



March/April 2025

Today

refresh, refocus, renew

THE PEOPLE AROUND JESUS

ALSO: THINGS I WISH I KNEW WHEN I WAS YOUNGER

Dear Friends:

Have you ever said to yourself, “I wish I had known these things when I was younger?” It’s hard to understand life until you have experienced it and have gained some wisdom. Sometimes, though, mentors—experienced Christian brothers or sisters, pastors, and teachers—can help us with insight and guidance as we grow in our experience and faith.



In the month of March, Pastor Darrel Delaney, chaplain and *Groundwork* podcast host, serves as our mentor by sharing insights he has gained over the years in his walk with Jesus. His prayer is that sharing his walk with Jesus will help us to deepen our own relationship with Jesus and help us navigate life’s challenges as we discover and grow in the abundant life Jesus has promised.

Then, in April, Pastor Bret Lamsma guides us through the story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, which we celebrate on Easter. Everyone loves a great story, and the story of Jesus—filled with tension, suspense, and a miraculous outcome—is the greatest story of all time! While Jesus himself is at the center of this story, we can learn much about him and how he calls us to live by observing some of his family members, his disciples and other followers, and his critics and enemies. Through Jesus we have been made right with God and called to share this story with the world.

May you be refreshed, refocused, and renewed in God’s Word!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kurt Selles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kurt Selles

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**“Things I Wish I Knew
When I Was Younger”
Darrell Delaney**



**“The People
around Jesus”
Bret Lamsma**

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**ReFrame
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march

Things I Wish I Knew When I Was Younger

Darrell Delaney

Throughout my life, I've encountered moments of growth, challenge, and profound lessons that have shaped my faith and perspective. Looking back, I am grateful for the mentors, friends, and moments of divine revelation that have given me insight and guidance. Reflecting on these things, I have sometimes said to myself, "I wish I knew these things when I was younger." So these devotions are born out of a desire to share insights that have been helpful to me—in the hope that they may be helpful to you too.

My prayer is that through these reflections you may be able to deepen your relationship with God, navigate life's challenges with faith, and discover the abundant life Jesus has promised. May you be blessed, encouraged, and empowered in your discovery and growth in the grace and truth of God.

Rev. Darrell Delaney is a cohost of ReFrame's podcast ministry Groundwork, and he serves as lead chaplain with Reach the Forgotten Jail Ministry in Michigan. He considers it his life's calling to create and facilitate life-giving environments in which people can thrive and grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ. Darrell and his wife, Kia, have three children. He enjoys spending time with family, walking, reading, and playing basketball, chess, and video games.

LEARNING TO LOVE MYSELF

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. —Psalm 139:14

In my youth I struggled with self-worth and often felt inadequate. I vividly recall a time in high school when I was surrounded by peers who seemed more talented, attractive, and confident than I was. The constant comparison made me feel flawed. One day, a caring teacher noticed my struggle and shared Psalm 139:14 with me. She reminded me that God's creations are wonderful—including me!

Learning to love myself took time. I had to deliberately practice seeing myself through God's eyes. I realized that self-love isn't about arrogance or self-centeredness; it's about acknowledging and appreciating the unique person God created me to be.

Psalm 139:14 declares that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made." Each of us is crafted with intentionality and care

by our Creator, who loves us. Understanding this helped me to break free of the chains of self-doubt and criticism. Loving oneself is a vital part of loving others; we cannot pour from an empty cup.

As we embrace God's love for us, we find the strength to love ourselves. This self-love allows us to live confidently, knowing that we are valued and cherished. And by accepting ourselves, we can better fulfill God's purpose for our lives and extend his love to the people around us.

Heavenly Father, thank you for creating me. Help me to see myself through your eyes and embrace the love you have for me. Teach me to love myself so that I can love others more fully. In Jesus, Amen.

LEARNING FROM THE EXAMPLES OF OTHERS

The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.
—Proverbs 12:15

I had a friend who was a very handy repairman. One day I discovered a leak in my plumbing and didn't know how to fix it. I went to him for advice, and he showed me how to fix the problem. His help saved me hundreds of dollars, avoiding water damage throughout my house.

Over the years, I have realized the importance of learning from others' experiences. Observing others' successes and mistakes can provide valuable lessons. We often think we must figure everything out on our own, but wisdom invites us to learn from others.

Proverbs helps us see that surrounding ourselves with wise mentors and friends can profoundly help in our decision making and growth.

There were times when I didn't heed advice, and I faced hard consequences. Ignoring a men-

tor's caution about a business venture, for example, led to a financial loss. Looking back, I can see how pride and stubbornness can cloud judgment, leading to avoidable mistakes. Learning from others calls for humility and openness, recognizing that we don't have all the answers.

God places people in our lives to guide and teach us. In addition, the Bible is filled with stories of people who learned valuable lessons through their experiences—both good and bad. By observing their examples, we gain insight into living wisely and faithfully.

Lord, help us to be open to the wisdom of others. May we apply their lessons to our lives as we seek to honor you. In Jesus, Amen.

COMPARING MYSELF WITH OTHERS

When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.

—2 Corinthians 10:12

In my younger years, I often found myself caught in the trap of comparison. In one situation, for example, I wanted a promotion at work. I watched colleagues advance, seemingly effortlessly, while I struggled with feelings of inadequacy. The more I compared my progress to theirs, the more disheartened I became. I remember spending sleepless nights worrying about how I measured up, rather than focusing on my own growth and abilities.

Looking back, I realize how harmful that was. It robbed me of joy and blinded me to the unique gifts and path God had in mind for me. In 2 Corinthians 10 we find some helpful advice about serving the Lord and not worrying about comparisons with others, especially if they think highly of themselves.

Today, social media may often magnify the temptation to

compare our lives with those of others. We see snapshots of success and happiness, but people rarely reveal their struggles and failures. It's crucial to remember that our worth is not defined by how we stack up against others but by our identity in Christ.

As we go through life, let's focus on our personal growth and the unique path God has set before us. May we find contentment in his plan and trust that he is guiding us where we need to be.

Dear God, help us to resist the urge to compare ourselves with others. Remind us of our unique worth and purpose in you. With your wisdom may we find contentment in you. Amen.

PRACTICING HUMILITY

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

—Philippians 2:3-4

When I was younger, I often felt the need to prove myself. Whether it was in school, sports, or social situations, I was always striving to be the best, to outshine others, and to seek recognition. One day a mentor gently pointed out that my constant need for validation was rooted in pride and insecurity. He shared with me the importance of humility, noting that true greatness lies in serving others and putting their needs ahead of my own.

This was a hard lesson to learn, but it changed my perspective. Practicing humility doesn't come naturally; it requires intentional effort and a heart transformed by God's grace. It means recognizing that every good thing we have comes from God and that we are not superior to others. It involves acknowledging our limitations and being willing to

learn from others, even those whom we might think are less experienced.

Jesus is the ultimate example of humility. Though he is God, he chose to humble himself, taking the form of a servant and sacrificing his life for us. In following his example, we learn to value others, to listen more, and to serve without expecting anything in return.

I've learned that humility allows us to see others through God's eyes and to respond with compassion and grace. Practicing humility means letting go of our ego and embracing the mindset of a servant, just as Jesus did.

Lord, teach us to practice humility. Transform us to reflect your love and grace. Amen.

EMBRACING PATIENCE

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

—Romans 12:12

In my younger days, impatience often clouded my vision. I yearned for instant results, quick solutions, and immediate gratification. It wasn't until I embraced the wisdom of patience that I truly understood its importance.

Patience involves more than waiting; it's a virtue cultivated through endurance, trust, and faith. It teaches us to remain steadfast in times of trial and uncertainty, knowing that God's timing is perfect.

The Scriptures remind us to "be patient in tribulation." This doesn't mean passively enduring difficulties but, rather, maintaining hope and perseverance in the midst of challenges. Patience allows us to navigate life's twists and turns with grace and resilience.

Jesus, our ultimate example, demonstrated patience in his

earthly ministry. He endured hardships, faced opposition, and waited for the appointed time to fulfill his mission. His patience was rooted in unwavering trust in God's plan.

Practicing patience requires discipline and a shift in perspective. It's about focusing on progress rather than perfection, trusting that each step forward, no matter how small, brings us closer to our goals.

Lord, teach us the importance of patience in our daily lives. Help us to endure trials and struggles with grace, rejoicing in hope and remaining constant in prayer. Strengthen our faith and trust in your perfect timing. In Jesus' name, Amen.

EXPECTATIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS

The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.
—Proverbs 4:7

I'm thankful to have learned the valuable lesson of clarifying expectations with others and reducing assumptions that often lead to misunderstandings. It's a process rooted in wisdom and insight.

Proverbs 4:7 reminds us that wisdom begins with gaining understanding and insight. This includes actively seeking clarity in our interactions and communications with others. Rather than assuming intentions or outcomes, we should strive to clarify expectations up front.

Jumping to conclusions based on assumptions can hinder relationships and lead to unnecessary conflicts. Taking the time to communicate openly, ask questions, and listen attentively fosters understanding and promotes harmony.

Jesus, the epitome of wisdom, demonstrated the importance

of clear communication in his teachings and interactions. He listened intently, asked probing questions, and offered clarity to people seeking guidance.

Practicing clarity in expectations and reducing assumptions requires humility and patience. It involves setting aside preconceived notions and approaching situations with an open mind and heart.

Heavenly Father, teach us the importance of clarity and understanding in our daily interactions. Help us to communicate openly, seek clarity in expectations, and reduce assumptions. Strengthen our relationships and promote harmony through wise communication. In Jesus' name, Amen.

GIVING OUR BEST IN ALL WE DO

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters. —Colossians 3:23

As I think about what it means to give our best, I am reminded of a dear friend, a pastor who poured his heart into every sermon—not for applause or recognition but to honor God. His dedication inspired me to approach my work and service in a similar way.

In the workplace I witnessed a colleague who consistently went above and beyond—not for promotions or praise but out of genuine passion and commitment. His example taught me the value of excellence and dedication.

Considering these real-life examples, I've come to understand that giving our best is about more than just meeting expectations—it's about exceeding them with wholehearted effort and dedication.

Colossians 3:23 echoes this sentiment, urging us to work

as for the Lord, not for human approval. It's a mindset shift that transforms mundane tasks into meaningful acts of worship.

Jesus, the ultimate example of giving one's best, served with compassion, healed people who were sick, and taught with authority. His life exemplified wholehearted dedication and service.

Heavenly Father, grant us a spirit of excellence. Teach us to give our best in all we do, inspired by the examples of people who have honored you through their dedication and passion. May our efforts bring glory to your name. In Jesus, Amen.

TRUSTING GOD'S TIMING

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens. . . .
—Ecclesiastes 3:1

Trusting God's timing is a lesson I have learned through seasons of waiting and uncertainty. In those situations Ecclesiastes 3:1 has helped me remember that God is in control of the events in our lives and that his timing is perfect, even when it doesn't align with our expectations.

Trusting in God's timing can often mean giving up our own desire for immediate results. Acknowledging God's wisdom and sovereignty, we recognize he sees the bigger picture and knows what is best for us. When we trust in God's timing, we let go of anxiety and practice patience, confident that he will fulfill his promises in his time.

God's timing is marked by his faithfulness and love. He works all things together for our good (Romans 8:28), even in times of delay or apparent silence.

God's timing prepares us, refines our character, and aligns circumstances for his glory and our ultimate good.

Looking back, I can see that God's timing has brought blessings. In seasons of waiting God has taught me dependence on him, deepened my faith, and opened doors I had never imagined. Each situation has been a divine appointment, revealing his faithfulness and provision in unexpected ways.

If you find yourself discouraged by waiting, I urge you to rest in God's promises and trust his timing. Seek his guidance through prayer and his Word, knowing that he is faithful to fulfill his plans for you at the appointed time.

Father, help us to trust your timing in every aspect of our lives. Amen.

GIVING OURSELVES GRACE

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

—2 Peter 3:18

As I grow and mature in Christ, I've learned the importance of giving myself grace. This lesson is often echoed by the wisdom of mentors and friends who remind me that growth is a process, not an immediate transformation.

One day a close friend gently pointed out that I was too hard on myself for not meeting certain milestones. She shared her own experiences of growth, filled with triumphs and setbacks. Her transparency and kindness helped me to see the value of being patient with myself.

In another example, a pastor emphasized that we need to acknowledge our progress, no matter how small. His words, "God's grace covers our imperfections," encouraged me to view myself through the lens of grace.

"Grow in the grace and knowledge of . . . Jesus Christ," urges 2 Peter 3:18. This involves embracing our imperfections, learning from our mistakes, and celebrating our progress. It's a reminder that God's grace is sufficient for every step of our journey. We need to let go of unrealistic expectations and understand that maturity comes with time and experience.

Another mentor once told me, "Every step forward, no matter how small, is still progress." His words have stayed with me, reminding me that growth is not always visible but is always happening.

Lord, help us to grow in grace, learning from our mistakes and trusting in your ongoing work in us. Through Jesus, Amen.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT CHOICE OF FRIENDS?

Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.
—Proverbs 13:20

I'm thankful to have realized the value of choosing good friends and company. Past experiences and wisdom from mentors have shown me that the people we spend time with can shape our character and outcome in significant ways.

In my younger days I often gravitated toward friends who had interests like mine—but not always the same values. In contrast, I remember a colleague who constantly encouraged me to pursue excellence and integrity. His unwavering support and positive influence spurred me to aim higher and live more faithfully. This clarified for me the importance of surrounding myself with people who uplift and inspire.

Proverbs 13:20 underscores the wisdom in choosing our companions carefully. Walking with the wise not only imparts knowledge but also fosters a life

aligned with God's principles. Conversely, keeping company with people who reject godly wisdom ("fools") can lead to damaging consequences.

Choosing the right friends means seeking out people who exhibit qualities such as honesty, kindness, and faithfulness. These relationships can encourage spiritual growth and provide support during challenging times. It's essential to cultivate friendships that reflect God's love and truth, helping us grow into the people he intends us to be.

Lord, guide us to seek relationships that inspire and encourage us to live faithfully for you. Protect us from harmful influences. Help us to reflect your love and wisdom. In Jesus, Amen.

LEARNING FROM MISTAKES

Though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again, but the wicked stumble when calamity strikes. —Proverbs 24:16

I've come to appreciate the value of learning from mistakes and of reframing failures as opportunities for growth. The insights shared by mentors, friends, and even strangers have profoundly shaped my understanding of resilience and perseverance.

When I was younger, I viewed failure as a reflection of my inadequacy. But a mentor once told me, "Failure is not the opposite of success; it's part of it." That helped me to see mistakes not as dead ends but as stepping stones toward improvement and wisdom.

A memorable example was a project I led that did not go as planned. I felt defeated, but a wise colleague encouraged me to analyze what went wrong and what could be done differently the next time. That helped me to see the experience as a learning opportunity.

I also recall a pastor sharing a story of his own failure in ministry. His transparency and humility taught me that even the people we look up to experience setbacks. This encouraged me to view failure as a shared human experience.

Learning from our mistakes means acknowledging them, seeking feedback, and making necessary adjustments. It involves humility and a willingness to change. By reframing failure, we can grow in resilience, deepen our trust in God's guidance, and continue moving forward with hope.

Father, teach us to learn from our mistakes and to see failures as opportunities for growth. Help us to be resilient and trust in you for guidance. In Jesus' name, Amen.

NORMALIZING OUR EMOTIONS

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.
—Psalm 34:18

In my younger days I struggled to express sadness or fear, thinking they made me look vulnerable. A wise mentor told me, "Emotions are like busy little children. If you don't acknowledge them, they get louder and louder to grab your attention. Once you acknowledge them, they feel seen and calm down." This helped me to see my emotions as valid and to understand myself and my needs.

I remember a preacher sharing his own struggles with anxiety. His honesty and reliance on God's strength gave me the courage to face my own feelings without shame. This was a powerful reminder that even the people we look up to can experience emotional challenges.

A friend once confided in me about struggling with depression. That friend's openness helped me realize that sharing our emotions with trusted

friends can bring comfort and support. Being honest about our feelings can lead to healing and deeper connections.

Psalm 34:18 reassures us that God understands our emotions and is present in our struggles. Normalizing our emotions means acknowledging them, sharing them with people we trust, and seeking God's comfort and guidance.

Feeling a range of emotions is normal and healthy. When we embrace our emotions, we can grow from our experiences, leading to greater emotional and spiritual well-being.

Lord, help us to express our feelings honestly and to seek your comfort and guidance. Strengthen our faith and patience in you. In Jesus, Amen.

UNDERSTANDING THE POWER OF MY STORY

They triumphed . . . by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. . . .
—Revelation 12:11

In the vast library of life, each of us holds a book—a story unique to our experiences, struggles, and triumphs. These narratives, when we share them, have the power to inspire, uplift, and even transform people's lives.

I recall a pivotal moment some years ago when a dear friend encouraged me to embrace and share my story. She reminded me that our stories, like threads in a tapestry, weave together to create a beautiful picture of God's work in our lives. Conversely, she also shared the regret of a missed opportunity—an untold story that could have brought hope to others.

Revelation 12:11 speaks of triumph through testimony. When we share our stories, we overcome the power of the devil by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our

testimony. Our experiences of God's work in our lives, whether joyful or challenging, become powerful tools in God's hands to bring healing and redemption to others.

God is the ultimate storyteller, and he has entrusted us with unique chapters in his grand narrative. Our stories can resonate with people who need encouragement or guidance.

I've learned that knowing and sharing my story is a privilege and a responsibility. Let's not withhold our stories, for in doing so, we may miss an opportunity to offer a hopeful light to someone in darkness.

Father, thank you for the gift of storytelling. Help us to recognize the power of our stories, and give us the courage to share them for your glory. Amen.

REDEPTIVE REFLECTION

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.
—Psalm 139:23-24

Engaging in personal reflection leads to self-discovery and growth. Taking time to explore our thoughts, emotions, and actions can lead us to redemptive, healing, and empowering outcomes.

In my own life, I've experienced the benefit of reflective practices. Through the examen of Ignatius, for example, I've learned to discern God's presence in my daily life, identify areas for improvement, and seek God's guidance for the future. This exercise has brought clarity, peace, and a deep sense of purpose.

Taking a personal inventory has also been beneficial to me. By honestly assessing my strengths, weaknesses, and values, I've been able to make intentional decisions aligned with my beliefs and aspirations. This self-awareness has

led to personal growth and a stronger sense of identity.

Imagination is important in reflective practices. Envisioning different outcomes or a favorable future can inspire hope, motivate us, and build our resilience. We can see beyond our current situation and consider new possibilities.

Psalm 139:23-24 reminds us to invite God into our self-reflection, asking him to reveal any areas in our lives that need redemption and guidance. This process leads us on a path of healing and empowerment guided by the Lord's wisdom and grace.

Father in heaven, guide us to seek your wisdom. May our introspection be redemptive and healing, aligning us with your purposes. Amen.

TEAMWORK TRIUMPH

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.

—Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Teamwork is important. There is strength and a sense of community in working together toward a common goal.

Working together is essential in overcoming challenges and achieving shared objectives. Teamwork develops synergy, where individual strengths complement each other, leading to greater productivity and creativity. Through teamwork, various perspectives and skills contribute to thorough problem solving and innovation.

The Bible emphasizes the values of teamwork. From Moses and Aaron leading the Israelites to Jesus sending out his disciples, cooperation and mutual support are foundational to God's work. Together we can encourage, support, and build each other up in faith and good works.

Looking back, I see how teamwork has enriched my personal growth and accomplishments. It has taught me humility, patience, and the joy of celebrating collective achievements. Each team effort has strengthened relationships and fostered a sense of community and belonging.

We can embrace collaboration in all areas of life, seeking opportunities to work alongside others, leveraging people's strengths for the greater good. Let's strive to imitate Christ's example of unity and service, knowing that together we can accomplish far more than we could if we worked alone.

Father, guide us in working together for your glory and your kingdom. In Jesus' name, Amen.

EMBRACING EACH NEW DAY

Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
—Lamentations 3:22-23

Each new day is a gift, a fresh opportunity to embrace life's possibilities and blessings. When we approach each day with gratitude and openness, we unlock the potential for growth, joy, and fulfillment.

I have learned the importance of starting each day with a positive mindset. Regardless of yesterday's challenges or successes, a new day brings renewed hope and opportunities. Lamentations 3:22-23 reminds us of God's faithful love and abundant compassion and mercy—they are "new every morning."

Embracing each new day involves letting go of past regrets and worries about the future. It means appreciating the blessings around us and making the most of every opportunity.

I recall a time when I faced a difficult season in life. Each

morning I reminded myself of God's unfailing love and the fresh mercies he provides daily. This gave me strength and resilience to face challenges with faith and optimism.

As we embrace each new day, let's cultivate habits of gratitude, reflection, and positivity rooted in God's faithfulness. Let's greet each morning with a heart filled with thankfulness for the gift of life and the opportunity to make a difference.

Lord, thank you for the gift of each new day. Help us to embrace it with gratitude and joy, knowing that you always love and care for us. Guide us to live for you faithfully. Amen.

EVOLVING ASSIGNMENTS

In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps.
—Proverbs 16:9

It's important to learn that our assignments from God change from time to time in the course of our lives. Each season brings new opportunities, challenges, and experiences, shaping us into who we are meant to be.

I've witnessed the evolution of God's assignments in my life. What once seemed like a clear path changed, leading to unexpected ventures and growth. Proverbs 16:9 reminds us that although we may plan our course through life, ultimately God establishes our steps.

Whatever our assignments may be, the underlying principles of love, service, faithfulness, and obedience to God remain. These values guide us whether we face a career change, a new role, a new season in life, or a shift in priorities.

Embracing the idea that we do more than one thing in our

lives opens us to the richness of diverse experiences and opportunities. It allows us to adapt, learn, and contribute in various ways, reflecting the multifaceted nature of God's plans for us.

As we navigate changing assignments, let's trust in God's wisdom and sovereignty. He orchestrates each chapter of our lives, weaving a beautiful tapestry of purpose and fulfillment.

Lord, thank you for the assignments you give us in our lives. Help us to embrace change with faith and courage, knowing that your plans for us are good. Guide our steps and align our hearts with your will, we pray. In Jesus, Amen.

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY BRINGS PEACE

"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." —Psalm 46:10

In moments of uncertainty and chaos, finding peace in the assurance of God's sovereignty is a source of strength and comfort. Whatever our life circumstances may be, God is in control, guiding our paths and working out his perfect plans.

Chewing on Psalm 46:10, we are reminded to be still and to acknowledge that the Lord is God. His authority transcends all challenges. He is exalted above every situation. And in this we can find peace.

I have experienced the calming presence of God's sovereignty even in the midst of brokenness, addictions, and sorrow in my own family. In times of turmoil or when facing the unknown, trusting in God's ultimate control brings a deep sense of peace. Knowing that his purposes prevail and his promises endure gives hope and reassurance.

Drawing peace from God's sovereignty means surrendering our worries, fears, and desires into his capable hands. In faith we can rest in the truth that God works all things together for our good (Romans 8:28).

As we navigate life's uncertainties, let's anchor our hearts in God's sovereignty. May his peace, which surpasses all understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).

Lord, thank you for your sovereignty over all things. Give us peace in knowing you are exalted above every situation. Strengthen our faith and trust in you. Amen.

GIFTED TO SERVE

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace. . . . —1 Peter 4:10

Discovering our gifts, talents, and skills is a journey of self-awareness and purpose. Each of us has gifts and abilities meant to be used to benefit others and to honor God.

Reflecting back, I wish I had understood the value of identifying and using my gifts when I was younger. Contributing positively to the world and fulfilling God's plan for our lives is important.

Identifying our gifts involves looking carefully at ourselves, seeking feedback from others, and exploring areas of passion and interest. When we recognize our strengths, we can channel them into meaningful service for the Lord, bringing joy and fulfillment to others as well as ourselves.

Using our gifts to serve others is an act of stewardship—a responsibility to manage and

use God's blessings wisely. As we step into our roles as good stewards, we align ourselves with God's purposes, glorifying him through our actions and impact.

Let's not delay in using our gifts for service. Whether our gifts are in teaching, helping, creating, leading, or another area, each has a place in God's kingdom work. By serving others with the strengths God has given us, we reflect his love and bring honor to his name.

Heavenly Father, thank you for gifting us with many abilities. Help us identify and develop our gifts to serve others and glorify you. May our actions and talents bring honor and praise to your name. Amen.

NURTURING SELF-CARE

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

—Matthew 11:28-30

Self-care is vital for physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. It's not selfish; rather, it equips us to care for others more effectively. Setting aside time for self-care activities like exercise, hobbies, reflecting on God's work in our lives, and simply resting can reenergize us and improve our general mood.

Embracing self-care involves recognizing our limits and needs. It means saying no when we need to, setting boundaries, and seeking support when we feel overwhelmed. Self-compassion is also necessary; treating ourselves with kindness and understanding promotes resilience and inner peace.

I am thankful to have experienced the transformative power of self-care. Taking regular breaks, practicing mindful-

ness, and engaging in activities that bring joy have all contributed to my well-being and my ability to serve others wholeheartedly.

Let's remember that self-care is not a luxury but a necessity. By nurturing ourselves, we honor the temple of our bodies and souls (see 1 Corinthians 6:19), enabling us to live more authentically and effectively for the sake of God's kingdom.

Lord, teach us the value and importance of self-care. Grant us rest and strength to serve others effectively. In Jesus' name, Amen.

GOD CAN REDEEM OUR MISTAKES

We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

—Romans 8:28

At times when my choices led to regret and distress, it was hard to see past the immediate consequences. But I have learned that God can redeem even our biggest mistakes and use them for his glory.

One vivid memory is from a poor financial decision I made. It caused a lot of stress for my family. I felt immense guilt and shame, but a trusted pastor reminded me of God's promise in Romans 8:28. He encouraged me to seek God's guidance and to trust that the Lord can bring good out of even the most challenging situations. Through prayer and support from our church community, our family eventually overcame that hardship and learned valuable lessons about stewardship and faith.

Another example is from a friend who struggled with ad-

diction for many years. After hitting rock bottom, he surrendered his life to Christ and found not only sobriety but also a new purpose in helping others with similar struggles. His journey showed me that God can transform our darkest moments into powerful testimonies of his grace and redemption.

Embracing God's redemption means acknowledging our mistakes, seeking God's forgiveness, and trusting in his plan for our lives. By sharing our experiences and the lessons we have learned, we can provide hope and encouragement for others.

Lord, you can turn our mistakes into opportunities for growth and restoration. Help us, in Jesus' name. Amen.

GOD IS FAITHFUL IN COMPLETING HIS WORK

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.
—Philippians 1:6

I remember a time when everything in my life seemed to be falling apart. I felt like a work in progress that had been abandoned. I began to doubt whether God's promises would be fulfilled in my life.

Then a wise mentor reminded me of Philippians 1:6. She shared how God had been faithful in her own life, bringing her through trials and unfinished projects to a place of fulfillment and purpose. Her story gave me hope and renewed my faith in God's ability to complete his work in me.

God is not like us; he does not leave things unfinished. When he starts a work in us, he is committed to see it through. The process of transformation and growth can be challenging and slow, but we can trust in God's perfect timing and faithfulness.

In self-analysis, I see how God has been at work in my life, shaping me through both triumphs and trials. Every step, whether forward or seemingly backward, has been part of his plan to mold me into the person he created me to be.

Today let's take comfort in knowing that God is faithful to complete the work he has started in us. No matter where we are in our journey, we can trust that God is working all things together for our good and to his glory.

Dear God, thank you for your faithfulness in our lives. Help us to trust in your timing and process. Strengthen our faith, knowing that you will complete the good work you have begun in us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

TRUSTING THE POWER OF GOD IN PRAYER

The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

—James 5:16

A close friend was seriously ill. Her doctors were not optimistic, and it felt like hope was slipping away. In desperation, I turned to prayer, gathering a group of friends and family to pray for our friend's healing. Despite the uncertainty, we prayed fervently, trusting in God's power.

Miraculously, our friend began to recover. The doctors were astonished by her sudden turnaround, and it was clear that God had responded to our prayers with healing. This strengthened my conviction that prayer is powerful and that God uses it to bring about real change.

Prayer is not just a ritual; it is a direct line of communication with our Creator. Through prayer we express our deepest desires, fears, and hopes to God. In prayer we find solace, strength, and guidance. The

Bible teaches that "the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective," and God can use it to transform lives.

Prayer aligns our hearts with God's will, allowing his power to work through us. It can bring healing, provide comfort in times of distress, and open doors that may seem impossible to unlock. Through prayer we invite God into our situations, trusting him to act according to his perfect will. God hears us and is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine. Let's bring our concerns, joys, and needs before him, trusting in his power to work wonders.

Lord, thank you for the gift of prayer. Help us to approach you with faith and confidence, knowing that you always care for us. In Jesus, Amen.

GRATITUDE

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
—1 Thessalonians 5:18

I remember a time when my job was stressful, my relationships were strained, and I felt overwhelmed. During that time, a mentor advised me to start a gratitude journal. At first, it seemed like a trivial exercise, but I decided to give it a try. Each day, I wrote down three things I was thankful for. And slowly but surely, my perspective began to shift. I started to see God's hand at work in everyday situations, even in little things, and my heart grew lighter as I focused on the blessings in my life.

Gratitude can work powerfully to transform our outlook on life. It helps us shift from focusing on what we don't have to what we do have, opening our eyes to the countless blessings God has given us. The Bible prompts us to "give thanks in all circumstances," recognizing that gratitude aligns our hearts with God's will.

With gratitude, we acknowledge God's sovereignty and goodness, even in difficult times. It helps us to trust in his plans and remain hopeful. Gratitude also develops contentment, reducing feelings of envy and dissatisfaction. It creates a positive atmosphere, improving our relationships and overall well-being.

Today let's cultivate a heart of gratitude, recognizing that every good gift comes from God. And as we practice gratitude, may we inspire others to see the goodness of God in their lives as well.

Father, thank you for the countless blessings you have given us. May our gratitude glorify you and inspire others today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A MENTOR/GUIDE

Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.
—Proverbs 15:22

When I was younger, I often thought I could handle everything on my own. It wasn't until I met a man with a wealth of experience that I began to understand the value of having a mentor. He took me under his wing, offering guidance and wisdom that helped me navigate some of my life's most challenging situations. His counsel saved me from many pitfalls and set me on a path of growth and success.

Having a mentor or guide is invaluable in our faith and life. The Bible points out the value of seeking wise counsel, as it provides perspective, experience, and support that we might lack on our own. A mentor helps us to see beyond our immediate circumstances, offering insights that can only come from years of walking a similar path.

Mentors offer more than just advice; they provide encour-

agement, accountability, and spiritual nourishment. They help us identify our strengths and weaknesses, encouraging us to grow and develop our God-given gifts. In times of doubt or struggle, a mentor's wisdom can be a source of strength and direction.

In my life the guidance of mentors has been a compass, helping me stay on course and make wise decisions. If you don't have a mentor, seek out someone whose qualities you admire and whose faith inspires you. And as you grow, be willing to mentor others, passing on the wisdom you have received.

Thank you, Lord, for the mentors in my life. May I also be a source of wisdom and support to others. In Jesus, Amen.

LETTING GO OF WORRY

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.
—Philippians 4:6

When I was younger, I was often consumed by worry. Whether it had to do with school, relationships, or the future, my mind was constantly racing with anxiety.

When I was preparing for an important exam, the stress would be overwhelming, and I couldn't sleep or focus. But one evening a trusted friend reminded me of Philippians 4:6-7. This encouraged me to turn my worries into prayers and to trust that God would take care of the rest.

Worry can easily become a burden that weighs us down, affecting our health, relationships, and well-being. It can steal our joy and keep us from fully experiencing the present.

When we present our worries to God, we acknowledge that he is in control and that we trust him with our lives. This

act of surrender allows us to experience his peace, which goes beyond human understanding. God's peace guards our hearts and minds, protecting us from the harmful effects of anxiety.

Letting go of worry is not always easy. It requires a conscious effort to shift our focus from our problems to God's promises. It means choosing to trust that God is bigger than any situation we face. From my experiences I can say that every time I have chosen to trust God instead of worrying, he has provided for me in ways I did not imagine.

Lord, help me to let go of my worries and to trust in you. Fill my heart with your peace and remind me of your faithfulness. In Jesus, Amen.

STUDYING GOD'S WORD

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.

—Psalm 119:105

Have you discovered the profound impact of studying God's Word? In my youth, I often underestimated its importance, seeing Bible study as merely a religious duty. But then came a time when I faced uncertainty and sought direction. And a wise mentor pointed me to Psalm 119:105, emphasizing that God's Word illuminates our path, guiding us through life's challenges and uncertainties.

Studying God's Word is not just about gaining knowledge; it's about encountering God himself. Through Scripture we discover God's character, his promises, and his will for our lives. God's Word provides wisdom for decision-making, comfort in times of distress, and hope for the future.

The Bible reveals God's redemptive plan and his un-failing love for humanity. It teaches us how to live accord-

ing to his principles and align our lives with his purposes. As we explore Scripture with an open heart and mind, we invite the Holy Spirit to speak to us, transforming our thoughts and renewing our minds.

I am grateful for being able to study God's Word. It has deepened my faith, strengthened my relationship with Jesus, and equipped me to serve others with compassion and grace. Each passage has been a source of encouragement, correction, and inspiration in my walk with God.

May God's Word be a lamp to illuminate your path and a constant source of wisdom and strength.

Lord, may your Word guide and sustain us, leading us closer to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SABBATH REST

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God.”
—Exodus 20:8-10

I recall a time when I neglected rest and found myself overwhelmed by busyness and stress. A friend shared Exodus 20:8-10 with me and encouraged me to set aside time each week for rest and reflection, trusting that God’s commandment to rest is not just for physical rejuvenation but also for spiritual renewal.

Sabbath is a sacred gift from God, a time set apart for rest, worship, and reflection. It reminds us of God’s creative power and his desire for us to experience his peace. In a culture that values productivity and constant activity, observing Sabbath requires intentional commitment and trust in God’s provision.

When we honor the Sabbath, we accept our dependence on God and his faithfulness. We cease from our usual work to

delight in God’s presence and to prioritize relationships with him and others. Sabbath rest allows us to recharge physically, emotionally, and spiritually to serve God and others throughout the week. Each Sabbath day is an invitation to enjoy God’s rest and to align our hearts with his rhythms of grace.

If you long for spiritual refreshment and deeper intimacy with God, consider embracing the gift of Sabbath rest. Set aside time to worship, pray, and reflect on God’s goodness. May each Sabbath remind you of God’s love and his desire for us to rest in him.

Father, thank you for the gift of Sabbath rest. May we find joy in worshipping you and resting in your provision. Amen.

IDENTITY IN CHRIST

If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!
—2 Corinthians 5:17

I recall times when I struggled with insecurity and uncertainty about who I was meant to be. And in moments like that 2 Corinthians 5:17 spoke to me deeply, reminding me that in Christ, I am a new creation, transformed by his grace and love. Embracing this truth has reshaped how I view myself and others.

Identity in Christ isn't merely a concept; it's a profound reality. It means understanding that our worth and purpose are found in Christ alone. Through his sacrifice on the cross, Jesus offers us forgiveness, redemption, and a new identity as children of God. This identity transcends our past mistakes, insecurities, and cultural labels.

In Christ we are called to live with confidence and purpose. We are empowered to walk in righteousness, love, and humility. Our identity is rooted in his

unchanging love and promises, not in the fleeting opinions of others or in worldly achievements.

Understanding my identity in Christ has brought me freedom and joy. It has allowed me to live authentically, without fear of judgment or comparison. Each day is an opportunity to grow closer to him, to reflect his character, and to share his love with others.

If you wrestle with questions of identity, turn to God's Word. Seek his truth about who you are in Christ. Embrace the reality that you are chosen, called to glorify God, and deeply loved.

Jesus, thank you for the new identity we have in you. May we reflect your grace and truth to everyone around us. Amen.

KEEPING TIME IN PERSPECTIVE

Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.
—Psalm 90:12

At times in the past I have been consumed by the busyness of life. And I am thankful that Psalm 90:12 has often turned me around to see the wisdom of stewarding the time God that gives us.

We need to keep time in perspective so that we recognize the brevity of life and the eternal significance of our actions. In our fast-paced world, it's easy to prioritize time-sensitive pursuits over eternal truths. Yet Scripture calls us to seek wisdom in how we use our time, investing in relationships, service, and spiritual growth.

Time is a precious gift from God, meant to be used purposefully and intentionally. When we "number our days," we align our priorities with God's kingdom purposes. We learn to value moments of rest, reflection, and worship, know-

ing that our ultimate goal is to honor God in all we do.

Keeping time in perspective has helped to deepen my relationship with God and to enrich my interactions with others. It has taught me to cherish each day as an opportunity to glorify God and to serve others, shining the light of his kingdom.

If you are overwhelmed by the demands of time, pause and seek God's guidance. Ask him to help you prioritize your life according to his will and to grant you wisdom in managing your time effectively.

Spirit of God, guide us in stewarding our time wisely. Teach us to seek your wisdom in all our endeavors. May we use each moment to honor you and to advance your kingdom. Amen.

I SURRENDER

I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.
—Romans 12:1

At times I have struggled with trusting God to direct and control my life. And Romans 12:1 has been a helpful reminder that I need to surrender myself to the Lord. This verse challenges me to offer myself completely to God, recognizing his mercy and goodness in my life.

Surrendering to God is not just a one-time decision; each day we need to commit to aligning our will with God's. This involves letting go of our desires, fears, and ambitions, and inviting God to guide and shape our lives according to his purpose. It requires humility and faith to surrender our plans and trust that God's ways are higher and his love is unending.

When we surrender to God, we experience true freedom and peace. We release the burden of trying to control ourselves and instead embrace

God's sovereignty. Surrender opens the door for God to work miracles in our lives, transforming our weaknesses into strengths and our struggles into testimonies of his grace.

If you wrestle with surrendering to God, I encourage you to pray earnestly and ask him to help you see that we can't control our own lives—only God can. Surrender your fears, dreams, and uncertainties into his capable hands, knowing that he cares for you and desires the best for your life.

Father, help us to trust your plans and yield to your will each day. May our lives be a testimony to your goodness and faithfulness. Amen.

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