

THE BEATING HEART OF DISCIPLESHIP

THE VITAL SIGN

Forty Days of Response to the Compelling Love of Christ

By Michael G. Dobbins

The cross of Christ is like a perfectly cut diamond with hundreds of facets. With each turn in the light, it radiates the beauty and magnificence of God's glory and love for us, producing in us unending wonder, worship and praise.

Published by Michael G. Dobbins

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Preface

Imagine you are a passenger on a cruise ship to England with two thousand fellow passengers. During a fierce storm, the ship hits an iceberg and begins to sink. The captain assures you help has been called for, and rescue is certain. Two boats come to the rescue, an ocean liner and a large fishing boat. The transfer of passengers begins aboard the fishing boat that will convey them to the ocean liner.

As you are being helped into the fishing boat, heavy swells cause you to slip and hit your head on the railing, fall unconscious into the icy water and begin to sink. At the same time, the fishing boat loses power and begins to drift toward the disabled cruise ship. Not only are you sinking, you also are about to be crushed between the two boats. The captain of the fishing boat sees you and jumps into the water, knowing there is not time to rescue you and save himself. Quickly, he lifts you to safety, but before he can get out of the water, he is crushed to death between the two boats.

The next day, you regain consciousness and are told the dramatic story. You have been informed about your rescue, but you did not experience the heroic act of the captain who willingly gave his life to save yours. You were unconscious and unaware and did not experience the most important event of your life.

Now let's consider a second scenario. As you are being transferred to the fishing boat, you slip, but do not hit your head on the railing. You are fully conscious as you fall into the freezing swells and feel the weight of your clothes pull you under. Not only are you about to drown, but you are also in the path of the impending collision between the fishing boat and the sinking cruise ship. But someone has jumped into the water to save you. Just in time, you feel the strong grip of the captain lift you to safety.

Then you watch in horror as he is crushed to death between the two boats. In shock, you try to comprehend what just happened to you. The captain, desperately wanting to save you, knew he would lose his life when he jumped into the water between the two boats. This time your knowledge of your rescue is not based on information given to you by someone else. It is intensely personal and experiential. You are more than aware. You are stunned, overwhelmed and unspeakably grateful to the captain who gave his life for you.

Finally, a third scenario. In this version, the captain of the fishing boat is your older brother from whom you have been estranged for many years. You have lived a life of excess and self-indulgence. He is responsible, generous and noble. You squandered your share of your father's estate and were now nearing the end of your resources. Your brother had invested wisely and become wealthy. You resented him and even hated him. Yet, your brother continued to love you. Unbeknownst to you, he generously made you the heir of his estate.

When he arrived at the rescue scene in his fishing boat, the two of you recognized each other. When you slipped and fell into the icy water, you saw your brother rush toward you and jump into the water. When you felt his strong arm lift you to safety, your hatred began to melt. Your brother knew he could not avoid being crushed if he leaped between the two

boats to rescue you. How could he love you enough to die for you when you had nothing but contempt for him? Your brother not only deliberately sacrificed his life for yours, but also all his wealth was now yours. His astonishing, heroic act utterly changed you. In the months that followed, you were completely transformed by his love. This third scenario is the best analogy of our salvation. We were estranged from God and destined to die because of our sin. But Jesus loved us and willingly sacrificed His life for ours, giving us all His riches to enjoy.

Every believer has been personally magnificently rescued by Christ. Yet some live without the joy of their salvation. Their minds are on the job and amassing enough money for retirement. They may be depressed and frustrated much of the time. Or, perhaps life is good. A good job, great friends and family, and deluxe vacations. Their need for God is easily satisfied by listening to a sermon on Sunday. Many look respectable on the outside, but inside they are given over to lust and pride. These professed believers are like the passenger in the first scenario. They are only vaguely aware of what Christ has done for them. They are Christians, but their knowledge of Jesus' love is intellectual. It is not personal, nor is it a vibrant reality in their lives.

Which passenger do you want to be? Will you be the passenger in the first scenario who only had information about his rescue and therefore live a lukewarm life? Or will you be the younger brother in the third scenario who powerfully, personally experienced his rescue, watching in agony as his older brother sacrificed his life for him, resulting in a transformed life of love and service? Is your relationship with Christ based on information you receive from pulpits and books? Or is your relationship with Christ powered by the Holy Spirit in a personal love relationship?

We have a choice. We can continue to live a lackluster, passive life as the unaware passenger in the first scenario. Or we can choose to live a life as the fully conscious younger brother in the third scenario who was transformed by experiencing the sacrificial death and love of his older brother.

The Vital Sign of Discipleship: A HEART COMPELLED BY THE LOVE OF CHRIST

The apostle Paul suffered severely all his life, but his love for Christ remained constant. He wrote: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:8-9); and "As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger" (2 Corinthians 6:4-5). In spite of pain and persecution, Paul triumphantly declared at the end of his life, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7).

How could he say all those things in light of his experiences? Paul reveals the key to his ability to live a joyful, loving, victorious life: "For the love of Christ compels us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). In this simple pronouncement, Paul shows the way to remain a faithful, joyful disciple of Jesus throughout life's cycles of affliction: **The love of**

Christ compels us. What motivated Paul, what urged him on, what carried and compelled him all of his life—through tragedy and triumph—was knowing and experiencing the love of Christ.

Being a disciple and making disciples are hard work. Loving others can be very challenging. Yet, Paul's devotion to his calling didn't come from a consistent practice of Christian disciplines; nor was his motivation found in winning heavenly rewards. At the heart of his self-denying discipleship was his continuing experience of the compelling love of Christ.

The Greek word for "compel" is *sunecho*, meaning to hold fast, secure, or hold together. Various scholars have translated the phrase in 2 Corinthians 5:14 to read, the love of Christ constrains us, or the love of Christ controls us, or the love of Christ compels us. All the variations convey the idea of a unifying, powerful force that serves to control us, hold us together, and motivate us. Paul tells us that the love of Christ is that force.

Paul longs for us to know the love of Christ because he experienced it himself: "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:14-19).

"To know" means a permeation of one's entire being in an experiential, deep, and intimate way. So when Paul prays for us that we will know the depth of the love of Christ, he is praying that we will experience the love of Christ in a powerful, intimate, and transformational way that floods our entire being.

Brennan Manning, former Franciscan priest, in his book *The Signature of Jesus* describes the time when he first knew and experienced the love of Christ:

On the night of December 13, during what began as a long and lonely hour of prayer, I heard in faith Jesus Christ say, "For love of you I left my Father's side. I came to you who ran from me, fled me, who did not want to hear my name. For love of you I was covered with spit, punched, beaten and affixed to the wood of the cross." These words are burned on my life. Whether I am in a state of grace or disgrace, elation or depression, that night of fire quietly burns on. I looked at the crucifix for a long time, figuratively saw the blood streaming from every pore of his body and heard the cry of his wounds: "This isn't a joke. It is not a laughing matter to me that I have loved you." The longer I looked, the more I realized that no man has ever loved me and no one ever could love me as he did. I went out of the cave, stood on the precipice and shouted into the darkness, "Jesus, are you crazy? Are you out of your mind to have loved me so much?" I learned that night what a wise old man had told me years earlier: "Only the one who has experienced it can know what the love of Jesus Christ is. Once you have experienced it, nothing else in the world will seem more beautiful or desirable."¹

In a tidal wave of divine passion, the Holy Spirit caused Manning to know in the depth of his being that Christ loved him, just as he was. His experience was sudden and dramatic. For others, the awareness of the personal love of Christ is slow, gradual, gentle. But *how* the Holy Spirit causes us to experience the love of Christ is not important. The important thing is that it happens. God wants us to know and enjoy His love.

The beating heart of discipleship is a love relationship with Jesus. John said, “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Paul knew this. For Paul, the heart of his unquenchable devotion was the love of Christ displayed on the cross as He died in his place, so that the love of Christ and the cross are joined together in an unbreakable, eternal bond. The love of Christ displayed on the cross is the source, the motivation, and the reason for our love, faith, and hope. Paul wrote: “I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20, *NIV*). Paul reveled in Christ’s love. He fully grasped that Jesus died not only to pay for the sins of the whole world, but for him personally. Notice his use of the pronouns “I” and “me.” Christ’s love was tangible and personal to Paul. It transformed him from a legalistic, murderous Pharisee to a gentle but bold, lifelong lover of Jesus.

Paul’s love for Christ compelled him, controlled him, and motivated him all of his life—through despair and joy, pain and peace. A true disciple is made when his or her life has been transformed by the love of Christ. It is at the cross where the Holy Spirit can cause us to know and experience the immeasurable love of Christ, because the cross is personal. The holy Sinless One taking the sins of unworthy, ungrateful rebels upon Himself to pay sin’s dreadful penalty is the ultimate expression of His love for us. For Paul, the love of Christ and the cross were (and are) eternally united in a stunning display of extravagant, overwhelming love. He rejoiced to say, “I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20b).

A TRANSFORMED HEART

Experiencing the love of Christ is a challenge, because change does not come easily. We are creatures of habit, and lukewarm and indifferent hearts are not easily altered. We like the familiar, the comfortable. But we **can** understand the magnificence of our rescue by Christ and we **can** personally experience the depth of His love for us. The Scriptures tell us that change is possible. The word used to describe this change is “transformation.” The word “transform” in the Greek is “*metamorphoo*” from which our word “metamorphosis” is derived. It means a noticeable or complete change in appearance, character, circumstances or condition. Paul declares that believers can behold the glory of the Lord and in that experience be transformed: “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18). To behold means *to look at, to see, to observe*. It is a focused, attentive, expectant gaze of the heart and mind. As we focus on Christ’s glorious triumph on the cross, the Holy Spirit causes us to experience God’s love, because the cross is a display of the glory and nature of God.

In addition to demonstrating His love, Christ's death on the cross was (and is) an astounding show of God's glory. In the most unlikely, shocking irony in the universe, the gruesome crucifixion of Jesus Christ was actually a lavish, eternal display of the attributes of God that define His glory. God revealed these attributes to Moses some 1,500 years before He sent His Son to the cross: "The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there and proclaimed the name of the LORD. The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty'" (Exodus 34:5-7a).

Far more than splendor and power, **God's glory is His nature.** Amazingly, these same attributes by which God described Himself to Moses were in full and magnificent display in the sacrificial death of His Son on the cross. This is astonishing! In beholding His glory, our marred souls are being transformed back into the image of God, who is love. "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Romans 5:5b). Our lukewarm, self-centered hearts can be transformed into hearts of love as the Holy Spirit pours the love of Christ into our hearts. Our theology becomes reality. The catalyst of our transformation is the Holy Spirit, who is the present manifestation of the power of God here on earth. He has the power to transform us.

Becoming transformed into the likeness of Christ by beholding His glory is "Christ-realization," where our true selves, originally created to be like Christ, are being transformed into the persons God intended us to be. The self is not being realized or actualized, it is being transformed into the likeness of Christ. The damaged, stifled, or destroyed person, now reborn by the Holy Spirit, is being made new—is being made to be like Jesus.

Paul makes it clear that we are being transformed by degrees, that is, incrementally in stages, over a lifetime. This is accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit. Transformation is not perfection. Instead, it is a lifelong process that is never finished. But without the regular practice of beholding His glory and spending time to worship Christ, our transformation into the freedom of the new self will slowly regress to the bondage and destructive patterns of the old self.

Experiencing the love of Christ is an essential ingredient for a transformed life and is the beating heart of discipleship. It is a love relationship with Jesus because of the cross that is the vital sign of a disciple. As we experience His glory and His love, His love becomes our motivation—the key to a fruitful life and true discipleship. Despair is transformed into hope; anxiety into peace, grudges and hatred into love, and self-centeredness into self-denial. God offers us the stunning opportunity to behold the glory of His Son and be transformed by degrees into the likeness of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

THE STRUGGLE

When you determine to draw closer to Christ to worship, and to experience His love, you will find yourself in conflict. This is normal. Paul describes it: "For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want" (Galatians 5:17, *NIV*). Later in the passage, Paul also says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,

goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22). There is ongoing tension between our old nature and the Spirit of Christ within us. On one hand, we experience His love, joy and peace; on the other hand, there is the pull of self-centeredness and the desires of the flesh. But every conflict, every struggle, can be overcome. The good news of the gospel is that Christ has triumphed for us in every battle we face.

Love of self is inherited from our ancestors, Adam and Eve. Because Eve loved herself more than God and didn't trust God that His commandment was for her good, she and Adam sinned. We carry their genes. Love of self is inborn. A desire to love Christ is not. Love of self is a lifelong struggle with the delusion that we can be master of our life. A. W. Tozer wrote, in his classic book *The Pursuit of God*,

[There is] the presence of a veil in our hearts . . . the veil of our fleshly, fallen nature living on, unjudged within us, uncrucified and unrepudiated. It is the close woven veil of the self-life, which we have never truly acknowledged, of which we have been secretly ashamed, and which for these reasons we have never brought to the judgment of the cross. . . . [The veil] is woven of the fine threads of the self-life, the hyphenated sins of the spirit. They are not something we do, they are something we are, and therein lays both their subtlety and their power. To be specific, the self-sins are self-righteousness, self-pity, self-confidence, self-sufficiency, self-admiration, self-love, and a host of others like them.²

Jesus warned us that we will have conflict with our self-centeredness: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). But He has provided us with powerful and effective means to overcome our conflicts. One powerful weapon is our freedom. Jesus has set us free from our self-centeredness. We are free to love. We are free to obey. And we are free to resist temptation. Days 24 through 28 of this devotional focus on these freedoms so that in our conflicts we will know and understand that we have been set free by Christ's victorious death and resurrection.

In the struggle we can have the power of the Holy Spirit. He fills us with joy to endure and to give praise to God during our struggles: “And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:49-52, emphasis added).

Nehemiah 8:10b says, “**The joy of the Lord is your strength.**” In all of our adversity, God can and will give us joy if we seek Him in faith. Days 36 through 40 focus on the joy that God wants us to experience. Will there be conflicts? Of course. Conflict is normal and natural. But in every conflict we face, Jesus has destroyed every enemy so that we can know Him better and experience His love and joy in spite of conflict. Will we be tempted? Absolutely. But Christ has set us free from giving in to temptation. Joy is the unmistakable sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit in us.

THE UPWARD CALL

Many years ago, my college buddy told me about a girl he wanted me to meet. The way he described her made me want to meet her. We did meet, and that beautiful young lady eventually became my wife. Our relationship began with information and grew from awareness of her to the deep intimacy of experiencing love in a trusting and fulfilling marriage bond. There is no comparison between hearing about her and experiencing her love in marriage. In the same way, Jesus wants us to experience His love, not just have secondhand information about it. Information about Christ is not what enabled the apostle Paul to endure severe suffering and persecution. He knew the love of Christ by experience, deep within his innermost being.

Christ is calling you and me to experience His love. Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20). Jesus wants us to experience His love because it is the love of Christ that compels us, carries us, controls us, and motivates us all of our lives so that we that can say at the end of our lives, as Paul did, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). The heart of self-denying discipleship is the compelling love of Christ. "We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Our love is a result of His love.

The love of Christ is the beating heart of self-denying discipleship and the vital sign of a committed follower of Jesus. A true disciple of Jesus naturally desires to read the Bible, to worship, to memorize and meditate on Scripture, to enjoy Christian fellowship, to pray, and to share the gospel. These practices are ways that God has provided to draw us closer to Him. They are vital to maintaining an intimate love relationship with Jesus during periods of suffering. But the practice of these spiritual disciplines is a **response** to the love of Christ; they do not generate His love. The Holy Spirit is the Creator of that love. It is the love of Christ that compels the discipline.

The power to understand and know the magnificence of our rescue and the depth of Christ's personal love for us is not found in formulas, rituals, or good works. It is found in Jesus' own words. Speaking of the Holy Spirit, Jesus declared, "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me." John 15:26. The Holy Spirit is the One who has the power to open our hearts and minds and reveal the magnificence of our rescue and the depth of Christ's love. Jesus made it clear that the Holy Spirit is our vital, essential link to knowing Him and experiencing His love. "He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you." John 16:14-15.

If you are looking for a formula to experience His love, you will find there is none. If you are seeking for the right rituals or a series of correctly performed disciplines to cause God to reveal His glory to you, you will be disappointed. But if you seek Christ with a simple heart of faith, you will find Him. He promised, "You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). James confirms this truth: "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you" (James 4:8). We can be sure that He will keep His promise and reveal Himself to us so that we can behold His glory. In reality, He will find you. The truth is, His

Spirit is pursuing you. Henri Nouwen, in his book *Return of the Prodigal*, offers an enlightening observation of this truth in his reflection on Jesus' three parables recorded in Luke 15:

God is looking into the distance for me, trying to find me and longing to bring me home. In all three parables, which Jesus tells in response to the question of why he eats with sinners, he puts the emphasis on God's initiative. God is the shepherd who goes looking for his lost sheep. God is the woman who lights a lamp, sweeps out the house and searches everywhere for her lost coin until she has found it. God is the father who watches and waits for his children, runs out to meet them, embraces them, pleads with them, begs and urges them to come home.³

What an awesome thought! God takes the initiative and pursues us simply because He loves us as we are. Knowing we are loved and desired even in our imperfection takes away our fear of drawing near to Him. Jesus loves us and rescued us so that we can draw near to Him, behold His glory, experience His love and worship Him.

It is my prayer that as you are going through the daily meditations, the Holy Spirit will help you draw near to God, and be transformed as you behold God's glory in Christ's triumph on the cross. In focusing on the cross the Holy Spirit can transform you into a devoted, joyful disciple with a deep, abiding love for your personal Savior. A love relationship with Jesus is the beating heart of discipleship, found at the foot of the cross. When you complete the meditations, may the vital sign of your life in Him lead you to say, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

1. IN HIS CROSS WE RECEIVE THE RICHES OF HIS GLORIOUS GRACE

“In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight.” Ephesians 1:4-8

God’s love, far from being caused by goodness in the object, causes all the goodness which the object has, loving it first into existence and then into real, though derivative, lovability. God is Goodness. He can give good, but cannot need or get it. In that sense all His love is, as it were, bottomlessly selfless by very definition; it has everything to give and nothing to receive.⁴

DAY 1

HE FORGIVES OUR SINS

Receive God's Word

"Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."
Isaiah 1:18

Reflect on God's Truth

Ponder the cost to God to forgive our sins. God's only Son paid the ultimate price in a crucible of excruciating pain, loneliness, and torment when He died on a cross, a Roman instrument of criminal execution. Though He was completely innocent, He became sin for us, taking on the penalty for our sins, and He gave us His righteousness in exchange. His death for us was the only way that God could adopt us into His family. Reflect on the cross as a magnificent display of God's love for you. God has forgiven your sins because of the infinite riches of His grace. Though your sins caused ugly, dark marks on your soul, you are now white as snow. Your recognition of God as a gracious and forgiving Father gives you peace and rest in His presence.

Live in God's Grace

"One of the greatest challenges of the spiritual life is to receive God's forgiveness. There is something in us humans that keeps us clinging to our sins and prevents us from letting God erase our past and offer us a completely new beginning. . . . Receiving forgiveness requires a total willingness to let God be God and do all the healing, restoring, and renewing."⁵ Have you let God be God in your life? Have you fully received His forgiveness? Have you experienced His loving words to your spirit that He doesn't condemn you? Spend time in prayer, listening to His voice, and because of the cross, fully receive His forgiveness today.

O Lord, the reality that my sins are forgiven forever because of your precious blood lifts a heavy weight off my soul, and I thank you and praise you for your grace. You have set me free from guilt, fear and shame. You alone can forgive sins, and you have forgiven mine because of your great love. I didn't deserve your mercy; I deserved your anger and wrath. But you have canceled the debt against me by your shed blood and death on the cross. Create in me a more thankful and grateful heart for your incomparable love. Amen.

DAY 2

HE CALLS US FRIEND

Receive God's Word

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.” John 15:13-15

Reflect on God's Truth

Just before Jesus went to the cross, He made a remarkable statement to His disciples, and to us, recorded in John 15: 13-15. There may have been a time in your life when you were not a friend of God. The feeling was mutual. Today's passage tells us that Jesus has brought you into friendship with God. A friend is someone whose company you enjoy. Ponder the reality that because of Jesus' death on the cross for your sins, you are God's friend, and He enjoys you.

Live in God's Grace

True friendship is a love relationship. God loved you so much His love compelled Him to send His only beloved Son to die for your sins. Does His love compel you to live a life of love? Is love the beating heart of your relationship with God? And a friend enjoys the company of his friend. Do you enjoy God's company? Do you enjoy spending time alone with Him? If you haven't spent much time with the Friend who is above all friends, what could you do to fix that today?

O Lord, even though I was once your enemy and rebelled against you, you mercifully saved me and brought me into friendship with you. When I was far from you, Lord, I was confused, troubled, and frustrated. I felt enmity with you, my Creator. But you reconciled me to yourself by your perfect sacrifice for sin on the cross, and you made me your friend. Now my soul is at peace. I praise you and thank you for being my best friend. I bless your name, the Name that is above all names. Amen.

DAY 3

HE DELIVERS US FROM SLAVERY

Receive God's Word

“For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.” Romans 3:22b-25a

Reflect On God's Truth

The Greek word for “redemption” means deliverance, a release by the payment of a ransom. The word is used for deliverance from physical torture. It carries with it the idea of a slave being sold in the marketplace to the highest bidder, to be used for whatever purposes the new owner intends. To be redeemed by God means that you are no longer a slave to your sinful nature; you now belong to Jesus and are His willing follower. You are precious to God and have been set free at the cost of the death of God's only Son. Through His shed blood on the cross, you have been given a new life, a new hope, and a new purpose. You are no longer enslaved to Satan, sin, and the allure of this world. You have been delivered from darkness to the light of freedom found only in Christ.

Live in God's Grace

There were slaves in ancient Rome who worked underneath the public baths, stoking the fires to heat water for the upper classes. They never saw the light of day. Think about the difference between living as a slave and living as a free man. What are you doing with the freedom Christ has given you because of the cross? Are you living a life of sacrificial love, in obedience to Jesus, or are you using your freedom to satisfy your own selfish desires?

O Lord, The cost of my redemption is incalculable. You willingly went to the cross and suffered excruciating pain and complete separation from your Father to secure my redemption and pay the ultimate price to set me free. I was a slave in the marketplace, in chains to the power of Satan, the world, and sin when you bought me with the price of your own blood. Cause your love to invade and penetrate my indifferent and lukewarm heart so that your love compels me to love. Help me to glorify you with all of me—spirit, soul, and body—in daily gratitude for my deliverance and freedom. Amen.

DAY 4

HE GIVES US ETERNAL LIFE

Receive God's Word

"And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life." 1 John 5:11-13.

Reflect On God's Truth

"The critical question for our generation—and for every generation—is this: If you could have heaven, with no sickness, and with all the friends you ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauty you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven, if Christ were not there?"⁶

Live in God's Grace

The death and resurrection of Christ is our eternal life simply by faith. What is your concept of eternal life? Is it a place of bliss and happiness where you can enjoy your friends and loved ones without pain and fear? What if Jesus weren't there? As John Piper asks, Would you still want to go to heaven? Eternal life is not a place, it is a person Who is living inside you. Live in the grace of eternal life because you have Jesus, and He has you.

O Lord, you are eternal life. Without you, heaven would be a wasteland, a dry and empty place. But you are alive at the right hand of the Father, and I am alive in you and will be alive in you forever. I bless you and thank you for making eternal life possible by your death on the cross and your mighty resurrection from the dead, in power and glory. I praise and bless you for filling me with your Spirit and giving me your life, which is eternal life. Amen.

DAY 5

HE CLEANSSES OUR CONSCIENCE

Receive God's Word

"How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" Hebrews 9:14

Reflect on God's Truth

Getting clean had never felt so good, so renewing! I watched the dirt, grime and sweat from four days of mountain hiking swirl down the drain during the most appreciated hot shower of my life. How much more glorious is the joy of being cleansed from the filth of a guilty conscience! When we confess our sin, the blood of the Lord Jesus washes us completely clean. Just as a hot shower removes all trace of ever having been dirty, so the blood of Christ cleanses our conscience so completely that we become blameless. We need never revisit guilt, fear, shame or condemnation, because Jesus shed His precious blood on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. Now we are free to serve the living God.

Live in God's Grace

Have you received the grace of God and had your conscience cleansed by the blood of Christ, or are you trying to be a better Christian and perform to work off your guilt? If you feel condemnation for past sins, the blood of Christ is the power of God to cleanse you completely.

O Lord, thank you for a clean conscience. The heavy load of guilt I once carried is gone, and now I can shout for joy because you have freed me from all condemnation. I worship you for the richness of your grace in forgiving me, cleansing me, and making me pure and blameless with your precious blood. You triumphed on the cross so that I could be pardoned and set free with a clean conscience. Thank you for the cleansing power of your blood that was shed for the pardon of my sin. I praise your wonderful name. Amen.

DAY 6

HE GIVES US HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS

Receive God's Word

"If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ." Romans 5:17

Reflect on God's Truth

"Admission Free." These words communicate one of the most welcome messages we will ever hear. God offers us His gift of grace and righteousness at no cost to us. We can do nothing to earn it. *Nothing*. Not our good works, not our good attitude, nor our good intentions. What do we have to do to receive His grace and righteousness? Nothing, except receive it.

Live in God's Grace

How does it make you feel to know that there is nothing you can do to earn God's grace and righteousness? Are you struggling with the notion that there is something you still need to do, such as pray more, read His Word more, or be more loving? There is nothing you can do to earn God's grace and righteousness. Read Romans 5:17 again. Don't wait any longer to receive and enjoy the grace and righteousness Jesus provides you through the cross, because it is the only way to reign in life.

O Lord, you were made guilty for me so that I could be given the righteousness of Christ. The truth of being cleansed and given the gift of righteousness seems too good to be true. But your Word declares that it is true; you exchanged my sinfulness for your righteousness when you died on the cross. I rejoice that I am washed, cleansed, and whiter than snow by your death and shed blood. I can actually stand before you as your righteous son or daughter. I praise you for the astonishing gift of your righteousness, which I did not deserve. All glory and praise to you for your priceless gift to me.

Blessed be your name. Amen.

DAY 7

HE IS OUR LIVING HOPE

Receive God's Word

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." 1 Peter 1:3-6

Reflect on God's Truth

There is a difference between a living hope and a false hope. A false hope is futile—empty and useless. It is wasted and pointless. But we have a living hope, because our hope is grounded and anchored in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Our hope is effective and useful. It is valuable and real. Our living hope is a loving, merciful Savior who makes our lives meaningful, purposeful, and joyful.

Live in God's Grace

Have you fully experienced the joy that comes from our living hope through the cross and resurrection? This world offers only temporary, fleeting pleasure. Our hope is based on the eternal love and power of our Savior. Have you experienced the gladness and delight that comes from a living hope in our resurrected Savior, who is guarding your inheritance in heaven by faith?

O Lord, you have given me a living hope through your death and resurrection from the dead. Without you, there is no hope. Without you, I would be standing on a precipice in the dark, staring out into a vast meaningless existence. But you have filled me with your joy and peace, so that I can abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. You have secured my life with the anchor of your presence at the right hand of the Father and the knowledge that you will never leave me nor forsake me. You will be with me until I put off the shell of this body; and then I will be with you where you are. I praise you for the gift of hope that is real and true. To you alone be glory, honor, and praise forever and ever. Amen.

2. IN HIS CROSS WE EXPERIENCE HIS LOVE

“ I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20, *NIV*).

God created us for union with Himself: This is the original purpose of our lives. And God is defined as love (1 John 4:16). Living in awareness of our belovedness is the axis around which the Christian life revolves. Being the beloved is our identity, the core of our existence.⁷

DAY 8

WE ARE RECONCILED WITH GOD

Receive God's Word

"God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." Romans 5:8-11

Reflect on God's Truth

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you" (John 15:9). "And how did the Father love Him? The infinite desire and delight of God to communicate to the Son all He had Himself, to take the Son into the most complete equality with Himself, to live in the Son and have the Son live in Him—this was the love of God to Christ. It is a mystery of glory of which we can form no conception; we can only bow and worship as we try to think of it. And with such a love, with this very same love, Christ longs in an infinite desire and delight to communicate to us all He is and has, to make us partakers of His own nature and blessedness, to live in us and have us live in Himself."⁸ Reflect on the truth that it was God who took the initiative to reconcile us to Himself when we were ignorant, apathetic and powerless to find Him. Ponder the reality that He now wants us to partake of His love and experience it in a deep and personal way.

Live in God's Grace

Have you ever wept with joy at being reconciled to God by the sacrifice of His Son, especially since you were completely undeserving of such grace? How does it make you feel that you are deeply loved by God, just as you are? Have you ever experienced the depth of His personal love for you?

O Lord, you loved me and reconciled me when I was your enemy. You brought me into your family; and now you invite me to sit at your table every day. The price of my justification and reconciliation was staggering beyond comprehension. The realization that my reconciliation required the death of your innocent, holy Son is humbling and overwhelming. I was, rightly, an object of your wrath, yet you sought me like a shepherd seeks a lost sheep and brought me back to the safety and shelter of your presence. Help me to always seek your presence and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory. I worship you and you alone. Amen.

DAY 9

WE ARE ACCEPTED AND EMBRACED BY GOD

Receive God's Word

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him." Luke 15:20

Reflect on God's Truth

Jesus told the parable of the prodigal son (recorded in Luke 15), which is a picture of what we were before we came to faith in Christ. The parable is actually more about the depth of our heavenly Father's love and mercy than it is about our sinful waywardness. In the parable, a son publicly rejects his father and leaves home to squander his inheritance on pleasure and prostitutes. The son runs through the money and ends up not only tending pigs, but also living with them and eating their food. Filthy, starving, stinking and desperate, he realizes that his father's servants are living in luxury compared to the way he lives. He also sees how wretched he is and wants to return home, if only to work as his father's servant. When his father sees his son in the distance, he runs to meet him, embracing him in his filthy poverty and shame. Not only does the father forgive his son, but he also restores him to full sonship, as if his rebellion had never happened. He puts a robe on him and gives him a ring for his finger. Although the son's filth was physical, our filth is inward, revealing our sins of pride, lust, hate and envy. Yet, just as the father in the parable embraced his wayward son, so our heavenly Father embraces us in mercy and complete forgiveness when we come to Him and confess our sins.

Live in God's Grace

Jesus, the master story teller, astounds us by opening our eyes to the eagerness and excitement God feels when we take even the first step of repentance toward Him. While we're still a long way off, our Father rushes to us to welcome us home, enfolding us in His embrace of compassion, forgiveness, complete restoration and celebration. The fact that God is tender toward you and zealously longs for you may be new ideas for you. How does it make you feel that your heavenly Father has embraced you and that you have been accepted as one of His sons through the sacrifice of His only Son?

O Lord, I praise you and thank you for your fathomless love. You embraced me in my sin and showered me with mercy, kindness, love and grace. While I was a sinner, you sent your Son to die for me. I was just like the prodigal son; but even when I was a long way from home you ran to me and took me in your arms. Thank you for rescuing me from hate, despair, foolishness, and slavery to ungodly passions and pleasures. You took the initiative to love me; I did nothing. You are rich in compassion and mercy. Help me, Lord, to shout for joy for your redemption of my soul. I worship and exalt you for holding me in your eternal, loving embrace because of the sacrifice of your Son. Amen.

DAY 10

WE ARE DELIVERED FROM GUILT AND SHAME

Receive God's Word

"How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" Hebrews 9:14

Reflect on God's Truth

One of the roadblocks to intimacy with God is our hesitancy to trust Him and allow Him to embrace us and love us in a deeply personal and intimate way. We are afraid of Him and try to hide from Him, just like Adam and Eve tried to hide from Him in the garden. Before they sinned, they openly walked God. After they sinned, they experienced fear and shame. Sometimes our fear and shame over past sins, even after we have come to belief in the saving grace of Jesus Christ, causes us to hide from God and wrongly think that we are unworthy of His love. This is especially true for anyone who was abused as a child and grew up in a toxic, dysfunctional family, where fear and shame were instruments of pain. Hiding from God and trying to medicate the pain with drugs, sex, and alcohol became the norm. But life is vastly different for the child of God.

Live in God's Grace

How does it make you feel that there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus? That Jesus blood and righteousness has set you free from guilt, fear, and shame? You can experience the freedom of an innocent child of God in your inner being. God can remove all roadblocks to intimacy with Him if you simply trust Him. You can start living in His grace today.

O Lord, thank you for freeing me from condemnation. Your precious blood has cleansed my conscience because you took the punishment for my guilt and shame. You were falsely condemned, humiliated, and made to feel ashamed. I was rightly condemned and rightly ashamed, but you stood in my place and were condemned for me. I no longer have to live under a cloud of unworthiness, because you died for me and set me free. I worship and praise you for your love, mercy, and grace. Your love is astounding. Help me to always walk in the open with you. Amen.

DAY 11

WE CAN DRAW NEAR TO GOD

Receive God's Word

"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water." Hebrews 10:19-22

Reflect On God's Truth

The word "confidence" is used five times in the book of Hebrews. Each time it is used as a word of encouragement. Our relationship with God as His adopted children isn't dependent on our mood or feelings. Feelings are funny things. A word of encouragement makes us feel up. A word of hurtful sarcasm in public makes us feel down. Regardless of our shifting mood or emotions, God's continual love and unconditional acceptance of us remains unchanged. The sun continues to shine even though clouds cover it; God's love for us is eternal, intense, and joyful, even if we can't sense it. He wants us to be confident in His love.

Read these words of encouragement from God's Word:

- "For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end" (Hebrews 3:14);
- "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16);
- "Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward" (Hebrews 10:35).

Live in God's Grace

A well-known Christian song declares, "the blood will never lose its power." Is your confidence to draw near to God based on the blood of Christ or your feelings? Is your confidence to pray based on how holy you feel, or based on your faith in His blood? Be assured this day that God wants you to draw near to Him in confidence through the cross.

O Lord, I thank you that you have sprinkled me with your precious blood so that I can come into your presence with confidence and joy. Your ultimate sacrifice required you to become a servant and then die a terrible death. It cost you your reputation, your comfort, your safety. It cost you your very life. But because of your death for my sins, I can draw near to the Father at any time, any place, and be confident of His acceptance of me. In peace or trouble, in joy or despair, I know that I can confidently draw near to your gracious and merciful Presence, Father, solely because of the precious blood of Christ. I praise you and worship you for the gift of your Son that has brought me near to you. Amen.

DAY 12

WE HAVE BEEN ADOPTED AS GOD'S CHILDREN

Receive God's Word

"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God."
Galatians 4:4-7

Reflect on God's Truth

"My identity as Abba's child is not an abstraction or a tap dance into religiosity. It is the core truth of my existence."⁹ Once a son, always a son. The identity of my three children will always carry the DNA of me and my wife. That can never change. When we became a son or daughter of God by adoption, He brought us into His family, gave us His name and His DNA through the work of the Holy Spirit. Now we can always call our heavenly Father "Abba." Is your relationship with God based on your performance or Christ's shed blood on the cross?

Live in God's Grace

Through His cross we have been adopted as God's children. Is your identity as Abba's child the core truth of your existence? Can you call your heavenly Father "Abba"? Throughout the day today, say "I love you, Abba Father."

O Lord, thank you for adopting me into your family. I was estranged, on the streets, in danger, but you rescued me. You have given me all the rights and privileges of being your child. O Lord, I celebrate the privilege of being able to call you "Abba" because of the death of your only Son on the cross. Take away my doubting, fearful heart and give me the heart of a child so that I can joyfully, freely, and in complete confidence call you "Abba," my Father. Thank you for the full assurance of your love. I praise you for inviting me into your presence the way a daddy throws wide his arms when his children run to him. Thank you for wanting me. Help me to hunger for you. I bless and praise your wonderful name. Amen.

DAY 13

WE ARE KEPT SAFE BY HIS UNFAILING LOVE

Receive God's Word

“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:38-39

Reflect on God's Truth

Ponder the truth that you are safe for all eternity because of His love. “It is staggering that God should love sinners; yet it is true. God loves creatures who have become unlovely and (one would have thought) unlovable. There was nothing whatever in the objects of His love to call it forth; nothing in us could attract or prompt it. Love among persons is awakened by something in the beloved, but the love of God is free, spontaneous, unevoked, uncaused. God loves people because he has chosen to love them—as Charles Wesley put it, ‘he hath loved us, he hath loved us, because he would love’ (an echo of Deut 7:7-8)—and no reason for his love can be given except his own sovereign good pleasure.”¹⁰

Live in God's Grace

The challenge is to accept the reality that God loves you in your imperfection. Why do you think there needs to be something lovely about you in order for Him to love you? Love is His nature, His essence, His being. He loves you as you are. You can't earn it. Nothing you can do will cause Him to love you more. You are safe. Nothing can separate you from His love. Is God's love the most compelling force in your life? Accept the reality that God demonstrated in the death of His only Son He passionately loves you, enjoys you, and wants you to draw closer to Him. Repeat this phrase during the day, “Nothing can separate me from His love.”

O Lord, when you showed your glory to Moses, you repeated and emphasized the magnificence of your love. The cross will shout for all eternity that you are a God of magnificent and overwhelming love. I worship you for your steadfast love to me. O Lord, burn this truth into my heart and mind that you love even me. You seek and save the lost, including me, just as the Father welcomed the prodigal son home in His loving embrace. Strengthen me with power by your Spirit in my inner being so that I can experience the fullness of the depth of your love for me. I worship you and praise you, my Lord and my God. Amen.

3. IN HIS CROSS IS THE RADIANCE OF HIS GLORY

“Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses’ face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory.” 2 Corinthians 3:7-9

His death and resurrection are where the glory of Christ shines most brightly. There is a divine glory in the way Jesus embraced his death and what he accomplished by it. So Paul says, “We preach Christ crucified, a stumblingblock to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:23-24). “The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18). For those who have eyes to see, there is divine glory in the death of Jesus.¹¹

DAY 14

THE GLORY OF HIS MERCY

Receive God's Word

"For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit." Titus 3:3-5

Reflect on God's Truth

One of the most stunning acts of mercy ever recorded is when our Lord Jesus forgave those who were laughing and jeering at Him as He was dying on the cross. These men spat on Him, brutally tortured Him, and were enjoying the agony of His excruciatingly painful, slow death. Yet, He said, "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do." Jesus manifested the glory of His mercy on the cross.

- Have you ever realized that you deserve the same punishment as those who tortured and executed Jesus?
- Think about the reality that you didn't deserve His mercy.
- Reflect on the mercy that God gave you in sending His own Son to die for your sins so that you could be forgiven and pardoned.

Live in God's Grace

God wants us to be joyful recipients of His gifts and grace. He is a God of joy and longs for us to experience the joy of salvation because of His mercy we did not deserve. Throughout your day, reflect on the glory of God's mercy in sending His Son to die for you. Receive His joy and throughout the day offer from your lips a sacrifice of praise and thanks for His abundant mercy to you.

O Lord, I worship you in the glory of your mercy. You have showered me with forgiveness when I didn't deserve anything but your anger. You loved me even when I was trapped, desperate and had given up all hope. I was the degenerate prodigal, but you embraced me when I turned to you. I was the woman caught in adultery, but you didn't condemn me. O Lord, the riches of your mercy are utterly magnificent! Help me to know in a deeper way the glory of your mercy displayed on the cross. By your Spirit, help me to rejoice with exuberant praise because of your boundless mercy toward me. Amen.

DAY 15

THE GLORY OF HIS GRACE

Receive God's Word

"In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which he lavished on us." Ephesians 1:5-8

Reflect on God's Truth

- Think about the cost of God's grace toward you. He didn't just say a simple word. In order to extend grace, God's Son had to pay the ultimate price for our sins in a crucible of excruciating pain, loneliness, and torment.
- Reflect on the cross as a magnificent display of the glory of God's grace. God's nature as a gracious God transforms us. The realization that He is full of grace and kindness toward us, in Jesus His Beloved, helps us to be at rest in His presence.
- Think of the fact that God has looked you in the eye, rescued you, forgiven you, and embraced you. How does His grace, which is personal toward you, make you feel?

Live in God's Grace

The word "grace" means an undeserved gift, an unearned blessing. During your day, reflect on the riches of God's glorious grace to you in redeeming your soul through the blood of His Son. As often as His grace comes to your mind, say out loud, gently or exuberantly, "Lord, I receive your glorious grace, and I praise and worship you." Don't be timid, shy, or weak in expressing your gratitude to God for His grace to you.

O Lord, I worship and praise you for your glorious grace to me. I do not deserve it. I was a slave to sin and darkness; I was utterly unlovable. In my pain, I lashed out and inflicted pain on others. I had no hope. But you loved me when I hated and was being hated. You rescued me and brought me into your family through Jesus' death on the cross. Only the Son of God could have gone through that unspeakable ordeal, and you did it for me. Your grace is glorious, immeasurably rich, and abundant. Only you are worthy of my worship, and I will worship you alone, forever. Amen.

DAY 16

THE GLORY OF HIS SLOWNESS TO ANGER

Receive God's Word

"Yet even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster." Joel 2:12-13

Reflect on God's Truth

When I was around twelve years old, and my brother was around four, the family was traveling home from a trip to visit my aunt and uncle. My brother had a new metal toy pistol, and from the backseat he leaned over and hit my father a good one over the head while he was driving. My brother was young and did not intend to cause my father pain, yet my father did not strike back or angrily raise his voice. In that instance, my father was slow to anger because he loved my brother. At times, we cause our heavenly Father enormous pain through our selfish acts and attitudes, yet He is slow to anger with us because He loves us passionately.

Live in God's Grace

Do you realize how you been spared from the wrath and anger of God because of the death of His Son on the cross for your sins? Do you fully understand how you have been saved from punishment and death because God is merciful and slow to anger? At various times during the day, acknowledge your selfishness and sin in the past and pause to give thanks to God for His slowness to anger and His longsuffering toward you.

O Lord, I worship you and celebrate your slowness to anger. You showed no anger as you suffered on the cross. Just like your enemies that day, I have caused you pain with my self-centered acts of evil that caused others to suffer; and yet you didn't destroy me in anger. You drew me in by your love, through your Spirit, and reconciled me by your grace. I praise you, Lord, that you are a God who is slow to anger, merciful, and kind. Help me to be like you. Help me to love others, and not hold grudges. Cause me to know the glory of your slowness to anger, and make me more like you. Amen.

DAY 17

THE GLORY OF HIS STEADFAST LOVE

Receive God's Word

"God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

Reflect on God's Truth

- Think about the heart of God and the glory of His steadfast love. His love for you has been steadfast in spite of your unbelief, your love of self, and your disinterest in Him.
- Reflect on the cross as a magnificent display of the evidence of His love for you. Jesus endured incalculable pain—not only physical pain, but the spiritual pain of separation from His Father when all of our sins were laid on Him. He became sin for us so that we could be clothed in His righteousness. His demonstration of love for us wasn't simply an easy word spoken in a comfortable setting. It was manifested on the cross in unspeakable pain, horror, and shame. What a Savior!
- How does it make you feel that He gave His life for you? That His love is personal to you? That His love is deeper, wider, higher, and broader than you can possibly imagine or think?

Live in God's Grace

Many of us do not feel worthy of His love. And that's true; we are not. But a parent loves a child regardless of his or her failures, mistakes, and personal inadequacies. Ask His Spirit to cause you to experience His love in a new and deeper way. The beating heart of discipleship is a love relationship with Jesus and may this be the day that you allow the Holy Spirit to help you experience God's passionate love for you. Give thanks to Him for loving you so much that He sent His Son to the cross for you so that you could enjoy His love and presence every day.

O Lord, I worship and praise you for your steadfast love toward me. Your love never fails. So often I have been weak, I have doubted and been afraid. But nothing has ever separated me from your love—not my fear; not my sin; not my failures; not my ever-present weaknesses, pain, or even tragedies. Not one thing can separate me from your love. Open my mind and my heart to the fullness of your Spirit so that I can experience and know your love in a deeper and more powerful way. Ground me, root me, and establish me in your love, and give me strength to know the depth of your love, which was manifested on the cross in power and glory. I worship and exalt you; I adore you and praise you, my Lord, my Savior, my King, and my Best Friend. Amen.

DAY 18

THE GLORY OF HIS NEVER-ENDING FAITHFULNESS

Receive God's Word

"The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." Lamentations 3:22-23

Reflect on God's Truth

When it is said of someone, "He's a rock," it means that person is steady in the face of pressure; faithful and dependable in all circumstances. Think of God as your rock. He alone is worthy of your complete confidence and trust, because He is completely faithful. In the book of Psalms, the word "rock" is used 21 times to describe God. Like a rock, God is constant, unchanging, certain. Think about the unchanging nature of God and His constant faithfulness to you. When you have been weak, He has been strong. When you have wavered, He has been faithful. Reflect on the faithfulness of God to you in loving you so much that He sent His Son to the cross to pay for your sins.

Live in God's Grace

When you doubt God's faithfulness, sin is not far off. Disobedience is close by when we question God's plan. His promises are certain, but they are delivered on His schedule, according to His plan. What promises are you waiting for that God has not yet fulfilled? Are you beginning to doubt Him? Ask Him to help you behold the glory of His faithfulness through His Son's death on the cross and put your heart at rest so that you unswervingly believe that "he who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23).

O Lord, nowhere was your faithfulness greater than at the cross. You knew from eternity that your destiny was the suffering of the cross, and you were faithful to the will of the Father, and faithful to me. For the joy set before you, you obediently endured the cross and despised its shame. O Lord, you have faithfully carried me in times of weakness, pain, and shame. Out of the depths of your faithfulness and love you hold me in the palm of your hand and protect me from evil and destruction. Truly, O Lord, the cross will forever display your faithfulness, your loving-kindness, and your mercy to me. I worship you and glorify your holy Name. Amen.

DAY 19

THE GLORY OF HIS FORGIVING HEART

Receive God's Word

"Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Isaiah 55:6-7

Reflect on God's Truth

One of the most dramatic and stunning displays of the glory of God's forgiving nature was manifested on the cross. His nature is not only to forgive, but as the verse says, to "abundantly pardon." His forgiveness is not grudging; it is joyful. His pardon is not reluctant, but abundant. Think about the completeness and finality of the forgiveness of your sin. Reflect on the truth that you are forgiven only because Christ paid the ultimate penalty for your sins. Ponder the joy of the Lord in forgiving you, cleansing you, and abundantly pardoning all of your sins.

Live in God's Grace

The evil one is called the accuser of the brethren, and he would have you believe that you have not been completely forgiven. He would have you think your forgiveness is dependent on performance; but that is a lie. Your forgiveness rests on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross for your sins, not your good works. During the day, repeat this phrase, "I have been abundantly pardoned by God. Christ shed His blood for my sins, and I have received His gift of righteousness."

O Lord, I worship you for your heart of forgiveness and merciful compassion to me. By your grace, I am cleansed, purified, and have been given a clear conscience. Help me by your Holy Spirit to comprehend the magnitude and depth of your mercy and kindness in forgiving my iniquity and sin. You have blotted out my sins by your precious blood, and I am free from guilt, condemnation, and shame. Thank you for taking away my sins and separating them from me as far as the east is from the west. I worship you and exalt your matchless name. Amen.

DAY 20

THE GLORY OF HIS HOLINESS AND JUSTICE

Receive God's Word

"The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake! The LORD is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the peoples. Let them praise your great and awesome name! Holy is he! The King in his might loves justice. You have established equity; you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. Exalt the LORD our God; worship at his footstool! Holy is he! Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel also was among those who called upon his name. They called to the LORD, and he answered them. In the pillar of the cloud he spoke to them; they kept his testimonies and the statute that he gave them. O LORD our God, you answered them; you were a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their wrongdoings. Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the LORD our God is holy!" Psalm 99

Reflect on God's Truth

When God appeared to Moses, He described Himself and said that He executes justice and judgment because He is holy. His holiness and justice are unwavering and proactive. Take some time to ponder that without the intervention of Christ's sacrifice for your sins on the cross, you would be eternally lost, because God is holy and just, and you would have justly received His wrath. Through Christ's sacrificial death, the holiness and justice of God were satisfied once and for all for your sins, and you no longer have to fear the wrath of God.

Live in God's Grace

The penalty of our sin was the death of God's only Son. God encourages joy, praise, and worship of Him with instruments and loud singing. But there are times when we need to be still in reverence and awe. In addition to praise and worship, cultivate reverence and awe before God, because He is holy and just. Today, in reverence and awe, say "Abba Father."

O Lord, the cross reveals the glory of your holiness and justice, and the magnitude of my sin. Without the blood sacrifice of your Son on the cross, I would have experienced your righteous anger and wrath. Because your holiness and righteous judgment has to punish sin and unbelief, you made Jesus, who is the exact imprint of your nature, guilty instead of me. I no longer have to fear you or your punishment. I am now your child because of your mercy, love, and kindness. Help me by your Spirit to hold you in awe and reverence as I live out my life. Empower me and strengthen me by your Spirit to be like your Son in holiness, purity, and godliness. In reverence and awe I call you my "Abba." Amen.

4. IN BEHOLDING HIS GLORY, WE ARE BEING TRANSFORMED

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

In our freedom, we have the stunning opportunity to behold the glory of God and experience the process of changing into the likeness of Christ. The dynamic of our transformation is the Holy Spirit who is the present manifestation of the power of God here on earth now in our time. He has the power to transform us. He glorifies Christ and reveals Him to us so that we will be transformed. “He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” John 16:14.¹²

DAY 21

HIS GLORY IS REVEALED IN THE DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST

Receive God's Word

"And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the **light of the gospel of the glory of Christ**, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." 2 Corinthians 3:3-6

Reflect on God's Truth

Ponder the amazing reality that the gospel is a revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ as He lay dying on the cross. Reflect on God's attributes that He described to Moses, and then think about these characteristics in your Savior on the cross: He had *mercy* on you in spite of your sins; He gives you the riches of His *grace*, which you don't deserve; He demonstrates His *slowness to anger* toward you; He proved the staggering depth of His *love* for you to have His Son pay the penalty for your sins; He never stops His *faithfulness* to you in spite of your doubts, wanderings, and sin; His *forgiveness* of your sins is complete; and He fulfilled His *righteousness* by punishing His only Son instead of you. God's nature and being is glorious, and it was nowhere more glorious and magnificent than on that awful, dreadful, wonderful day when His Son paid the penalty for our sins and opened the way to God the Father. The cross is a radiant, eternal burst of the glory of God.

Live in God's Grace

The old hymn says, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace." Pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal the glory of Christ to you. Let your inner man and the eyes of your heart begin a lifelong focus of gazing on the face of Jesus Christ and His glory manifested to you, and for you, on the cross.

O Lord, help me, by your Spirit, to behold your glory on the cross and worship you. Help me to celebrate and worship like the redeemed in heaven and fall on my face before you in wonder, awe, and praise. I hunger to see and experience your glory in a greater way. In the face of Christ on the cross, I have known your mercy, grace, slowness to anger, love, faithfulness, forgiveness, and holiness. I humbly ask your Holy Spirit to make your redemption of my soul powerfully real so that I worship you in Spirit and truth. Grant me a new infilling of your Holy Spirit so that I can know the depth, the height, the length, and the width of your love for me. Amen.

DAY 22

BEHOLDING HIS GLORY TRANSFORMS US INTO HIS LIKENESS

Receive God's Word

"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

Reflect on God's Truth

Ponder the seven attributes of God, described to Moses, that were radiant in Christ as He hung, dying, on the cross: mercy, grace, slowness to anger, love, faithfulness, forgiveness, and holiness. Jesus revealed how we are to be like Him on the cross. While hanging on the cross in excruciating pain He poured out His love on His enemies, His mother, and the thief next to Him. And in His brokenness and pain He kept His eyes on the Father and relied completely on Him until the end. The heart of discipleship is a love relationship with Jesus based on what He did for us on the cross, not only dying for our sins, but showing us in His death how we are to live.

Live in God's Grace

This day, behold His glory, and allow the Holy Spirit to transform your heart and mind to be like Christ. Ask the Holy Spirit to permeate your heart and mind with the realization that He has richly lavished on you each one of these attributes of His being on you so that the heart of your relationship with Him is love. This day, memorize and repeat this verse during the day: "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by which the world is crucified to me and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14).

O Lord, I hunger to be like you in your love, kindness, mercy, gentleness, and truth, but I am helpless without your doing it through me. Your promise is to transform me by the power of your Spirit as I behold your glory on the cross. All that you are—your love, power, mercy, grace, kindness, holiness, justice—shone on the cross with eternal radiance and glory. O Lord, grant that by your Spirit, I will behold your glory on the cross in a new and powerful way and be transformed into the likeness of your image. Amen.

DAY 23

HIS GLORY INSPIRES WORSHIP

Receive God's Word

"The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped." Exodus 34:6-8

Reflect On God's Truth

- Read Exodus 33:17-23; 34:4-8,29. Ponder the experience Moses had with God, and how it remained with him. Did you know that God wants you to experience His glory?
- Reflect on what God said to Moses when He appeared in His glory. The essence of God's glory is His being, His nature, His attributes. How do His attributes make you feel?
- What is your immediate reaction to God's mercy, grace, slowness to anger, abundant steadfast love, forgiveness of sin, and holiness?

Live in God's Grace

Did you know that Jesus prayed that we would behold the glory of God like Moses did? Just before He went to the cross, He said, "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). Do you feel safe with God? Are you at peace in His presence? Like Moses, ask the Lord to show you His glory and worship Him with all your being. In the presence of the glory of our Creator and Redeemer, as His loved creation we can do nothing else but worship.

O Lord, give me a deep, unquenchable desire to behold your glory. Forgive my past hardness of heart and my lukewarm response to the magnificence and wonder of who you are. Everything you described to Moses you have been to me: merciful, gracious, slow to anger; your love has been steadfast and faithful; you have forgiven me and pardoned me time and time again; and you punished your only Son for my sins. Create in me a hunger to know you better and experience your glory in a greater way. I humbly ask you to fill me with your Holy Spirit so that I behold your glory. Help me worship you with all of my heart, all of my soul, all of my mind, and all of my strength. Amen.

5. IN HIS CROSS AND RESURRECTION WE OBTAIN FREEDOM

“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” John 8:36

Paul writes in Galatians 5:1, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” If we are not experiencing what Paul calls in Romans 8:21 “the glorious freedom of the children of God,” then we must acknowledge that His Word has not taken sovereign possession of us, that we are not fully under the sway of His Spirit.¹³

DAY 24

HE HAS SET US FREE

Receive God's Word

"For freedom Christ has set us free;" Galatians 5:1

Reflect on God's Truth

Ponder the reality that Christ has set you free simply to be free. Think about the incredible truth that Jesus has set you free to enjoy life in His freedom. Because of His deep love for you and death on the cross you have been delivered from darkness into light, set free from hatred to love, from despair to hope, from meaninglessness to purpose, and from self-centeredness to self denial. You are free to live a life of peace, joy, and love. Reflect on His goodness that He enjoys you living in His freedom.

Live in God's Grace

A. W. Tozer wrote, "The world of sense intrudes upon our attention day and night for the whole of our lifetime. It is clamorous, insistent and self-demonstrating. It does not appeal to our faith; it is here, assaulting our five senses, demanding to be accepted as real and final."¹⁴ The allure of the world, the lies of the evil one, and the love of self would pull us back into slavery and darkness. The resurrection power of our risen Lord has set free to live life to the full. The beating heart of discipleship is a love relationship with Jesus in the fullness of our freedom to be who He has called us to be. This day focus on the cross and resurrection and allow Christ's victory to empower you to live and love in freedom with Christ as Lord, not in the illusion of the temporal, which is slavery, bondage, and death.

O Lord, I praise and adore you for persevering through unbelievable pain and suffering in order to set me free. You have done it, once and for all, now and forever. I did nothing; you alone have done it. Because of your mighty triumph on the cross and your resurrection from the dead, I can say, "I am a son of God, and the Son has set me free." I worship you and exalt you. You are my life and my freedom. Blessed be your matchless name. Amen.

DAY 25

HE HAS DELIVERED US FROM CONTROL OF THE EVIL ONE

Receive God's Word

"Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."
Hebrews 2:14-15

Reflect on God's Truth

- Ponder the reality that through His death your Savior and Redeemer has prevailed in an incredible, stunning triumph over the evil one. In the most important, violent battle of all time, the evil one and his minions were conquered once and for all in the death and resurrection of Christ.
- Reflect on the freedom that you have because of Christ's victory. You are no longer a slave to the forces of darkness. Christ has set you free.

Live in God's Grace

Do you live in the reality of your freedom in Christ, or are you still living as though you were a slave to sin? Does the evil one try to deceive you into love of self and doubting God? Do you seek the things of this world? Seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God, because you are free from the ensnarement of this world. Rejoice in the freedom from the evil one that Christ has given you.

O Lord, I worship you and praise you for your mighty triumph over Satan, the enemy of my soul. You have conquered him forever and delivered me from the domain of darkness to your kingdom, and I now stand in light, truth, and love by your power and grace. Satan came to steal, kill, and destroy, but you have given me abundant life. On the cross you overcame evil with good, and I rejoice in your eternal victory over Satan, death, and sin. I offer sacrifices to you with shouts of joy because your triumph seals the victory forever. I will rejoice and give you praise all the days of my life for your redemption of my soul. Amen.

DAY 26

HE HAS FREED US FROM THE WORLD'S ALLURE

Receive God's Word

"May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." Galatians 6:14

Reflect on God's Truth

Ponder the reality that the power of the world's allure in your life has been broken. Reflect on the truth that on the cross your Deliverer has freed you from the power of worldly pleasure that once enslaved you. Realize and know that you no longer are a slave to the temptations of the world and that you have been set free to choose life. Understand that you can now become the noble, loving, godly man or woman of integrity you have always longed to be.

Live in God's Grace

Life involves choices. Some choices are major, others are minor. Even some small choices are a choice between life and death. Should I get closer to that person or not? Should I go to that place or another? Jesus said there is a broad way and narrow way, and that the narrow way leads to life, and the broad way leads to death. But we are free to make the right choice because Jesus said, "He whom the Son sets free is free indeed" (John 8:36). And because you are free, you are free to choose life. The lusts in the world lead to death, but Jesus' cross has crucified the allure of the world's temptations and guilty pleasures. This day in all your choices, surrender to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to help you make the right choices. Choose life because you have been set free.

O Lord, your death on the cross broke the power of the world's allure in my life. It still tempts me, but you overcame it and destroyed its power and set me free. I worship and praise you for the freedom to love, obey, and live for you in purity and godliness. Lord, your amazing grace has given me new life in your Spirit so that you are at the center of my life instead of lust and pride. Thank you for taking my focus and desire away from things of this world, which are passing away, and centering my focus and desire on things eternal. I worship and exalt your glorious name. Amen.

DAY 27

HE HAS FREED US FROM LOVE OF SELF

Receive God's Word

"For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." Romans 6:5-11

Reflect on God's Truth

This passage describes our passport to freedom from love of self. Ponder this: "*Our old self was crucified with Him.*" Reflect on the words, "*You also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*" Think about what it means for your old self to have died and that you are now alive in a resurrection like Christ's. What does it mean to you to be "*united with him in a resurrection like his*"? Allow the Holy Spirit to penetrate your mind and heart with these incredible truths. Christ's victory on the cross and His resurrection has freed us from self-centeredness, self-love, and self-worship. "He whom the Son sets free is free indeed" (John 8:36).

Live in God's Grace

Augustine said, "There can be only two basic loves, the love of God unto the forgetfulness of self, or the love of self unto the forgetfulness of God."¹⁵ Who do you love most—God or yourself? Allow Christ's victory on the cross and His resurrection to render your old self powerless. In your freedom, allow the Spirit to help you love God with all of your heart, all of your soul, all of your mind, and all of your strength (see Mark 12:30).

O Lord, you know my weaknesses, sins, and failures. You've seen my many attempts at self-reformation only to fail time and time again. But in your mercy you saved me and gave me the victory that you won on the cross. Not only did you break the powers of darkness, but you also shattered my selfishness and greed, lust and pride, which were my shame and my destruction. I praise you for giving me new life, new hope, and new desires. I exalt you for renewing your image in me and creating in me a new man, which is like you in true righteousness and holiness. You alone have set me free to love, to serve, to be pure. I rejoice in you. I worship you and bless your wonderful name. Amen.

DAY 28

HE HAS FREED US FROM PERFECTIONISM

Receive God's Word

"And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.'" Colossians 2:13,14.

Reflect on God's Truth

Ponder the reality that the source of your guilt lay in the pronouncement of the demands of the law against you. Your condemnation emanated from your failure to be perfect. Reflect on the freedom of your redemption by Christ, the Holy, Sinless Perfect One who died in your place. You have failed to keep the law, and you will fail to keep the law in the future. But there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, because He is our perfection. He fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law for us with His sinless life; and by His blood shed on the cross, we are free from guilt, shame, and condemnation. The consequences of our imperfection was nailed to the cross.

Live in God's Grace

This day memorize: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1).

O Lord, Thank you for your sinless life and death on the cross that has set me free from the weight and burden of being perfect. But Lord, I also need your daily grace to be always free from a legalistic mind and feeling pressure to perform. The old habits and tendencies are still there, and sometimes I fall back into thinking I need to perform and earn your love. Forgive me for having confidence in my flesh and thinking that by my works of righteousness, I can earn your favor. Help me to know your love is constant and I am safe in you. O Lord, let the glorious truth sink into my innermost being that you do not now condemn me, even when I stumble and fail. Deliver me from a mindset of legalism and performance, and help me to rejoice in the joy of your salvation, and worship you with joy. Amen.

6. IN HIS CROSS WE BEHOLD THE UNMISTAKABLE SIGNS OF A TRUE DISCIPLE

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

“If we are wise we will do what Jesus did: endure the cross and despise its shame for the joy that is set before us. To do this is to submit the whole pattern of our lives to be destroyed and built again in the power of an endless life. And we shall find that it is more than poetry, more than sweet hymnody and elevated feeling. The cross will cut into our lives where it hurts worst, sparing neither us nor our carefully cultivated reputations. It will defeat us and bring our selfish lives to an end. Only then can we rise in fullness of life to establish a pattern of living wholly new and free and full of good works.”¹⁶

DAY 29

A DISCIPLE IS COMPELLED BY THE LOVE OF CHRIST AND DENIES HIMSELF

Receive God's Word

"For **the love of Christ compels** us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" 2 Corinthians 5:14-15.

Reflect on God's Truth

The love that God showed for us in sending His only Son to die on the cross for our sins compels us to love. And the cross records Christ's works of love that need to be at the core of our existence. While on the cross, in excruciating pain, He ministered, forgave, and loved. He loved His mother by placing her in the care and protection of John. He loved the thief next to him by securing a place for him in paradise. And He loved His enemies, who were continuing to cause Him pain, by forgiving them.

The self has to die; there is no other way. Jesus made it clear that we cannot serve two masters. The self wants to be a lord, not a servant. It desires recognition, not obscurity. The choice is clear, and Jesus showed us the way while hanging on the cross. The way of the cross is the way of the loving self denial. Ask God how you can be more like Christ, the servant of the Father. Reflect on Jesus' call to take up your cross daily, deny yourself and be compelled by His love.

Live in God's Grace

Love is a choice, and the love of Christ compels us to loving acts. Paul says, "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails" (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). Show yourself to be Christ's disciple by your love, not your words. Today, how can you deny yourself and allow the love of Christ compel you in a way that is new, unique and different from anything you have done before?

O Lord, these verses say it all. You laid down your life for all mankind. The evil and the depraved, the noble and the good. Help me to love the way you loved when you went to the cross and laid down your life. O Lord, the heart of discipleship is a love relationship with you. Help me to die to self and live a life of continual love for my friends, neighbors, and enemies the way you did on the cross. Lord, fill me with your love so I am compelled to love and deny myself with a thankful and joyful heart. Help me to love by the power of your Spirit and follow your glorious example. Amen.

DAY 30

A DISCIPLE DELIGHTS IN OBEDIENCE

Receive God's Truth

"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Philipians 2:5-11

Reflect on God's Truth

- Ponder the obedience of Christ as He faced the excruciating pain and torture of physical death and spiritual separation from the Father when He paid the penalty for the sins of the whole world, even though He was completely sinless.
- Reflect on the love Christ had for the Father that enabled Him to be obedient even unto death.
- Think about the love of Christ for you that He was willing to be obedient so that your sins could be forgiven and you could have the gift of eternal life.

Live in God's Grace

What is the nature of your obedience? Are you being disobedient in any area of your life to what you know is the will of God? Ask God to pour His love into your heart so that you can obey the way Christ obeyed the Father, through incredible pain and suffering.

O Lord, the culmination of your earthly life is the supreme example of obedience to the Father in the face of excruciating pain. You never questioned or resisted the Father's will. You perfectly obeyed even to the point of going to the cross, because it was necessary for my redemption. Help me always to say, like you did, "Not my will, but thine be done." Give me a heart that loves to obey and serve you; and take away my tendency to rebel and go my own way. You never went your own way. You always went the Father's way; and because of your obedience, you secured eternal redemption for me. Thank you for your faithful obedience to the Father's will, and for being the perfect example. Amen.

DAY 31

A DISCIPLE SHARES THE GOSPEL MESSAGE AND MAKES DISCIPLES

Receive God's Word

"And he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' And he said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise'" (Luke 23:42).

Reflect on God's Truth

Jesus said He came to seek and save those who were lost. It was His primary mission on earth. And the last thing He said to us while on earth was, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus' concern for the thief should be our concern as well. Parting commands are typically of vital importance. Ponder the crucial importance of our mission and call. The greatest gift of love we can share with a friend is to share the gospel so that he or she comes to know Jesus and gains eternal life.

Live in God's Grace

How deep is your passion for the lost people around you? How much do you think about the eternal destiny of your friends and acquaintances who need to become disciples of Jesus? Ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit so that your love for others causes you to reach out to them with the salvation message. If we truly love our neighbors and friends, we will want to tell them about Jesus, share the good news of the gospel, and make disciples.

O Lord, even when you were experiencing excruciating pain and were at the point of death, you reached out in love to the thief hanging next to you and saved him. You cared about him more than you cared about yourself, and you brought him into your kingdom that same day. Thank you for this wonderful example of love to the lost, even when crushed by pain. Help me when I'm down to care about the lost. Help me when I'm discouraged to reach out in love and tell them the good news of the redemption you have secured. Help me to know that I can rely on the power of your Spirit to give me the strength and the words to share, even when I feel despondent or downcast. The lost are all around me. Help me to follow your wonderful example of reaching out even while in pain. Amen.

DAY 32

A DISCIPLE REACHES OUT IN LOVE TO OTHERS

Receive God's Word

“Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.”
John 19:25-27

Reflect on God's Truth

This is another example for a true follower of Jesus. In suffocating and intense physical and emotional pain, Jesus was concerned about the wellbeing of His mother, and He established a new relationship between her and John so that she would be provided for after He departed. Reflect on Jesus’ focus on the safety and security of His mother. Ponder the practicality of love for family and those in need around you.

Live in God's Grace

Providing for one’s family isn’t limited to food and shelter. It also encompasses emotional and spiritual needs. Is there a relative or family member who needs your love, who needs to know that you care? If you aren’t providing for the wellbeing of your family in every aspect of their lives, you are not a true disciple of Jesus. There may be others around you who desperately need a kind word, a loving thought, or food. This day, ask God to open your eyes to the needs of those around you.

*O Lord, thank you for your example of love to your family even during the crushing pain of crucifixion and impending death. Thank you for showing me that love is selfless, kind, and tangible. It’s more than words and feelings. It is action, and it involves practical and material things. You saw to it that your mother was provided shelter and cared for by placing her under the protection and safety of the disciple who was one of your closest friends. Help me to follow your example and be willing to give of my material things even though it is painful. Help me to love my family the way you loved yours, and give to them out of love. Help me, by your Spirit, to be more like you even today.
Amen.*

DAY 33

A DISCIPLE FORGIVES HIS ENEMIES

Receive God's Word

"And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'" Luke 23:33-34

Reflect on God's Truth

"The demands of forgiveness are so daunting that they seem humanly impossible. The exigencies of forgiveness are simply beyond the capacity of ungraced human will. Only reckless confidence in a Source greater than ourselves can empower us to forgive the wounds inflicted by others. In boundary moments such as these there is only one place to go—Calvary. Stay there for a long time and watch as Abba's Only-Begotten dies utterly alone in bloody disgrace. Watch as He breathes forgiveness on His torturers at the moment of their greatest cruelty and mercilessness. On that lonely hill outside the city wall of old Jerusalem, you will experience the healing power of the dying Lord."¹⁷

Live in God's Grace

If you harbor grudges in your heart toward someone, you are not a true disciple of Jesus. If you secretly enjoy thinking about inflicting pain on your enemies, you are not denying yourself as a true follower of Jesus would. If you conceal resentment and bitterness toward someone, it indicates a lack of love. Take inventory of your heart today, and if you have not fully forgiven someone for wounding you, ask God to enable you, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to pour His love into your heart and fully forgive the one who has hurt you.

O Lord, on the cross, you demonstrated to heaven, earth, and hell the magnificent radiance of who you are. In the unspeakable torture and agony of death by crucifixion, the indescribable emotional pain of undeserved guilt and shame, and the intense grief of loneliness, you asked the Father to forgive the wicked and ignorant men who crucified you. I bless you for forgiving me also. It was my sin that put you there, and it was because of me that they crucified you. Help me to forgive my enemies the way you forgave yours. Help me to forgive my friends their shortcomings and weaknesses. And help me to forgive myself and not condemn myself for my sin and iniquity. Lord Jesus, the glory of who you are is magnificent. Thank you for your eternal mercy, love, and forgiving grace. Amen.

DAY 34

A DISCIPLE COMMUNICATES WITH GOD DAILY

Receive God's Word

"And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed" (Mark 1:35).

Reflect on God's Truth

Jesus recognized the need to be in constant communication with the Father. And just as important, He also recognized the need to be alone with the Father. An intimate relationship requires nourishing. A deep and lasting friendship needs focused time and attention. Jesus said that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (see John 14:6). Reflect on how vital it is to maintain a daily focus on Jesus in prayer and Bible meditation.

Live in God's Grace

The beating heart of discipleship is a love relationship with Jesus. Your mind will follow your heart; and the eyes of your heart can lose focus. Ask God to give you a deeper hunger to know Christ and continually focus on Him, His love, and His power through daily prayer and Bible meditation. Ask the Father to cause the Holy Spirit to fill your heart with love for what Christ did for you on the cross, and give you a deeper hunger to know Christ. Because you love Him more, your heart and mind will be filled with gratitude, and spending time with Him daily will be a joy, not a burden.

O Lord, you set a wonderful example of communicating with the Father when you were on the cross. You never lost sight of the Father except for one time during a moment of extreme anguish and pain. You know what it is like during pain to lose sight of you. Help me to lay aside the things that distract me from time with you, so that I can continually look to you for everything I need and concentrate on the calling you have given me. Help me, Lord, to set my affections on things above. Help me to look away from the things of the world, which are temporal and focused on lust, pride, and pleasure. Help me always to spend time alone with you daily, because you are the author and perfecter of my faith.

Amen.

DAY 35

A DISCIPLE HAS BEEN BROKEN AND LEARNED TO RELY ON GOD

Receive God's Word

“For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.” 2 Corinthians 1:8,9.

Reflect on God's Truth

The Apostle Paul had an experience that is universal in the life of a disciple. It is called many things; the valley, the desert, the shaking, the storm, but God uses it to destroy our reliance on the self; to shatter the illusion of our self-righteousness, and to eliminate our self-centeredness. The self needs to be exposed as a false god, an idol to be broken. God in His mercy and grace will allow storms, tests and pain to toss you and send you reeling in helplessness so that you learn only Jesus is worthy of trust.

Live in God's Grace

Accept the storms. Embrace the pain. Endure the suffering. As Jesus was broken on the cross, accept your experience as God's instrument of life, not death. God is disciplining you so that you learn to rely on Him and not yourself. He wants you to reign in life in His strength, not yours. Paul said those who “receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one man, Christ Jesus” (Romans 5:17). The challenge is to get self out of the way and trust Him and receive His abundance of grace and His gift of righteousness—His life lived in you. If you attempt to live life relying on your own strength, you are destined to fail. But this day, simply trust Him and receive the abundance of His grace, and you will reign in life.

O Lord, I worship and praise you for your wonderful and timeless example of being broken and totally dependent on the Father. I feel so unlike you. My flesh wants pleasure, not sacrifice. It wants recognition, not obscurity. It wants independence, not dependence. By your grace, and the power of the Holy Spirit, help me to accept and embrace suffering and pain as your instrument of grace so I can learn to rely on you, and not myself. Thank you that you were willing to leave the Father and the comforts of heaven to show me how to die, and how to live. Help me to take up my cross daily and follow you in brokenness and complete reliance and dependence on you so I can say in the depth of my being and from the bottom of my heart, “Lord Jesus, without You, I can do nothing.” Amen.

7. IN HIM WE ARE FILLED WITH HIS JOY AND RECEIVE EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING

“These things I have spoken to you that my joy might be in you and that your joy might be full.” John 15:11

Celebration belongs to God’s kingdom. God not only offers forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing, but wants to lift up these gifts as a source of joy for all who witness them. In all three of the parables which Jesus tells to explain why he eats with sinners, God rejoices and invites others to rejoice with him. “Rejoice with me,” the shepherd says, “I have found my sheep that was lost.” “Rejoice with me,” the woman says, “I have found the drachma I lost.” “Rejoice with me,” the father says, “this son of mine was lost and is found.” All these voices are the voices of God. God does not want to keep his joy to himself. He wants everyone to share in it. God’s joy is the joy of his angels and his saints; it is the joy of all who belong to the Kingdom.¹⁸

DAY 36

JOY IN THE FILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Receive God's Word

“And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.” Acts 13:49-52

Reflect on God's Truth

Paul and Barnabas had just been treated with utter contempt and driven out of the city, yet they were filled with the Holy Spirit and joy. Reflect on an incident in the past when you were treated rudely in public. Did you feel joy? Probably not. But the Scriptures tell us that Jesus wants us to experience His joy regardless of our circumstances, and He has sent the Holy Spirit to fill us so that it is possible. In Ephesians 5:18, Paul says, “be filled with the Spirit.” Being filled with the Spirit is not optional, it is commanded. Ponder the power available to you by the joy of the Lord and the filling with the Holy Spirit.

Live in God's Grace

Have you ever been filled with joy and the Holy Spirit? The Scriptures tell us that we are like vessels, or pots. This image helps us realize that our entire being can be filled with the Holy Spirit in a way that causes joy, worship and praise to rise up to God. The Holy Spirit can so fill you to overflowing that you can rejoice and give thanks regardless of what else you are experiencing. But take the first step, and rejoice and give thanks, even as you ask God to fill you with His Spirit so that you know and experience His joy that overcomes pain, pressure, suffering, and disappointment.

O Lord, thank you for offering me your wonderful Holy Spirit so that I can be filled with joy and give you the praise and honor due your name. I long for your Spirit to fill me in a new and powerful way. Fill me, flood me, and overflow my being so that I am transformed from being downhearted to joyful, from being disappointed to filled with your praises, and from being unhappy to worshiping you and offering you thanksgiving and blessing. Thank you for rescuing me and saving me. Now, fill me with your Spirit and your joy, for your glory. Help me worship you with gladness, in the power of your Spirit. Amen.

DAY 37

JOY THAT RISES ABOVE ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

Receive God's Word

"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." 1 Peter 1:6-9

Reflect on God's Truth

Ponder the paradox in this Scripture passage. How is it possible to be in a state of grief from various trials and yet rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory? Where do you think the power comes from that would cause you to rejoice while suffering? What does the Scripture passage say? "*In this* you greatly rejoice." The *in this* is our salvation in the person of Christ. Our rejoicing is because of what He did on the cross that gave us eternal life. Do you have the joy of salvation? Have you ever rejoiced with joy that is so great that it is virtually impossible to express? How would you feel if someone knocked on your door and handed you a check for \$100 million? Now think about this: *Our salvation is far better, and it will last for eternity.* At the core of our joy and rejoicing is the love of God—His love for us, and His love in our hearts that gives us the ability to love others.

Live in God's Grace

Ponder the depth of God's love for you. Allow it to flood and penetrate your heart. Has His love transformed your being so that you can rejoice with joy unspeakable? If you have never experienced the fullness of the joy of salvation, ask God to do it. The only thing God requires of you for answered prayer is faith. He longs for you to worship Him in Spirit and in truth, and to know and experience His inexpressible joy.

O Lord, I praise you for giving me the joy of salvation. Your Word says it perfectly. Your Spirit opens my heart and mind to worship you with joy unspeakable and full of glory because of your magnificent triumph for me on the cross. You did it. I did nothing. Your dying in my place causes me to weep with joy at your indescribable love for me. And Lord, thank you for the blessed assurance that you have me in the palm of your hand and have given me eternal life. Thank you for the wonderful assurance that I can say with the apostle Paul, "the Lord will rescue me from every evil work and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever" (2 Timothy 4:18.) Your mercy and love reaches to the Heavens, and I worship, praise, and adore you. Amen

DAY 38

JOY IN THE DAILY RENEWAL AND RESTORATION OF OUR INNER MAN

Receive God's Word

“But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” Ephesians 4:20-24

Reflect on God's Truth

- Most people would say, in a moment of honesty, that at the core of their old self they either loved themselves or hated themselves. What was your old self like? Ponder the reality that because of the cross and the resurrection, you are free to put off the old self. How does it make you feel to know that one day you will be perfect and will remember your old self no more?
- How God loves you that He has given you a new self created to be like Him! How does it make you feel that God wants to continually renew His image in your new self through the power of the Holy Spirit? How does it make you feel to know that one day your new self will be perfect and complete, never to change?

Live in God's Grace

The joy of salvation includes the joy of becoming the person God created you to be. Deep within each of us is a longing to become who we know we were meant to be. And there is a joy that God gives, by His Spirit, when we partake of His nature and allow His Spirit to mold us and transform us to be like His Son. Today, ask the Holy Spirit to renew in you the joy that comes from knowing Jesus and being conformed to His image.

O Lord, my life used to be a barren plain of hopelessness, hatred, lust, and emptiness; but you have brought me into a garden of peace, joy, hope, and love. You are the garden, and you have made my life completely new by the power of your death and resurrection. Thank you for creating your image in me and giving me your joy. I thank and praise you that you have given me a new heart and mind that is becoming more like you. You are making me the way I have always wanted to be. And it's all because of your tremendous love in dying on the cross for me. You are the Resurrection and the Life. You not only make all things new, every day, but you also make me new. I worship you with all that I am.

Amen.

DAY 39

JOY THAT RISES ABOVE OUR FAILURES AND SIN

Receive God's Word

"He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." Psalm 103:10-12.

Reflect on God's Truth

Reflect on the reality that our God is mighty and separates us from our failures and sins. We have all sinned. We have all failed. But one of His names is Redeemer and He is able to restore, rebuild, and renew people we have hurt, loved ones we have failed. And He can use our weaknesses to draw us closer to Him so that we experience His love, grace, and goodness in new and powerful ways. Ponder the sad aspects of unbelief. Without a belief in a kind and loving Savior who controls our destiny with a master plan and purpose, the knowledge we have failed and sinned in the past would lead to despair. But our God is mighty, and His power is infinite. He is able to redeem our failures and make all things new. We who have been called by God and have received His love can live in hope and joy, knowing that He works all things together for good.

Live in God's Grace

Are you sad about failures in the past? Do you despair about your behavior and actions in days gone by? This day allow the Spirit of God to help you know that the Lord is a mighty Redeemer who came to heal the brokenhearted and set the captive free. Let Him free you from past sins and failures and restore your joy, your hope, and your peace. Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you that my joy might be in you, and your joy might be full." John 15:11. Trust Him that He is able to make all things work together for good. This day, ask Him for the fullness of His joy and rejoice that He makes all things work together for good.

O Lord, I praise and thank you for your love and that You separate me from my failures and redeem my sins. Thank you for the joy and peace that comes from knowing that you are causing all things to work together for good. Your Spirit renews me, restores my life, and helps me to give thanks and praise in spite of my past. Lord, the enemy came to steal, kill, and destroy, but you came to give life, joy and peace. By your Spirit, renew me, restore me, and fill me with your Spirit so that I continually rejoice and give you thanks because you have forgiven me and separated me from my failures and sins.

Blessed be your glorious name. Amen.

DAY 40

JESUS—OUR GREATEST JOY AND TREASURE

Receive God's Word

"One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in His temple." Psalm 27:4

Reflect on God's Truth

"Jesus put it like this: 'Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me' (Matthew 10:37). Jesus must be the supreme treasure of our lives, if we are true disciples of Jesus. Jesus died for us and rose again to make it possible for us to see him and savor him above all things with everlasting joy. This is the greatest good the gospel is meant to accomplish."¹⁹

Live in God's Grace

Is love the heart of your relationship with Jesus? Is Jesus the supreme treasure of your life? Do you savor Him above His blessings? Do you believe that putting Jesus as your supreme treasure is the greatest good the gospel was meant to accomplish? Let this day be the day that you make Jesus the supreme treasure of your life. The beating heart of discipleship is a love relationship with Jesus.

Lord Jesus, these 40 days have been such a rich blessing. From this day forward, help me to make you the supreme treasure of my life. Help me to savor you above all your blessings. Thank you for pouring your rich, deep, compelling love into my heart, by your Spirit. Thank you for taking away my fear, doubt, and shame, and replacing it with your love, joy, and peace. I ask that from this day onward I will say, as Paul said in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." The glorious riches of your amazing grace never cease to amaze me. The words I will say one day, as I worship in your presence, I say to you now: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honor, and glory and blessing!" (Revelation 5:12). Blessed be your name forever and ever! Amen.

Addendum A

Practical Suggestions for Communicating with God Daily

Life is challenging. Daily Bible study, worship, Scripture memorization and meditation, fellowship, prayer, and sharing the gospel are all vital to your ability to maintain a relationship with Jesus and develop the heart of self-denying discipleship. But these disciplines are a *response* to the love of Christ; they do not generate His love. It is the love of Christ that compels the disciplines, and it is the Holy Spirit who supplies that love. A love relationship desires intimacy, so these practices are simply ways that God has provided to help us draw closer to Him. The enemy--Satan, the world's distractions, and our own weak flesh--will try to rob us of our time with God. But we have a role model in Jesus, who continually sought connection with the Father in the peace and quiet of solitary devotion: "And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed" (Mark 1:35). You are special to Him; He wants your undivided attention. Consider these guidelines to help you focus on Him and develop the heart of a true disciple.

- **Every day, go to a quiet place and ask Him to help you experience His love in a deeper way.** Focus is important, and distractions can keep you from developing and maintaining a love relationship with God. Jesus said to go into a closet when you pray. Whatever your "closet" may be, seek quiet and privacy.
- **Meditating on God's Word is vital.** Jesus said, "It is written: Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." Matthew 4:4 (NIV). As Jesus said, your life depends on God's word in the same way your body needs food. Every aspect of your being, spirit, soul, and body is dependent on the nourishment, wisdom, strength, and life you receive from hearing, listening, and receiving God's word.
- **Rejoice that God is pursuing you.** He wants to have fellowship with you and He wants you to know Him and experience His love. Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20).
- **Ask God to give you a hunger and thirst for Him.** We are all broken people, and our hunger and thirst to be in the presence of our holy God does not come naturally. But He can and will answer our prayer to give us a hunger and thirst for Him. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6).
- **Each day, draw near to God in confidence by faith.** "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full

assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:19-22).

- **Have patience that at His appointed time He will answer your prayer to experience His love.** Our faith in God’s promises, and not our feelings, is the important issue. “And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Hebrews 6:11-12).
- **Pray the prayers from each day’s meditation out loud.** Prayer is an expression from your heart to your heavenly Father. “Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:12-13).

Addendum B

40 Gifts of His love and Grace That Flow from the Cross

Read each verse and supply the missing word (s)

- Romans 1:16 The cross is the _____ of God unto _____.
- Romans 5:1 We are _____ by faith.
- Romans 5:1 We have _____ with God.
- Romans 5:9 We are _____ from the _____ of God.
- Romans 5:10 We are saved by His _____.
- Romans 5:11 We are _____ to God.
- Romans 5:17 By receiving His _____, we can _____ in life.
- Romans 6:22 We have been set _____ from _____ sin.
- Romans 8:1 We are under no _____.
- Romans 8:11 There is _____ for our bodies.
- Romans 8:15 We have been given the Spirit of _____ as sons.
- 1 Corinthians 1:30 Christ has been made unto us _____.
- 1 Corinthians 1:30 Christ has been made unto us _____.
- 1 Corinthians 1:30 Christ has been made unto us _____.
- 1 Corinthians 1:30 Christ has been made unto us _____.
- 2 Corinthians 5:17 We are a new _____.
- 2 Corinthians 5:18 We have been given the ministry of _____.
- 2 Corinthians 5:20 We are _____ of Christ.
- 2 Corinthians 5:21 We have become the _____ of God.

Galatians 2:20 Our old nature has been _____ with Christ.

Galatians 5:1 For _____ Christ has set us _____.

Galatians 6:14 Our only _____ is to be in the _____.

Galatians 6:14 The _____ has been _____ to us.

Ephesians 1:7 We have _____ of our _____.

Ephesians 2:8 We are _____ by His _____.

Ephesians 2:13 We have been drawn _____ by His _____.

Colossians 1:13 We have been _____ from the kingdom of _____ into the _____ of Christ.

Colossians 1:27 We have been indwelt by _____.

2 Thessalonians 2:16 We have been given eternal _____.

Titus 3:7 We have been given eternal _____.

Hebrews 2:11 We are a member of God's _____.

Hebrews 2:14 Christ has destroyed _____

Hebrews 2:14 Christ has destroyed _____.

Hebrews 7:23-26 Christ is now our _____ _____

Hebrews 10:14 We have been given the _____ of Christ.

Hebrews 10:19 We now can have _____ to draw near to God.

Hebrews 10:22 We have a _____ conscience from past sins.

1 Peter 1:3 We have been given a living _____.

2 Peter 1:3 We have been given exceedingly great and precious _____.

2 Peter 1:4 We have become partakers of the Divine _____.

1 John 1:7 We have been _____ from _____.

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