trust in God was with generous giving. Do you have a generous heart when it comes to giving back to God? Do you think the words of Psalm 23 are meant to be a comfort only in times of danger or sorrow? How do the words reinforce your certainty of God's protection and provision every day?

For further reading: Proverbs 3:5-6; Philippians 4:6-7; 1 Timothy 6:17-19

Prayer:

God, thank you so much for the generous way in which you care for me. Like David, I trust you as my protector, shepherd and the provider of all my needs. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

THE KING WHO HAD IT ALL

DAY ONE – SOLOMON THE WISE

Today's reading: Page 143 through break on page 150

This reading covers: 1 Kings 1-4; Proverbs 1-3, 6, 20-21

Summary: Solomon chooses wisdom.

Consider this:

Can you imagine God giving you the opportunity to ask him for anything you want? What would you ask for? Long life, peace, love, wealth? Solomon was given just this opportunity. He passed on all those requests and instead asked God to give him a discerning, understanding heart. What would it look like if God gave that to you? How would that impact your choices and the way you live day-to-day?

For further reading: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; Ephesians 1:15-17; James 1:5-8; 3:13-18

Prayer:

Father, truly give me the gift of your wisdom. Help me to live each day with a discerning and understanding heart. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY TWO – GOD FILLS HIS TEMPLE

Today's reading: Break on page 150 through break on page 155

This reading covers: 1 Kings 5-9; 2 Chronicles 5-7

Summary: God comes to live among his people.

Consider this:

What would the presence of God in his Temple have been like? The Bible says that fire came down and the glory of the Lord filled the Temple. How would you have responded to this? How do you relate this to the New Testament understanding that we are the temple of God?

For further reading: 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20; Ephesians 2:19-22

Prayer:

Father, you chose to live among the people of Israel by residing in the Temple. Today, you choose to live among us by residing in our lives. Help us to honor your presence by the way we live. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY THREE – THE BIGGER YOU ARE...

Today's reading: Break on page 155 through end of chapter

This reading covers: 1 Kings 10-11

Summary: Solomon had it all, but his heart turned away from God.

Consider this:

Solomon had it all, but foreign wives turned his heart from God. What has the potential of pulling you away from following God? What are you doing to keep that from happening?

For further reading: Psalm 119:33-40; Proverbs 7:1-27; Jeremiah 17:9; Hebrews 3:12-13

Prayer:

Father, help me to guard my heart. Help me to keep my heart fully turned to you. Continue to guide and direct my steps. In Jesus' name, Amen.

KINGDOM TORN IN TWO

DAY ONE – BIG SPLIT

Today's reading: Page 159 through bottom of page 163

This reading covers: 1 Kings 12-13

Summary: Discord sets in and God's people turn against each other.

Consider this:

Israel was on a downturn, having nine dynasties and 19 kings, all of them evil. Judah had one dynasty, David's, which was interrupted only for five years by Queen Athaliah who usurped the throne. Of 20 kings in Judah, only seven were good. Both groups turned away from God. Such statistics should make us more aware of the need for good government. What does God say about the powers that be?

For further reading: Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-16

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, I don't always see what is behind the decisions our leaders make. Help me to live up to the laws and ordinances, while always keeping in mind that I am to obey God first, then man. Bless our leaders in government. Help them to make righteous decisions that will protect our nation and help our citizens. Bless those who are leaders in the church. Guide their plans for expansion and outreach. Help me to be an effective part of the ministry. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY TWO – FIGHT TO THE BOTTOM

Today's reading: Bottom of page 163 through bottom of page 164

This reading covers: 1 Kings 14-15

Summary: Both Israel (northern tribes) and Judah turn their hearts away from God

Consider this:

Turning away from God can happen in two ways, through sins of "commission" and sins of "omission." What are some sins of "commission?" What is the key to avoiding them? What are sins of "omission?"

For further reading: Matthew 25:41-45; Colossians 3:5-10; 1 John 3:17-18

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, make me aware of the various ways I can sin, either by commission or by omission. Help me to avoid the pitfalls. Give me discernment in areas that are not clear, always keeping me aware of what the Scriptures say about these areas. Give me strength to obey your word, to flee from sin, and make me aware of the needs of my fellow man. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY THREE – GOOD KING, BAD KING

Today's reading: Bottom of page 164 through end of chapter

This reading covers: 1 Kings 15-16

Summary: How could two men (Asa of Judah and Ahab of Israel) be so different?

Consider this:

Good King. Bad King. Asa reigned forty-one years over Judah and did right before God, just as his ancestor David had. Next, Ahab became king over Israel for twenty-two years. He built an altar to Baal and took an evil, heathen wife named Jezebel. How did Asa appear before the Lord? What was the Lord's reaction to Ahab?

Journal some details about your own walk from your early years, in ten-year increments. Focus only upon your walk with the Lord, whether it was good or evil during those decades. What have you learned from your experiences? What would you like to change?

For further reading: Matthew 7:15-20

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, help me to learn from the lives of Asa and Ahab, so I can make right choices and live righteously before you. Let me be aware of the things that please you. Let me avoid the things that anger you. "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer." (Psalm 19:14) In Jesus' name, Amen.

GOD'S MESSENGERS

DAY ONE – MAKE A CHOICE

Today's reading: Page 167 thorough break on page 172

This reading covers: 1 Kings 17-19; 2 Kings 2

Summary:

Elijah calls God's people to choose who they will follow. Elijah demonstrates the power of God at a community-wide sacrifice. His intention is to bring the people to a once-and-for-all realization that God is God, and there is no other.

Consider this:

Elijah's demonstration is visually impacting. Is this what it takes for you to believe? Does God have to toss a miracle into the mix from time to time to get your attention? Or do you hear him in the gentle whisper as Elijah did? Do you need a large worship center filled with people in order to be motivated to follow God? Or can you close the door to your bedroom and quietly seek him?

Choosing to follow God is a decision that sometimes calls for a public stand. The decision to stand publicly is strengthened by our quiet times with him.

For further reading: 1 Kings 19:11-13

Prayer:

Dear God, every day I have to make many choices. Today, when I am asked to choose, help me to choose you above all things. Give me wisdom and discernment, that I may hear you in the whispers of your presence, even amid the noise of this world. Help me to cultivate that quiet time with you. Help me to recognize your voice. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY TWO – TAKE A LOOK AROUND

Today's reading: Break on page 172 through break on page 175

This reading covers: 2 Kings 2, 4-6

Summary: Elisha prayed that his servant would see the power of God around him.

Elisha wanted to see the power of God in the things God did. Perhaps it was because he had been following Elijah around and had seen what God had done through him. Maybe he was so amazed at Elijah's usefulness to God that he had some doubts about his own. Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit, and he got it.

Consider this:

Elisha not only desired to see God around him, he wanted others to see God through him. Whatever you are facing today is an opportunity to see God's power, and to reveal it to others. Whether it is an action or an attitude, an encouragement or a discipline, God wants to be seen through you today. Take some time to ask him to do just that.

For further reading: Ephesians 1:18-19

Prayer:

Father, would you give me eyes to see your power today? Would you soften my heart to know you better? Help me to see the hope you have called me to, the riches of your glory, and your incomparably great power. Help me, always, to show your power and glory to others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY THREE – UNHEEDED WORDS

Today's reading: Break on page 175 through end of chapter

This reading covers: Amos; Hosea

Summary:

God sends prophets calling his people to repent; but they don't listen. Maybe you are still wondering about this journey of faith and considering the first step of your walk with Christ. Maybe you are brand new, taking baby steps with this first-time study of the Word of God. Or you could be a seasoned believer, challenging yourself with a daily time with God. No matter your place on the path, your journey has involved others. They might be people who were instrumental in bringing you the message, or people you hope to bring the message to. Or both.

Consider this:

How long did it take before you listened to God's message? How long is it taking for your loved one to hear it from you? Heeding the message is, of course, crucial. But the faithfulness of God's messengers plays a large part.

For further reading: Romans 10:9-13

Prayer:

Father I am so grateful that so many of your followers are not quiet about you. I am thankful that someone talked to me. I pray today that you would give me a loving boldness to speak of you to others. I ask that I would have the courage to proclaim you in this dark world, and to encourage those who need you. Help me to see opportunity and to not pass it up. In Jesus' name, Amen.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

DAY ONE – CAPTIVITY

Today's reading: Page 181 through break on page 183

This reading covers: 2 Kings 17-19

Summary: Captivity begins as a result of the continued unfaithfulness of God's people.

Consider this:

Have you noticed that our introductions to the various kings of Israel and Judah usually include a one-sentence resume: "He did evil in the eyes of the Lord," as was the case of Hoshea or "He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord," as was the case of Hezekiah. If your life was summarized in one sentence, what would it be? Think about your proudest accomplishments. Is God part of them? Idol worship was Israel's downfall. A definition of idolatry is excessive devotion to, or worship of, an object or ideal. What are some false gods people worship today?

For further reading: 1 John 2:15-17

Prayer:

Father God, help me make you the core of my life – to always try to do right in your eyes. I ask this in your son's name, Amen.

DAY TWO – GOD'S BATTLE

Today's reading: Break on page 183 through break on page 185

This reading covers: 2 Kings 19

Summary: Hezekiah sees the threat against him, but allows God to fight his battles.

Consider this:

The king of Assyria blasphemed God (with dire consequences) and taunted the people of Judah about their trust in him. Have you ever been teased or even ridiculed for being a Christian? Think about what it means to live for Christ and how you should respond. Defeat seemed certain for King Hezekiah, but instead of surrendering to the enemy he surrendered himself to God, the only one who could help him. What lessons can we take from Hezekiah as we face life's problems?

For further reading: Psalm 25:16-22; Romans 1:16-17; 2 Timothy 4:16-18; 1 Peter 4:12-16

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for being my rescuer, the one I know I can always turn to in time of trouble. Help me to never be ashamed of you but that I will always proudly declare your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY THREE – WORDS TO LIVE BY

Today's reading: Break on page 185 through end of chapter

This reading covers: Isaiah 3, 6, 14, 49, 53

Summary: Through Isaiah, God speaks words of judgment, hope and salvation.

Consider this:

The prophet Isaiah spoke to the people of Judah who lived between 740 and 680 BC, but many of his poetic words are as relevant as ever. How did the people of that time react to his words of warning and promise? What can we learn from them today? Underline a verse or two from today's reading that speak to you. Have you ever thought about the fact that God planned for Christ's death as a means of salvation thousands of years before it happened? How does reading the prophecies of Isaiah confirm that truth?

For further reading: 2 Peter 1:12-21

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for giving me your words of hope and salvation spoken through the prophet Isaiah. Thank you for the Savior that he announced. In Jesus' name, Amen.

THE KINGDOM' FALL

DAY ONE – REBELLIOUS TO THE END

Today's reading: Page 191 through break on page 194

This reading covers: 2 Kings 21-24; 2 Chronicles 33

Summary: God's people refuse to return to him.

Consider this:

What is it about us that keeps us from turning to God? Why do we continue down the path of rebellion, even when we know the consequences? In what area of your life do you need to change direction?

For further reading: Deuteronomy 31:24-29; Psalm 25:4-7; Ezekiel 2

Prayer:

Father, point out any rebellion toward you in my life. Allow me to hear your words of correction and challenge. Thank you for providing a way for me to return to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY TWO – JUDGMENT

Today's reading: Break on page 194 through break on page 201

This reading covers: Ezekiel 1-2, 6-7; Jeremiah 1-5, 13, 21; 2 Chronicles 36; 2 Kings 25

Summary: All hope is lost as God's judgment comes to pass on his people.

Consider this:

The final straw. The end of the line. The chances have all been used up. Now it's judgment time. Do you live with any sense of finality? Do you have an understanding of accountability? There will be a final judgment for us as well. Now is your opportunity to make things right through Jesus Christ.

For further reading: Matthew 12:33-37; Revelation 20:11-15

Prayer:

Father, help me to see that your judgment is real. However, thank you that you have made it possible for me to escape this judgment through a relationship with Jesus Christ. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY THREE – FUTURE HOPE

Today's reading: Break on page 201 through end of chapter

This reading covers: Lamentations; Ezekiel 36-37

Summary: Even as God's judgment is carried out, his prophets bring words of restoration.

Consider this:

Even after he punishes his people, God reaches out to them and promises to restore them. He is still pursuing them for a relationship. God pursues you with the same passion and determination.

For further reading: Psalm 30:1-5

Prayer:

Father, how incredible it is to realize the extent of your love for me. How amazing to recognize how much you pursue me. Thank you! In Jesus' name, Amen.

DANIEL IN EXILE

DAY ONE – POSITION

Today's reading: Page 205 through break on page 209

This reading covers: Daniel 1-2

Summary: God shows his sovereignty by placing his people where he wants them to be.

Consider this:

Life is always about Plan A and Plan B. Plan A often is what we'd like to see happen. Plan B is usually what God wants instead. It's like what we read in Proverbs 16:9, "A man's heart devises his way: but the Lord directs his steps." Think about a Plan A that changed into God's Plan B in your own life. How difficult was it to make the change? What finally convinced you?

For further reading: Proverbs 3:5-6

Prayer:

Father, thank you for your place above all things. You truly are working out your plan for all time. I know I can defer my ways to your ways. Help me to be bold and follow you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY TWO – FAITHFULNESS

Today's reading: Break on page 209 through break on page 214

This reading covers: Daniel 3-6

Summary: Four of God's chosen ones show faithfulness regardless of circumstances

Consider this:

What is the key ingredient that makes men like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? They came through the fire as though not burned. How does God say we'll be after our own fiery trials? Can you identify with Daniel? How? What events in your own life have created an opportunity for taking a stand?

For further reading: Isaiah 43:1-4

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, Help my own life to emulate that of your servants, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Even though I may walk through the fire, bring me through unscathed. As I commit to stay in your word and pray daily, help me be as strong as Daniel. Let my testimony be one of strength and God's love showing through me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY THREE – RESTORATION

Today's reading: Break on page 214 to end of chapter

This reading covers: Jeremiah 29-31

Summary: Even as his people experience captivity, God sends words of hope.

Consider this:

Captivity can take different forms. It doesn't have to involve exile in a foreign land. Nor does it have to be a prison with physical bars and locks. It can be an exile into the recesses of one's own heart. And the bonds that keep us there can be just as strong as real-life chains.

Name a form of captivity that has imprisoned you at one time or another. How long were you held captive? How did God's Word help to release you from bondage? What other resources did you have?

For further reading: Acts 12:5-10; Romans 8:1-2; Galatians 5:1

Prayer:

Father, you have made it possible for me to be free because of Jesus Christ. Thank you for this incredible truth. Help me to live with joy in this new life that you have given me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

THE RETURN HOME

DAY ONE – TIME TO RETURN

Today's reading: Page 217 through break on page 219

This reading covers: Ezra 1-4

Summary: God uses a pagan king to call his people to return to their homeland.

Consider this:

King Cyrus was not a believer in God. In your journey with God or toward God, can you recall people or circumstances that profoundly impacted your journey, even though the people were not believers, nor the circumstances joyful? Maybe there was a strained relationship, a job loss, a broken family, and yet even those were used by God to draw you to him. Can you come to the point of thanking God for his plan and his presence in the circumstances? Can you find joy in the journey?

Look up Malachi 3:16. God asks us to “keep a scroll of remembrance.” Remembering God’s touch in our story is essential to understanding his story for us.

For further reading: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; Romans 8:28

Prayer:

Heavenly Father I am so grateful that once again I know you see the big picture of my story long before I see the end of a chapter. I thank you for the people and circumstances you have allowed in my life to draw me closer to you, even when it doesn't seem good at the time. I want to trust you with your purpose and your will. Strengthen my faith and grow my trust. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY TWO – TIME TO WORK

Today's reading: Break on page 219 through break on page 223

This reading covers: Haggai 1-2; Zechariah 1, 8

Summary: God's people are challenged to work and be encouraged about God's presence.

Building the temple was an enormous undertaking. When the exiles returned with good intentions to do so, they soon met with resistance. Neighboring nations did not want them to become a strong people under their God.

Consider this:

God sometimes asks us to take on more than we feel we can handle. Ultimately, he does so to complete his plan. But God never leaves us alone with a struggle. He is always with us. Without God's encouragement we might easily fall into despair.

God is with you! Where do you need this encouragement today? Take time to give it to God. Have confidence in him that no matter how big the task or how deep the hurt, God's will prevails – and he is with you.

For further reading: Ezra 3:10-13

Prayer:

You are with me! Lord, your promise means so much to me. I thank you that today you are with me. Please encourage me with your presence and make the victory yours. I will remember to give you the praise. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY THREE – TIME TO CELEBRATE

Today's reading: Break on page 223 through end of chapter

This reading covers: Ezra 5-6

Summary: With the help of a foreign king, the temple is completed.

The difficult, costly, time-consuming task of rebuilding the temple King Solomon first erected was completed, and a celebration was planned.

Consider this:

What do you need to celebrate today? Every day is a choice. We can wake up ready to celebrate our day's victories, or we can get out of bed lamenting the tasks and the people we are faced with. A simple change in attitude can make all the difference in our journey with Christ. Daily celebrating God's victories in us is a sure-fire way to become a believer with a positive attitude and one who lives in joy.

Any time we choose an attitude or action that reflects Christ, it is a victory over our sinful nature. Take time to list any recent victories, past or present, and thank God for his presence, his strength and his joy over you. Our God is mighty to save! And he rejoices over our victories.

For further reading: Zephaniah 3:14-17

Prayer:

Use whatever victory you wrote in your journal to form a prayer of thankfulness to God for what he has seen you through.

THE QUEEN OF BEAUTY AND COURAGE

DAY ONE – MADE TO BE A QUEEN

Today's reading: Page 227 through break on page 230

This reading covers: Esther 1-2

Summary: God's sovereignty puts Esther on the throne.

Consider this:

What were some of the seemingly “chance” circumstances that led to Esther becoming queen? Have there been circumstances in your life that at the time seemed inconsequential? Did they turn out to be pivotal in your growth as a Christian or your opportunity to advance God's kingdom? Think about the places where you currently connect with others – in the work place, your neighborhood, your church, your circle of friends, even your family. Could God have placed you there for a reason? Are you open and willing to be used by God for his purpose?

For further reading: Ephesians 1:1-14

Prayer:

Lord, help me take notice of relationships and events you place before me. Help me discern if circumstances are indeed opportunities for your purpose. Help me see your hand in everything I do. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

DAY TWO – ENEMY

Today's reading: Break on page 230 through break on page 233

This reading covers: Esther 3-4

Summary: Haman sets out to destroy God's people.

Consider this:

Mordecai refused to bow down to (worship) anyone or anything besides the God of Israel. What are some situations today that might call for you to make a public declaration of your faith? Upon learning of the king's death decree, the Jews banded together in mourning, fasting and prayer. Why do tragedies unite people? What are some things we can do to support our fellow Christians in need?

For further reading: Hebrews 10:24-25; 1 Peter 3:13-17

Prayer:

Father God, thank you for the never ending love and protection you give to those who call you Lord. Give us the conviction of Mordecai to stand firm in our faith. Help us to be a church of compassionate believers striving to make a difference. We ask this in the name of Christ our Savior, Amen.

DAY THREE – A TIME AS THIS

Today's reading: Break on page 233 through end of chapter

This reading covers: Esther 5-9

Summary: Esther's courage results in the salvation of her people.

Consider this:

Have you ever wondered why God might select you to accomplish his will? Does the success story of Esther – who had the disadvantage of being a female at a time in history when females had little importance, an orphan and a Jew living in exile in a foreign land – make you reconsider? God chose Esther to save an entire nation, and he still uses the weak and the insignificant, armed with his strength and protection, to change the world. What are you facing right now that demands courage? As a Christ-follower, where does your inner strength and courage come from? If God has faith in you to do great things for him, who are you to argue?

For further reading: Psalm 121; Isaiah 41:8-13; Acts 4:1-13; Romans 8:28-39

Prayer:

Dear Father in heaven, you know my fears, my weaknesses and my worries. I don't know how I can face these obstacles alone. Please be with me. Make me brave. Even though I feel insignificant, use me for your purpose. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

REBUILDING THE WALLS

DAY ONE – A HEART FOR GOD

Today's reading: Page 239 through break on page 244

This reading covers: Ezra 7; Nehemiah 1-2

Summary: God uses a foreign king and the heart of Nehemiah to rebuild Jerusalem.

Consider this:

Are you concerned about the things God is concerned about? When God wants to act in a certain situation, can he move through you to accomplish his purposes? What would it take for you to be available to God? Since we see that God can use even a pagan king to accomplish his purposes, we know he can use anyone. I wonder how much more God wants to use his children to do his will.

For further reading: Deuteronomy 6:4-6; Jeremiah 18:1-4; Romans 12:1-2

Prayer:

Father, turn my heart towards you. I want to be available to you to respond according to your will. Use me for your purposes. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY TWO – COMMITTED TO COMPLETION

Today's reading: Break on page 244 through break on page 246

This reading covers: Nehemiah 4-6

Summary: In spite of opposition, the people stay focused on the task before them.

Consider this:

How do you respond when things don't go as planned? How quickly do you give up when there are obstacles in your way? God wants to use you to accomplish his purposes, but the path ahead won't always be easy.

For further reading: 2 Corinthians 4:8-9; Philippians 3:12-14

Prayer:

Father, how incredible to realize that you invite me to be part of what you are doing. Help me stay focused on your plans and give me the courage and determination to see things through to the end. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY THREE – REBUILDING HEARTS

Today's reading: Break on page 246 through end of chapter

This reading covers: Nehemiah 7-8; Malachi 1-4

Summary: The walls were completed, but the people's hearts were in disrepair.

Consider this:

Which is easier to repair, issues on the outside or issues on the inside? God's people took care of the Temple and the walls, but their hearts were still in bad shape. When it comes to the internal issues of the heart, we must learn we are dependent on God's help.

For further reading: Psalm 51:7-12; Ezekiel 36:24-27; Matthew 9:4-8

Prayer:

Father, take my heart and make it fully yours. Continue to mold and shape me, from the inside out, into the person you want me to be. In Jesus' name, Amen.

THE BIRTH OF THE KING

DAY ONE – GOD FROM THE BEGINNING

Today's reading: Page 255 through break on page 258

This reading covers: Matthew 1; Luke 1-2; John 1

Summary: Though he is God from the beginning, Jesus comes to us by a very humble birth.

Consider this:

The dichotomy of Christ: he is God and was involved in creation. He humbled himself and came to earth as a human baby, frail and subject to all the trials and tribulations we experience. What do you think about this holy God who would humble himself even to the point of death? How does this example humble you so that you can worship him as he deserves?

For further reading: John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16-17; Luke 1:30-31; Philippians 2:6-8

Prayer:

Read aloud Mary's prayer of praise to God seen in Luke 1:46-55. Use this as your closing prayer.

DAY TWO – ANOTHER KING?

Today's reading: Break on page 258 through break on page 260

This reading covers: Matthew 2

Summary: Jesus' birth caused quite a stir in the Roman world.

Consider this:

What are your thoughts about the birth of Jesus Christ. How does this important event affect your salvation? Your walk? Your talk? In what ways did Jesus' birth create a stir in your own life? How did his entrance into your world drastically change your life?

For further reading: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Galatians 2:20-21

Prayer:

Jesus' coming into my world has changed everything! Thank you for giving me a sense of peace and purpose. Thank you for your strength and presence. I pray I will never be the same! In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY THREE – JESUS AS A BOY

Today's reading: Break on page 260 through end of chapter

This reading covers: Luke 2

Summary: The Bible gives us a brief glimpse into Jesus' childhood.

Consider this:

Even as an infant, Jesus had to escape death. His time had not yet come. Then as a young teenager, he separated briefly from his earthly parents in order to do his Father's will. How did Jesus, at this young age, amaze the wise men of Jerusalem? What does this tell you about his divine/human nature?

The Bible tells us that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature. He went on to do and say many amazing things, even working numerous miracles.

For further reading: John 21:24-25

Prayer:

Father, I'm grateful that Jesus experienced all of life from birth to death. Because of this, I know he knows what I'm going through. Thank you for loving me so much. In Jesus' name, Amen.

JESUS' MINISTRY BEGINS

DAY ONE – LAMB OF GOD

Today's reading: Page 265 through break on page 269

This reading covers: Matthew 3-4; John 1-2

Summary:

John the Baptist reveals Jesus to the world. John the Baptist called Jesus “the Lamb of God” as a picture of the sacrificial system God had ordained so long ago. Jesus, the Lamb of God, would be sacrificed once and for all.

Consider this:

From the following list, choose one name for Jesus that speaks to you today. How do you need him to minister to you today? How has he shown himself to you in the past? Choose one and share your thoughts in your journal.

Names for Jesus:

Word, Living Water, Bread of Life, Shepherd, Savior, Prince of Peace, Light of the World, Lord, Alpha and Omega, Redeemer, Master, Friend, Messiah.

For further reading:

Use the concordance found in the back of many traditional Bibles, or go to biblegateway.com to find some verses where that name appears. Look up your chosen word or type it into the search bar on the Web page. Verses will appear that contain this name. Reading some of the verses will make this aspect of Christ's character more alive to you.

Prayer:

Jesus, thank you today that you are my _____. (fill in the blank with the name you have chosen)
Reveal this aspect of who you are to me today and help me show you to others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY TWO – A NEW BIRTH

Today's reading: Break on page 269 through break on page 270

This reading covers: John 3

Summary: Jesus' radical message about being born again.

This portion of our reading contains one of the most frequently quoted Bible verses in all of scripture. If you are a sports fan, you have undoubtedly seen John 3:16 written on a placard in the bleachers of many contests.

Consider this:

Being born again is a personal experience. Look up John 3:16 and make it personal in your journal. It will look something like this: “For God so loved me that he gave his only son, that if I believe in him I shall not perish but have eternal life.”

For further reading: Matthew 16:24-26

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for your son. Thank you for getting personal with me, so that I might understand my need, and your great gift. Please give me the opportunity to share with someone how they can be born again. Help me to be bold with your message of salvation. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY THREE – AMONG THE PEOPLE

Today's reading: Break on page 270 through end of chapter

This reading covers: Matthew 4, 11; Mark 1-3; John 4

Summary: Reading Jesus' story reminds us that ministry happens among the people.

Consider this:

Jesus' power, compassion, and love are shown through his people. Some of what Jesus did is beyond our calling. But we can buy school supplies for underprivileged children, provide toiletries for the homeless, paint a room in a Habitat for Humanity home, make a casserole for a sick neighbor, trim the shrubs for an elderly friend, hold babies in the church nursery, listen to a middle school girl pour out her heart or move chairs in a worship center.

The power of a servant's heart speaks his message of love for others. What can you do today, this weekend, to help someone else? Where do you serve? If you don't serve, it is time to put feet to your heart. If God has made a difference in your life, then you need to go out and make a difference in another.

For further reading: Matthew 20:20-28; John 13:34-35; Philippians 4:9

Prayer:

Father, thank you for those who serve me. I pray that you would help me to be a servant to others. Make me aware of opportunities, and give me a boldness to step out in obedience to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

NO ORDINARY MAN

DAY ONE – TEACHER

Today's reading: Page 277 through break on page 283

This reading covers: Matthew 5-7; Mark 4; Luke 10, 15

Summary: Jesus teaches in everyday language so the people can understand.

Consider this:

Jesus' parables of the lost sheep, lost coin and lost son all convey one truth: God seeks after what is lost. Why would this have been such a radical concept to those religious leaders schooled in the law? The story of the Good Samaritan ends with a direct command, "Go and do likewise." If you agree those words weren't just meant for the audience that day but for you as well, think of some small acts of kindness you can do every day to obey this command. When asked how to pray, Jesus gave his disciples a succinct example that includes praise as well as requests for needs, protection and forgiveness. Think about your prayers. Are they forced and contrived or are they genuine conversations from the heart?

For further reading: Ephesians 2:8-10; Philippians 4:6-7; Colossians 4:2-6

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I love you. I thank you for the spiritual truths you so clearly gave to all "who would have ears to hear." Help me love my neighbor. Thank you for the privilege of being able to talk to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY TWO – MIRACLE MAN

Today's reading: Break on page 283 through bottom of page 288

This reading covers: Matthew 9, 14; Mark 4-6

Summary: Jesus performs miracles that show who he is.

Consider this:

What is your definition of the word miracle? Do you think the word is used too casually today? On the other hand, if a proper definition of the word is "an act that only God can perform," what would you say to someone who stated, "God no longer performs miracles like he did in the Bible?" Besides healing, what other benefits did the recipients of Jesus' miracles receive? What benefits can you receive from reading about Jesus' miracles?

For further reading: Psalm 77; John 10:22-30; Acts 2:22-24

Prayer:

Savior King, I stand amazed at the miracles you performed while you were here on earth. Thank you for the miracles you still perform today in and around my life. Thank you for rescuing me from my sin. Amen.

DAY THREE – HARD TEACHING

Today's reading: Bottom of page 288 through end of chapter

This reading covers: John 6

Summary: The crowds followed because of food, but Jesus is the bread of life.

Consider this:

For some, Jesus was merely entertainment or someone they hoped would become an earthly king. He astounded them with his interpretations of the law and his miracles, but they somehow missed the big picture: he was the Messiah! Why did Jesus compare himself to the manna of his listeners' ancestors? What do Jesus' symbolic words, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life," mean to you? What significance does the Lord's Supper hold for every Christ-follower?

For further reading: Deuteronomy 8:1-5; Luke 4:1-4

Prayer:

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God." We hunger and thirst for you, dear Jesus. Fulfill us and sustain us as we grow in our relationship with you. Amen.

JESUS, THE SON OF GOD

DAY ONE – YOU ARE THE CHRIST!

Today's reading: Page 291 through break on page 295

This reading covers: Matthew 16-17; Mark 8-9; John 7-8

Summary: Peter's words clearly express the truth about who Jesus is.

Consider this:

Have you ever just "got it"? Maybe you've been wondering about something for a while and then it becomes crystal clear. You got it! That must be what happened to Peter when Jesus asked in Matthew 16:13, "Who do people say the son of Man is?" As he began thinking about this, God brought it into focus for him. "You are the Christ, the son of the living God."

For further reading: John 1:29-34; 11:21-27

Prayer:

Father, thank you for Peter's clear declaration of Jesus. Help me to stand and state clearly that Jesus is the Christ! In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY TWO – TRUE LIFE

Today's reading: Break on page 295 through break on page 299

This reading covers: Mark 10; John 11

Summary: Life is not the absence of death, but the presence of Jesus.

Questions to consider:

Lazarus had died. Jesus raised him from the dead. Yet Lazarus would one day die again. So what is true life? It must be found beyond the here and now.

For further reading: 1 Corinthians 15:35-58; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Prayer:

Father, thank you for making true life available to me through Jesus Christ. Help me to see the temporary nature of all that is around me, and help me to focus on things that are eternal. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY THREE – CLEAR PURPOSE

Today's reading: Break on page 299 through end of chapter

This reading covers: Matthew 21; Mark 11-14; Luke 22; John 12

Summary: Jesus came for one reason.

Questions to consider:

What's your purpose? How would you define the reason you are here? What's it all about? For many, these questions remain unanswered for a lifetime. Jesus knew his purpose and he lived it out to the fullest.

For further reading: Matthew 16:21-23; 20:17-19; Luke 18:31-34

Prayer:

Father, I'm grateful Jesus perfectly lived out his purpose. Help me to walk close to you so I can understand and then live out my purpose. In Jesus' name, Amen.

THE HOUR OF DARKNESS

DAY ONE – FINAL MOMENTS

Today's reading: Page 303 through break on page 307

This reading covers: Matthew 26; John 14-17

Summary: Jesus models service and comforts his followers in their final time together.

Consider this:

Preparation. Service. Submission. This was the pattern Jesus followed during his last hours.

Preparation:

Jesus chose the place, the time and the guests. What preparations do you make when you read God's word? Where is the place? What is the time? How do you prepare yourself to welcome the Holy Spirit who teaches all things?

Service:

Jesus washed his disciples' feet. How do you wash the feet of others? You can "wash other people's feet" through words of encouragement, by shopping for them, taking care of their children, by feeding them.

Submission:

Jesus asked the Father to remove the cup, but then added, "Not my will but thine be done." How have you submitted to the Father's will?

For further reading: Philippians 2:1-11

Prayer:

Thank you for showing me clearly the way you intend for me to live. Jesus, you perfectly modeled a life pleasing to God right up to the very end. Help me now to live like you. In your name I pray, Amen.

DAY TWO – NOT MY WILL

Today's reading: Break on 307 through break on page 312

This reading covers: Matthew 26-27; Luke 22; John 18

Summary: From a peaceful garden to a noisy palace, Jesus follows God's plan.

Consider this:

Surrounding Jesus during this dark time were the faithful and the unfaithful. Judas proved himself an enemy rather than a trusted friend. Peter vowed to never fail Jesus, but he denied him three times. The apostles fell asleep when they were supposed to be praying and watching. Then, fearing for their own lives, they all ran away.

When would you have been an enemy of Jesus? How were you released from that state to become his friend?

For further reading: Romans 5:1-11

Prayer:

It makes me sad to know that I was counted among your enemies. But I am so thankful that you made it possible for us to be friends. Thank you Jesus for following God's plan all the way to the cross. I pray in your name, Amen.

DAY THREE – THE END?

Today's reading: Break on page 312 through end of chapter

This reading covers: Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 19

Summary: As the crucifixion takes place, it seems all hope is lost.

Consider this:

Spend time reviewing the suffering of Christ. If you had been in the crowd, what role would you have played?

Imagine yourself as a Roman soldier. Would you have been the one who drove the nails, or the one who said, "Surely this was the son of God"?

Imagine yourself as one of those who passed by. Would you have hurled insults at him, or would you have wept hopelessly?

Imagine yourself as one of the thieves crucified on either side of Christ. Would you have been the one who cursed, or the one who asked for mercy?

Imagine yourself among the family and friends. Would you have stood far off, or remained at the foot of the cross?

For further reading: Isaiah 53

Prayer:

It is hard to imagine the scene at the cross. But as I look back over what happened, I respond with great sadness and great joy. Jesus, Thank you for dying for me. I pray in your name. Amen.

RESURRECTION

DAY ONE – RESURRECTION

Today's reading: Page 315 through gap on page 317

This reading covers: Matthew 27-28; Mark 16; John 20

Summary: Jesus rose from the dead, just as he said he would.

When Jesus died it appeared evil had finally won. But just as he promised, Jesus rose from the dead. With that one act he secured his identity as the son of God, and proved that he could be trusted to do whatever he said he would do.

In the end, Jesus' victory was not just over evil. It was victory over death itself.

Consider this:

What do you need Jesus to overcome? Are you trusting yourself to overcome? Or are you trusting Jesus? Do you need to overcome something in the world, or is it within you?

For further reading: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58; 1 John 5:1-5

Prayer:

Jesus, thank you that you are who you say you are. Thank you that you can do what you say you can do. Thank you that, because you have overcome the world, I can have peace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY TWO – BACK TO FISHING

Today's reading: Gap on page 317 through gap on page 320

The reading covers: Luke 24; John 20-21

Summary: When they go back to their previous ways, the disciples encounter Jesus.

The disciples figured it was time to fish or cut bait. It's what they knew. It's what was comfortable. They thought they'd lost their identity as Christ-followers when they no longer had Christ, so they picked up where they had left off in life – as fishermen. But Jesus did not leave them where they were. Jesus never wants to leave us where we are.

As believers we have a new identity. We are a new creation.

Consider this:

Who are we supposed to be like? Our goal is not to know more of Jesus, but to be more like him. Our identity is not what we make of ourselves, but what Jesus wants to make of us. Some Christ-followers have a profound life change when they become believers. Others have subtle changes which happen deep within their souls. Thinking of your old identity, without Christ, what comes to mind? How have you changed as a new creation?

For further reading: Romans 8:28-30; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Peter 1:13-16

Prayer:

Jesus, help me to know you better in order to be more like you. Conform me to your image. In your name, Amen.

DAY THREE – WHAT’S NEXT?

Today’s reading: Gap on page 320 through end of chapter

This reading covers: Matthew 28; John 20-21

Summary: Jesus gives his followers direction for the future.

Spiritual growth is all about taking Next Steps. Everyone has one. The surest way to make zero progress in our lives is to stay right where we are; the same mistakes, the same habits, the same hurts. The surest way to move ahead into a life of victory is to take the next step on our journey with Christ.

Consider this:

The next step for any believer is to do more, go farther, dig deeper. Have you just become a Christ-follower? The next step is to begin a daily time with God. If you have that habit down well, maybe it is time to start serving. If you’ve been a Christ-follower for years, consider yourself mature in the faith, and maintain consistent godly habits in your Christ-filled life, then you’d better be making disciples.

Jesus loves us where we are, but he does not want us to stay there. Following Christ is never accomplished. We finish when we die. Until then, there is always room for growth.

For further reading: Romans 12:1-2

Prayer:

Dear Father, help me to take my next best step with you. Challenge me to move ahead in my journey with you. I know it is not always easy, but you promised to be with me always. And I can do all things through you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

NEW BEGINNINGS

DAY ONE – POWER

Today's reading: Page 323 through first break on page 330

This reading covers: Acts 1-5

Summary: When the Holy Spirit came, the world was changed.

Consider this:

Before ascending into heaven, Jesus told his disciples they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Can you image how impossible a task that must have seemed to a handful of people? What power would be behind their ability to carry out such a commission? Does witnessing for Christ seem overwhelming to you? How does knowing you have that same power (the Holy Spirit) change that? How did the Holy Spirit aid Peter and John as they spoke before the crowds and religious leaders? How can you contribute to instilling “Acts 2” vitality (devotion to teachings, fellowship, prayer and sharing) in your church?

For further reading: John 14:15-31; Galatians 5:16-26

Prayer:

Holy Spirit, I invite you into my heart. Convict me, intercede on my behalf, produce godly attributes in me, encourage, strengthen and empower me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY TWO – RADICAL CONVERSION

Today's reading: First break on page 330 through break on page 333

This reading covers: Acts 6-9

Summary: Saul's life is radically changed when he meets Jesus.

Consider this:

To say that Saul was set in his ways before his conversion would be an understatement. Likewise, Ananias was certainly hesitant to reach out to someone known to be his enemy. But when God showed up, they listened and obeyed. Are you listening and obeying God's directive for your life? With God's help, is it really possible for a person to do a complete turnaround as Saul did?

For further reading: 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Prayer:

Lord, I am astounded at your gift of grace -- how you run after even those who ignore you. Open my heart that I may hear your plan for my life and, like Saul, turn me around to be your servant. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

DAY THREE – MESSAGE FOR ALL

Today's reading: Break on page 333 through end of chapter

This reading covers: Acts 10-12

Summary: Peter helps the early church learn an important lesson about the gospel.

Consider this:

Think about some cultural practices or beliefs that once were acceptable but now are taboo. Why did Jesus' disciples have to abandon old thinking? In what ways had Jesus already demonstrated he had come to redeem everyone? What is the only standard for inclusion into God's family? Compare the prejudice Jews showed towards Gentiles to modern day prejudices people hold. As a Christ-follower how do you defeat prejudices you might inwardly hold as well as make a stand against prejudices displayed by others?

For further reading: Galatians 3:26-29; 1 Timothy 2:1-7

Prayer:

Father God, thank you for your love. Please keep my thoughts and actions free from anything that hurts or degrades others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

PAUL'S MISSION

DAY ONE – DIFFICULT MISSION

Today's reading: Page 337 through break on page 344

This reading covers: Acts 13-18

Summary: Misunderstood and jailed God promises to be with Paul.

Consider this:

Paul's sufferings brought greater ministry, and his ministry came with greater sufferings. Note the sufferings of Paul as he continued on his missionary journeys.

What sufferings have you endured since receiving Jesus Christ? What does Paul say helped him endure, which can also help you endure?

For further reading: 2 Corinthians 11:23-28; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Prayer:

Father, I know that life is not going to be easy. I understand that there will be difficult times. But thank you that you will be with me through all things. Use difficult situations help me grow. I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY TWO – LIVING AND WAITING

Today's reading: Break on page 344 through break on page 350

This reading covers: Acts 18-19; 1 Thessalonians 1-5

Summary: 1 Thessalonians helps us know how to live today as we wait for Jesus' return.

Consider this:

The church of the Thessalonians was a baby church but already had displayed itself as a model for others. What main points did Paul bring out in his praises of this church? How can we emulate those same qualities in our own ministry? What words of Paul comfort you when he speaks of the return of Christ? What are the various instructions Paul gives as we await Christ's return?

For further reading: 2 Peter 3:10-18

Prayer:

Thank you for your word. Thank you that it shows me how to live day-to-day. Give me a desire for your truth. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY THREE – THE TEACHER

Today's reading: Break on page 350 through end of chapter

This reading covers: Romans; 1 Corinthians; Galatians

Summary: Paul was a great teacher God used to help his people know how to live.

Consider this:

As Paul addressed each church, he focused on different areas that needed instruction or encouragement. Consider the following themes in his writings and relate them to your own life and service in the church:

Flee from sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18)

Find your gift and use it (Romans 12:4-8)

Be wary of those preaching another gospel (Galatians 1:6-9)

Stand firm in your faith (1 Corinthians 16:13-14)

Be led by the Spirit of God (Galatians 5:16-26)

Offer yourself as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2)

For further reading: Colossians 3:15-17

Prayer:

Jesus, use your word to change my life. Keep me close to you as I spend time in the Bible. May your truth sink deeply into my heart. In Jesus' name, Amen.

PAUL'S FINAL DAYS

DAY ONE – HEADING INTO TROUBLE

Today's reading: Page 363 through break on page 369

This reading covers: Acts 20-22

Summary: Because God sent him, Paul goes to Jerusalem knowing trouble is there.

Paul was a follower of Christ. His devotion to Jesus was his defining role. When God made it clear Paul was to go to Jerusalem, he went despite certain persecution.

Consider this:

We hear the term “blind faith” all the time. Real faith is not blind at all. Faith is being sure. Faith is being certain. Faith involves a supernatural confidence.

We do not follow a God who requires blind faith. We follow a God who sent his son, so that we can have faith in someone real. When God sends us, we can be confident that he who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

For further reading: Hebrews 11

Prayer:

Father, you never ask me to do anything that you are not willing to do with me. I am so grateful that I do not live this life alone. Thank you for your presence as I walk the journey of faith here on earth. Give me the confidence I need to have in you. Give me faith to be sure and be certain that what you have in store for me is exactly what I need. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY TWO – GOD'S GRACE

Today's reading: Break on page 369 through break on page 376

This reading covers: Acts 27-28; Ephesians 1-6

Summary: Even in prison, Paul shares about the incredible grace of God.

We know Paul's background and what he had done against the name of Christ. We know what he deserved from God, and it wasn't grace. Paul was keenly aware of God's tremendous gift grace. He spent the rest of his life preaching in the name of Christ and offering Christ's grace to anyone who would listen to him, including us.

Consider this:

Mercy is being saved from something, and grace is getting a gift of something. Every believer is saved from hell and given heaven. For each of us, mercy and grace looks a little different in our daily lives. How is your life different because of God's mercy and grace? What have you been saved from? What did you receive?

For further reading: Galatians 2:20-21; Ephesians 1:3-10; Ephesians 2:1-10; Hebrews 4:15-16

Prayer:

Father, thank you for your grace. Thank you for sending Jesus. Because of him I can approach your throne of grace with confidence, to receive mercy from you, and grace to help me in my time of need. I deserve neither, and yet you give me both. Thank you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY THREE – FAITHFUL UNTIL THE END

Today's reading: Break on page 376 through end of chapter

This reading covers: 2 Timothy 1-4

Summary: As Paul nears death, he encourages the next generation of Christian leaders.

Consider this:

We know what a zealous unbeliever Paul was before his conversion. We know he became a passionate Christ-follower after meeting Jesus. Paul pursued Christ-likeness with the discipline of an Olympic champion, and even at the end of his life he never ceased to encourage others to do the same.

For further reading:

- 1 Corinthians 9:24-27
- Philippians 4:13
- Hebrews 13:7
- Hebrews 6:12
- 1 Corinthians 4:16
- 2 Timothy 4:7-8

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for the example of men like Paul, who were faithful to the end. Thank you for his words, which give me faith in my journey, and hope for the prize at the end. Our rewards are the same, Paul's and mine. Help me to be faithful to the end, in word and in deed. I want to be an example for someone else. In Jesus' name, Amen.

THE END OF TIME

DAY ONE – JESUS REVEALED

Today's reading: Page 379 through break on page 382

This reading covers: Revelation 1-3

Summary: Jesus himself is revealed to John.

Consider this:

Imagine getting the opportunity to talk physics with Albert Einstein. How about discussing music with Beethoven or baseball with Babe Ruth? While each of these people would have amazing insights into their fields, we would miss something tremendous if we only talked shop with them.

If we are not careful, this is what could happen in our relationship with Jesus. Sure, John's revelation contained incredible images of future events and he learned much about what was to come. But more than anything, there was Jesus.

Are you content meeting with Jesus without an agenda? Do you ever come into his presence simply to spend time with him and not to have him answer all your requests? How long could you sit still before him and just be amazed?

For further reading: Hebrews 1:1-4

Prayer: Help me to be quiet right now and enjoy who you are.

DAY TWO – PRAISE

Today's reading: Break on page 382 through break on page 385

This reading covers: Revelation 4, 5, 19

Summary: Praise is the focus in heaven.

Consider this:

Help Wanted: Must be able to praise God 24/7. Ten thousand times ten thousand positions available. Benefits are out of this world!

That's the scene in heaven. Non-stop praising the Lord. That is what he deserves!

What would it look like for you to join in the act while still here on the earth? How could you praise God 24/7 while working 9 to 5?

For further reading: Romans 12:1-2

Prayer:

Father, you are worthy of my praise. And that means you are worthy of my best, my time, my resources, my hopes, my future; everything I am and have. I offer it all to you because of who you are. I praise you, in Jesus' name. Amen!

DAY THREE – GOD MAKES ALL THINGS NEW

Today's reading: Break on page 385 through end of chapter

This reading covers: Revelation 20, 21

Summary: A new heaven and a new earth await the followers of Jesus Christ

Consider this:

There has to be more than this! There has to be more than the heartaches and frustration of this world; more than the sorrow and pain all around us.

The good news is there is more! From the beginning of The Story, God has had a place prepared for those willing to follow him. God has pursued you for an intimate, personal relationship and this relationship is designed to last forever!

For further reading: John 14:1-6; Romans 8:18-25

Prayer:

Jesus, I can only imagine what you have prepared for me. I pray that you would give me glimpses of heaven so I don't get too attached to the earth. Help me to see that I'm not home yet. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Thank you for journeying through *The Story* with us. It has been our great joy to have guided your steps during these days together. It is our hope that you will continue to spend time with God in his Word each and every day.

During our time together you have discovered that the Bible is a book you can understand, learn from, and even love. You now have a sense of the big picture and have seen that all of God's Word is really telling one story – *The Story*. We also hope you have come to find out more about your story in the pages of the Bible.

The heart and soul behind all of this is a bedrock belief that God has revealed Himself to us through his son and his Word. We firmly believe that your life will be changed as you meet with God in the pages of the Bible.