

Walk *in* Freedom

30 Days to Understanding God's Design
for Your Money, Identity and Purpose



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Introduction

Born out of a love for God's word and the wisdom contained in it, Crown began its ministry helping Americans manage their money and businesses according to biblical principles. For years, Crown has had the opportunity to take these principles around the world to bring freedom and flourishing to millions. Through the continuous spread of His principles, through many ministry experiences, we've realized that these principles serve people on a personal level, but also solve significant issues on a macro level, such as poverty. We believe God has given us a solution to end personal and generational poverty, founded on the idea that poverty isn't a resource problem, it's a stewardship problem.

Our newest program, *Restoration Path* is designed specifically for hurting individuals and marginalized communities who are struggling to overcome poverty. By helping them understand the answers to 5 key questions ...

1. *Who am I?*
2. *Where am I from?*
3. *Why am I here?*
4. *What do I have?*
5. *How do I use what I have?*

... we are leading these individuals on a journey from deep financial and spiritual pain onto a path of true freedom and flourishing.

But because God is the author of truth, His principles for stewardship are true for everyone. From the poorest nations to the wealthiest individuals, we are all called to be faithful stewards of what He has given us. So regardless of where you are in your journey, we hope God will bless you beyond measure as you answer these critically important questions for yourself over the next 30 days. It is our prayer that you will encounter Him in the pages that follow as you explore His Word and apply it to your life; and that as He guides you through the answers to these 5 questions, you will experience *"life that is truly life"* (1 Timothy 6:19) as you Walk in Freedom.

*Who
Am I?*

Day 1

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

Genesis 1:27 NIV

Do you ever feel like a failure? Do you often compare yourself to others and conclude that you don't measure up? Today's verse reveals that no matter how we mistakenly view ourselves, we are created in God's image. What we think doesn't change this truth. God made us in His likeness and created us to be like Him. Nothing else in creation was made in God's image. This means we're perfectly designed to worship God and to bear His image to all of creation. But that's not all.

When we were in a fallen condition because of Adam and Eve's sin, God went one step further. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to bear our sins on the cross and to close the chasm that separated us from Him. This merciful act is summed up in one of the most well-known verses in the Bible: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but*

have eternal life" (John 3:16 NIV). One of the most beautiful words in this passage is "whoever." Just as all bear God's image, salvation is open to all who believe. So, the next time you don't feel you measure up, remember that God, who made the planets, galaxies, and stars, thinks you're important. And He values you so much that He not only wants a personal relationship with you in this life, He has cleared the way for you to live forever with Him in Heaven!

PRAY: *What aspects of yourself do you feel separate you from God or make you unworthy? Turn those over in prayer to Him, and listen to what He may have you change or what assurance He is offering you today.*

If we believe we are made in the image of God, we must extend this amazing belief to all others. Are there people, whether they are specific individuals in your life or maybe certain groups of people, who you struggle to see as being made in the image of God? Bring this conflict to God in prayer.

Day 2

“So Bezalel, Oholiab and every skilled person to whom the Lord has given skill and ability to know how to carry out all the work of constructing the sanctuary are to do the work just as the Lord has commanded”

Exodus 36:1 NIV

Who are Bezalel and Oholiab? Before the Israelites entered the Promised Land, their worship centered on a place called the Tabernacle. It was a portable sanctuary that served as God’s earthly dwelling among His people. Someone had to build this structure and everything associated with the Israelites’ worship of God. Two of the key people involved in this project were Bezalel and Oholiab. Exodus 35 tells us that God filled them with the skills necessary to complete this important work.

In the same way, God has given you an assortment of talents. You have combinations of strengths, interests, and gifts that fit together in a general pattern. Crown’s Career

Direct assessment can help you discover the abilities God has given you. As you learn more about yourself, you begin to understand why some tasks come naturally and others are more difficult. With this information, you can make informed career decisions now and re-evaluate your career goals as you move through the seasons of life, including retirement. But your skills aren't just for work. As in every other area of life, it's important to lay your personality on the altar as a sacrifice to be used in honoring the Lord. In the same way that He used the gifts He gave to Bezalel and Oholiab, He can use the gifts He has given you to further His Kingdom within your church, your community, and maybe, throughout the world!

PRAY: *Weaknesses do not make you weak. Take a moment to praise God for the gifts He did not give you, and thank Him for shaping you to be exactly who He designed you to be.*

Day 3

***“Seek the Kingdom of God above
all else, and live righteously,
and he will give you everything
you need”***

Matthew 6:33 NLT

In 2013, the journal *Motivation and Emotion* published a report by a group of researchers who wanted to know how changes in materialistic desires related to changes in well-being. The researchers conducted three studies, and their findings supported the hypothesis that “people’s well-being improves as they place relatively less importance on materialistic goals and values.” God warned us about the dangers of materialism a long time ago. 1 Timothy 6:9 says, “*Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction*” (NIV).

In Matthew 6:33, Jesus offers an alternative to worrying about material possessions. It would be better for us, and for God’s Kingdom, if we heeded His advice. Larry Burkett, the co-founder of Crown Financial Ministries, observed that many Christians were so caught up in making more

money and buying bigger and better things that they had lost most of their thrust to reach the unsaved world. He said that if believers were going to spend eternity in God's presence and only about 70 years in this life, then obviously, they should be more concerned about what they will receive then than what they are getting now. Your identity is in Christ, not in what you possess. By following Him and seeking God's Kingdom above all else, you can make the most of your time and have your greatest impact as a believer during the years He has given you on this earth.

ACT: *God calls us to steward our resources, and sometimes that means we need to pass them on to others. Look around and select a good quality item that you feel called to give to someone else. Pray for the Lord to show you the best way to pass it on. You may have a loved one in need or you could donate it to a local non-profit.*

PRAY: *Pray these words, "God, you are more important than anything I own. Reorient me towards you and away from seeking out wealth and material comforts. Lord, you provide all I need. Let me find satisfaction in you alone."*

Day 4

“For you created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well”

Psalm 139:13-14 NIV

Throughout history, artists from many countries created a broad range of works that are still with us today. Examples include Leonardo Da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* and Vincent van Gogh’s *Starry Night*. James Whistler left us a famous portrait of his mother, and Rembrandt gave us a look at life in the 1600s in his painting *The Night Watch*. These artists, and many others like them, became known for the different ways in which they painted and for the particular subjects that they chose.

Now think about the days before you were born and imagine God, the Master Artist, creating an even more important work: You! God told Jeremiah the prophet,

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart, I appointed you as a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5 NIV). Just like Jeremiah, God also knew you before you were ever born. He not only formed you, He has a plan for your life, to give you hope and a future. So, the next time you hear a voice inside telling you that you don’t matter, remember that you matter to God. You are His unique creation, and that makes you special.

PRAY: *Pray these words, “Lord, thank you for carefully crafting me in my entirety. Help me to recognize your workmanship, and to love myself in the same way you have always loved me.*

ACT: *Care for yourself today. Society often makes self-care seem trite, reserving it for bubble baths or binge-watching television while eating a whole pizza by yourself. Take a moment to rest in God’s creation. If you cannot go outside, admire His beauty from your window, or imagine a place you once visited and admired. Allow everything else to fall aside, and indulge in the peace that can only come from God.*

Day 5

“But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’”

1 Samuel 16:7 NIV

Israel's first king was Saul. The Bible tells us, “as he stood among the people he was a head taller than any of the others” (1 Samuel 10:23 NIV). But Saul's height didn't guarantee he'd do a great job. In fact, he ended up disobeying God, who rejected him as king. In Chapter 16 of 1 Samuel, we read how God sent the prophet Samuel to the household of a man named Jesse, who had eight sons. God had chosen one of these young men to be king instead of Saul, and when the first one passed before Samuel, the prophet was impressed. But God told Samuel not to consider this son's appearance or height. In selecting Israel's next king, God was looking at the heart. One by one, Jesse's seven oldest

sons passed before Samuel, but not one of them was the person God had chosen.

Samuel asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" Jesse replied, "There is still the youngest. He is tending the sheep." The youngest son's name was David, and when he passed before Samuel, God said, "Rise and anoint him; this is the one." You may be looking at yourself and wondering how God could ever use you to make a difference for Him in this world. But God knows your heart. You were so important to Him that He gave His son to bear the penalty for your sins on the cross and to make a way for you to live with Him in Heaven forever. As a believer, you can make a difference because you have something valuable to share. So start telling others what God has done for you. And when they hear your testimony, the Holy Spirit can use your words to transform their lives both in this life and for all eternity!

PRAY: *This David who was selected for his heart is also the same man who committed adultery and murder. But God knew this from the start, and He still offered Him forgiveness and the opportunity to forever change His Kingdom. Do not allow your sins, past, present, or future, to allow you to give up on connecting to God or feeling worthy of His love. Pray, «God, you know all of me, the good and the bad. Thank you for your forgiveness. Move me where you want me to be, and mold me into the person you intended from the very beginning. Give me patience for myself in my mistakes, and help me to break free from sin.»*

Day 6

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you”

Deuteronomy 31:6 NIV

Moses spoke these words to the children of Israel as they prepared to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land. They would have to fight many battles, but he said in verse 3, *“The LORD your God himself will cross over ahead of you”* (NIV). Moses assured the Israelites that God was not going to forsake them, and He will not forsake His children today. Life is not always easy. In fact, there are times when life is hard. We may face problems on multiple fronts, and our situation can seem hopeless. During such trying circumstances, Satan will try to make us believe that God doesn't care and has left us to face life alone.

But according to the Bible, we are not alone. The Holy Spirit lives within us. In 1 Corinthians 3:16, Paul wrote, *“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit*

of God dwells in you?" (NKJV). We also have the assurance that Jesus is praying for us. Romans 8:34 says, "Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us" (NLT). In the meantime, God knows everything, including all our circumstances, both good and bad. David wrote, "You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways" (Psalm 139: 2-3 NIV). Like the Israelites, who were facing what may have seemed like impossible odds, we have the assurance that when obstacles appear too great to overcome, God cares about us and is intimately aware of our circumstances. Do not lose heart. Jesus assured us in Matthew 28:20, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (NIV).

ACT: *Write out some of your fears on a slip of paper. Pray over them, and ask God to give you peace. After praying, rip the paper and throw it away to symbolize that when we are with God we have nothing to fear. Then, write today's verse and place it somewhere meaningful for you where it can serve as a reminder of God's presence and love for you every time you see it.*

*Where
Am I
From?*

Day 1

“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland”

Isaiah 43:18-19 NIV

A sign in front of a small north Georgia church offered a message that all of us would do well to heed. It said, “There is no future in the past.” Many people are haunted by their past. In fact, it not only shaped where they’ve been; it continues to shape where they’re going. That’s why it’s important to understand your past and how it can help, or hinder, God’s plan for your life. You have both positive and negative influences in your past. The goal is to weed out the negative influences, those wrong perspectives, and ideologies that are still keeping you from enjoying God’s blessings and being everything He wants you to be.

Psalm 139: 13-14 says, *“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well”* (NIV). This encouraging passage tells us that from the very start, God had His hand on us. It describes His influence on our core: the person we are inside. But there’s another part of us, and it’s the part shaped by our environment and our experiences. These things can hinder us from being the person God created us to be at our core. That’s why it’s important to recognize your past and the influence it’s having on who you are today. Take a step back and see how your past has power over you. Then, decide to stop being shaped by past negative influences that are keeping you from experiencing God’s best for your life.

PRAY: *Jesus, thank you for your sacrifice that gives me a new life. Help me completely recognize that you have forgiven me of my past. Open my eyes to the invitation that you have extended me to follow you in totality with my new life.*

Day 2

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose”

Romans 8:28 ESV

Yesterday we looked at the past and the need to not let negative experiences define us and keep us from enjoying God’s best for our lives. The same could be said of our present experiences. We noted that God created our core being. So, it’s important not to let experiences, both past and present, dominate us and alter what God designed us to be. As Christians, we are assured that all things work together for good and that God will comfort us in our troubles. One way we can use our negative experiences for good is by comforting others who are going through the same things. The Apostle Paul wrote, *“All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us”* (2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NLT).

God did not create us to live in isolation. Present experiences can lead to fear. When that happens, we may shut ourselves off from others. But there is strength in numbers. As Solomon said, *“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.”* He goes on to say, *“A cord of three strands is not quickly broken”* (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 NIV). God has a purpose for you in your own life and in the lives of others. If you are bitter about your experiences, you can become like a dry riverbed that offers no hope of refreshment to others. Or you can be like a river that flows into others and helps them discover how to live in victory regardless of the experiences that would rob them of the purpose God has planned for their lives.

PRAY: *God, help me to experience your goodness in the midst of my suffering. Show me who you can bless through my hardships. Stand by me, and give me the strength and courage to find, reach out to, and lift up this person.*

ACT: *After praying, pay attention this week to who the Lord may be leading you to minister to, and how. Whether it is through sharing your experience, being present with someone in pain, or an act of service to someone who is struggling. Be open to His call to use hardship in your life for the good of yourself and others.*

Day 3

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”

John 3:16 NIV

Have you ever turned off the news because it was too depressing to hear? As you listened to one bleak story after another, you probably began to feel that darkness was creeping in and that hope was disappearing fast. Instead of continuing to watch or listen to the news, you shifted your attention to something else before the next gloomy story completely ruined your day. Our world's many problems are the result of sin, and stories about those problems can be hard to bear. They're like weights on our shoulders, and we can only take so much before we have to turn our attention to something brighter. With that in mind, imagine how Jesus must have felt when He bore the many sins of the world on the cross. Regarding His sacrifice, the Bible says, *“He himself bore our sins’ in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for*

righteousness; 'by his wounds you have been healed'" (1 Peter 2:24 NIV).

None of us could have saved ourselves because we were "dead" in our "transgressions and sins" (Ephesians 2:1 NIV). To satisfy God's justice and provide us with salvation, there had to be a perfect, sinless sacrifice: Jesus. When we were helpless, God showed us mercy by giving His one and only Son to bear our penalty and provide us with salvation. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV). One of the most powerful descriptions of Jesus' sacrifice is found in the book of Philippians. It explains how He left Heaven, became a servant, took on human form, humbled himself, and became "obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:5-8 NIV). Your decision to accept Jesus as Savior is the most important step in your journey through this life. And it is a key part of your answer to the question, "Where am I from?" Today, take time to think about Jesus' humility, His willingness to go to the cross on your behalf, and the many benefits of a personal relationship with God that His sacrifice has made possible for you.

PRAY: *Before praying, take time to think about Jesus' humility, his willingness to go to the cross on your behalf, and the many benefits of a personal relationship with God that his sacrifice has made possible for you. Find a quiet moment to pray, and thank Jesus for His sacrifice and love for you.*

Day 4

“Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus”

Philippians 3:13-14 NIV

Paul, the author of these words, had been a strong opponent of the church in his younger days. But as he traveled to Damascus to persecute Christians, Jesus met him on the way and confronted him about his actions. The Bible tells us that “a light from heaven flashed around [Paul]” and he “fell to the ground” (Acts 9:3-4 NIV). His life would never be the same. This man, who had worked tirelessly to destroy Christianity, would now become one of its greatest evangelists. He was so devoted to God that his goal was to be conformed to Christ’s image. Paul told the church at Philippi, an ancient Greek city, that he had not yet “taken

hold” of that goal. But he wasn’t giving up. Notice that he talks about forgetting what is behind. He didn’t rely on whatever good deeds he may have done in the past. And he wasn’t going to let mistakes of the past be a hindrance. Instead, he would focus on *“straining toward what is ahead.”*

Paul traveled around much of the known world telling others about the salvation available to them through Jesus Christ. In the process, he faced tremendous opposition and hardships. Here’s a sample of his struggles: *“Five times I received from the Jews forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea”* (2 Corinthians 11:24-25 NIV). In the following verses, he talks about other dangers, including bandits and false Christians. And he goes on to describe his experiences with sleeplessness, cold, and hunger. But with God’s help, Paul persevered and was faithful till the end. His life has been a source of encouragement to Christians throughout the centuries. And whatever you may be facing, remember that the same God who walked with Paul through incredible opposition and hardships is there to strengthen you in the midst of the struggles and challenges you face today.

REFLECT:

As Paul acted as a servant of Christ, he discovered that his strict adherence to Jewish laws was not the key to salvation, but that his belief in Christ was. Consider what forms of legalism or self-reliance in your past or present may be a source of pride for you and could be standing between you and complete reliance on Jesus. Like Paul, you might take pride in your morality, or you could be proud

Where Am I From?

of the success found through your work, parenting, or skills.

PRAY: *Lord, I cannot save myself. You have saved me and set me free from sin. I struggle with pride over my achievements, and trusting in you can be hard some days. God, all good things I have and that I have done come from You. Thank you for what you have given me. Help me recognize that nothing belongs to me. Help me to serve you as Paul served you, and let my service be for your glory and not my own.*

Day 5

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ”

Romans 3:23-24 NIV

As we continue to ponder the question “Where am I from?” let’s take a moment to consider salvation, which plays a key role in our answer to this question. The first part of today’s verse tells us that everyone has sinned. Only Jesus Christ lived a life completely free of sin in this world. Because we have sinned, we need some means of being justified before God. Through His death on the cross, Jesus provided the means of justification, and it happens when we surrender our lives to Him and accept His free gift of salvation. What, exactly, is this justification that the Apostle Paul was writing about? It actually is a legal term, and through the process it describes, we are pardoned from both the guilt and the penalty of our sins. In addition, the righteousness of Christ is imputed to our account.

Where Am I From?

The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 5:12 that sin entered the world when Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, disobeyed God. As a consequence, all of us were born with a sinful nature. Paul said in Romans 5:19, *“Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners.”* Then he shifts the focus to Christ: *“But because one other person obeyed God, many will be made righteous”* (NLT). In Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus, we learn that before Christ, we were *“dead”* in our *“transgressions and sins.”* Paul later writes, *“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved”* (Ephesians 2:1, 4-5 NIV). If you have accepted Christ as your Savior, this wonderful story is part of where you’re from. However, it’s also part of where you’re going. As Paul goes on to tell the Ephesians in verses 6-7, *“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus”* (Ephesians 2:6-7 NIV). Make time today, and every day, to thank God for salvation. And ask Him how you can lead others to an eternal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

PRAY: *Select a time every day this week that you will stop and thank God for your salvation. After thanking Him, pray that He will lead you to others who need to develop an eternal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.*

Day 6

“Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.’”

John 6:35 NIV

The devastating effects of sin have left the entire human race in a state of spiritual hunger and thirst. People seek to satisfy these needs in a variety of ways, including alcohol, drugs and relationships. But the only way to meet these needs is through a relationship with Jesus Christ. Sadly, although everyone needs salvation, not everyone will find it. The reasons why are explained in Jesus’ Parable of the Sower. The parable tells the story of a farmer who went out to sow seeds. Some of these seeds fell on a footpath and were eaten by birds. Some fell on rocky soil. The plants that sprouted couldn’t form deep roots and were killed by the hot sun. Some seeds fell among thorns, and the plants that sprouted were choked. And finally, some fell on fertile soil and produced up to one hundred times as much as had been planted. These four soils represent the spiritual

Where Am I From?

conditions within the hearts of people who hear about the salvation Jesus offers and either accept or reject it.

The seeds on the footpath are people who hear the Gospel, but it never permeates their hearts. They have hard hearts that are difficult to penetrate. The seeds on stony ground are those who appear to accept the Gospel, but their commitment is not real, and they walk away from Christ when following him requires sacrifice. This lack of true commitment is also seen in the third group. The thorns represent things of this world, and their love for these things chokes out the Gospel. Finally, the fertile soil represents those who accept the Gospel and become productive workers in God's Kingdom. What's striking is that people in only one of the four groups Jesus described are able to find salvation.

ACT: *Are you a part of this group? If so, you are blessed beyond measure in ways that the majority of people around you cannot comprehend. In the meantime, live as an ambassador for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). Pray for people you know in the first three groups, and let them see the hope that lives within you. It may be that through your efforts, Satan's hold on these individuals will be broken and they, too, will experience the joy of knowing Jesus as their Savior.*

*Why
Am I
Here?*

Day 1

***“For we are God’s handiwork,
created in Christ Jesus to do
good works, which God prepared
in advance for us to do”***

Ephesians 2:10 NIV

God has a designed plan and purpose for each person He creates. One question that can be helpful in discerning His plans for you is, “What frustrates you about the world?” Often, what frustrates you about the world is what God is calling you to fix. You’ve probably heard of Florence Nightingale. As a teenager, she realized her calling in life was to be a nurse. When the Crimean War began in 1853, Florence organized a team of 34 nurses and headed to the battlefield. She set about making sure that rooms in the military hospital were adequately cleaned. She established food, laundry and library services for patients. And she worked tirelessly to help wounded soldiers recover. In the process, she reduced the death rate in the hospital by two-thirds.

Also consider George Muller, who cared for more than 10,000 orphans during his lifetime. You may ask,

“How could I do something that big?” The answer is that God provided. Muller never made direct appeals to people for money. He simply prayed, and people donated all the funds he needed to support his work. Furthermore, Muller inspired others to follow his example, and as a result, more than 100,000 orphans were cared for in the country of England.

Another inspiring story of someone who made a difference is found in the Bible. It involves a man named Obadiah. While Israel’s wicked queen, Jezebel, was killing God’s prophets, Obadiah took 100 of them, hid them in caves, and supplied them with food and water (1 Kings 18:4). We also read in the Bible about a man named Barzillai. He brought food and supplies to Israel’s king, David, who was on the run from his son, who had staged a successful coup (2 Samuel 17:27-29). David was eventually restored to power, but in the meantime, God used Barzillai to help meet his needs. There isn’t enough space in today’s devotion to retell the many other people like the ones mentioned above, but the point is clear: These individuals saw needs, and with God’s help, they met them. Today, take time to consider the words of Ephesians 2:10 and ask yourself, “What good works has God prepared in advance for me to do?”

PRAY: *Lord, you have a heart for justice and you love the poor and oppressed. Open my eyes to the people you have called me to serve. Equip me as your servant, and help me understand the work that you want to do through me.*

Day 2

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

Philippians 2:3-4 NIV

Today we reflect on another important question, “What do I want to be known for?” On Day 1 we discussed Florence Nightingale and George Muller, who are remembered for their service to others. Unfortunately, some people want to be known for things that benefit them. Consider the social media users who are doing crazy and dangerous stunts in an attempt to become “famous.” They crave the limelight, and they’ll take risks in order to get noticed. Comedians may seek the limelight by mocking and belittling other people. Their hurtful comments make audiences laugh, but those laughs come at someone else’s expense. What about office workers who want to be known for being president of their company? They can be so desperate to achieve this goal that they’ll walk over others on their way

up the company ladder. Over time, they become cold and insensitive, and the decisions they make as managers can be harmful to their employees, their families, and even to themselves.

There also are people who want to build great structures that honor their name. The Roman Emperor Nero is a good example. After much of Rome was destroyed by fire, he began a rebuilding program that included a huge palace. While it wasn't completed because of his death, if it had been finished, it would have consumed a full one-third of the city! No matter where you were in Rome, you probably would have had a view of that palace. Nero intended it as a monument to his greatness, but chances are many of his citizens saw it as just another example of his out-of-control vanity.

Finally, let's look at a story from the Bible. It involves Nebuchadnezzar, the king of ancient Babylon, who faced God's judgment for being prideful and sinful. The prophet Daniel advised the king, *"Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed"* (Daniel 4:27 NLT). But one year later, as Nebuchadnezzar was walking on the roof of his palace, he said, *"Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"* (Daniel 4:30 NLT). Immediately, God judged the king. He lost his mind, lived with wild animals, and ate grass like an ox. After some time, he looked toward Heaven and his sanity was restored. He praised, honored, and glorified God, and he was restored as Babylon's king. As you consider what you want to be known for, remember today's verse, *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit."* Such ambition may get you a little recognition in this world, but if you want

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your achievements to have an eternal impact, then make others, not yourself, the focus of your goals.

PRAY: *Lord, open my eyes to the places where I am selfish. Show me the path back to you, and stand beside me on my journey away from ambitions and towards where your will desires that I be.*

Day 3

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”

Matthew 28:19-20 NIV

These verses, known as “The Great Commission,” illustrate the responsibility and privilege of all believers in sharing the Gospel with others. It would be a mistake to see the words “*all nations*” as applying only to the activities of missionaries. Yes, missionaries are ambassadors for Christ in other nations, but those of us who never go overseas are also Christ’s ambassadors wherever we live. The Gospel is not to be something that we keep to ourselves. It is something to be shared so that others, just like us, may experience salvation through Jesus Christ. In Matthew 5:13 Jesus compared us to salt, which was used in his

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day to preserve food and keep it from being corrupted. In the same way, our testimony before others serves as a restraining factor on the corruption of this sinful world. We also serve as lights in sin's darkness. Jesus said, *"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven"* (Matthew 5:14-16 NIV).

So, no matter what type of work we do, and no matter where we live, we are part of our Lord's Great Commission. And, even if God does not call us to go overseas as missionaries, we can support the work of missionaries through organizations and churches, allowing us to have an influence around the world. In this work, we have our Lord's guarantee in Matthew 16:18 that all authority has been given to Him in heaven and on earth. Our job is to be salt and light and share the Gospel. We don't have to worry about saving the lost. Only He has the authority to do that. In addition, when unbelievers come to faith in Christ, our responsibilities do not end. Notice in the last verse of The Great Commission that our Lord instructed us to teach new believers everything He has commanded us. We, along with our churches, disciple these believers and help them grow in the faith. As a result, they will be equipped to teach new believers who come to faith through their witness, thereby allowing the work of our Lord's Great Commission to continue. As you meditate on today's verses, be encouraged by the words of the Apostle Peter as you contemplate how God can use you in this important outreach: *"But you are the ones chosen by God, chosen for*

the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people, God's instruments to do his work and speak out for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you—from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted" (1 Peter 2:9-10 MSG).

ACT: *Who might God be calling you to disciple? Consider people in your life, such as family, friends, neighbors, church members, co-workers, or others you know. Check-in on this person, and listen to how they are doing and what is happening in their life. Ask if you can pray over them. After your meeting, phone call, or text, talk to God about this encounter, and ask Him to guide your actions as you begin the process of discipleship.*

Day 4

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own”

Matthew 6:33-34 NIV

In the verses prior to this passage, Jesus told his followers not to worry about what they would eat or drink or about the clothes they would wear. In verse 25 He asked, *“Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?”* (NIV). Instead, our Lord urged us to seek God’s kingdom and his righteousness. This means that everyone should seek salvation above everything else. After we have surrendered our lives to Christ and are adopted into God’s family, He will ensure that we are equipped for the work He wants us to do and that our needs are met. As the Apostle Paul told the Philippian Christians, who had been faithful to support his ministry, *“And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:19

NIV). Christians' focus should not be on the accumulation of temporal things but on the advancement of God's kingdom.

As Jesus taught us in Matthew 6, we shouldn't settle for what we can see versus what we cannot see. Life is brief, and everything around us is temporal. Focusing on temporal things draws our devotion from God to things of this earth. Earlier in Matthew 6, our Lord said, *"Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be"* (Matthew 6:19:21 NLT). This life is our only opportunity to join God in shaping the course of eternity. When our focus is on furthering His Kingdom, the results last forever. In contrast, the things people build in this life decay, and when God brings judgment on this earth, everything in it will be gone. The Apostle Peter warned that on that day, *"the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare."* With this in mind, Peter encouraged us not to become focused on this world but to *"live holy and godly lives as [we] look forward to the day of God and speed its coming"* (2 Peter 3:10-12 NIV).

ACT: *Our finances can be one of the greatest indicators of what matters the most to us. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). Examine how you are using the resources you have, and consider if you need to pivot some of your resources away from yourself and towards a purpose God has made clear to you.*

Day 5

***“Then he said to them all:
‘Whoever wants to be my
disciple must deny themselves
and take up their cross daily and
follow me. For whoever wants
to save their life will lose it,
but whoever loses their life for
me will save it. What good is it
for someone to gain the whole
world, and yet lose or forfeit
their very self?’”***

Luke 9:23-25 NIV

In chapter 16 of this same book, Luke shares the story of a well-dressed rich man who lived in luxury every day. At the rich man's gate was a beggar named Lazarus, who was covered with sores and longed to eat the food that fell from the rich man's table. Lazarus died and went to heaven. When the rich man died, he found himself in hell. He looked up and saw Lazarus standing with Abraham, the first patriarch of Israel. Then he asked that Lazarus

would be allowed to come to him, dip his finger into water, and simply cool his tongue. But Abraham replied, “*Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us*” (Luke 16:25-26 NLT). People who knew the rich man while he was alive would have concluded that he had gained the whole world. Lazarus appeared to have nothing, but he had the most important thing: a relationship with the Lord.

Another conclusion people would have drawn about the rich man is that he was fully satisfied. After all, he lived in luxury every day! But Solomon wrote, “*Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income*” (Ecclesiastes 5:10 NIV). We often tell ourselves that if we could have this or do that we would be happy. But when we get those things, we’re only happy for a while. Then, we’re looking for something else to satisfy the lack of contentment within us. The beginning of true joy is a relationship with Christ. Beyond that, our focus needs to be Him, not ourselves. The Bible says, “*So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God*” (NIV). The sign on the wall of a church gymnasium read, “The main thing is to keep the *main thing* the main thing.” What’s the *main thing*? Serving Jesus Christ! Starting today, make Him and His Kingdom the focus of your efforts in this life, and never look back. Let Him use you to impact your family, neighbors, community, and workplace. In the process, you’ll know the unmatched

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satisfaction of serving Him and helping to grow His Kingdom during your time on earth.

ACT: *Today, consider how you can change the way you approach your life so that God and His purpose for you are at the center. Think about the key areas of your life, such as your family, work, church, and any other activity or hobby that you dedicate time to (volunteer work, fitness and sports, travel, etc.). Choose one area to focus on, and write down one way that you can shift how you approach this part of your life so that it is less about you and more about God.*

Day 6

“My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be”

Psalm 139:15-16 NIV

God was aware of you before you were born. He knew the days of your life before you uttered your first cry as an infant. Further proof of God’s intimate connection to your life is found in verse 13 of Psalm 139, which says, “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.” You are God’s creation, made in His image, and He can use you in the work of expanding His Kingdom if you’re willing to follow Him. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight” (NIV).

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Frederick Buechner (pronounced beek-ner) said, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” What might God be calling you to do? Regardless of what it is, Satan will try to disrupt that call, and two of his primary weapons are (1) encouraging you to dwell on past mistakes or (2) trying to convince you that you are useless to God. But we can be ready for such attacks. Ephesians 6:11 says, “*Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes*” (NIV). If we live for the Lord, we can expect to be at war with Satan. Thus, the armor described in verse 11 is comparable to that worn by Roman soldiers. For example, verse 16 advises us to “*take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one*” (NIV). Satan has been practicing his schemes on believers for thousands of years, and you can be sure he has worked very hard to refine and enhance them. Like flaming arrows, they are destructive—if we fall for them. However, Satan’s power over us was broken at the cross. He’s good at making suggestions, but we don’t have to listen. If he’s tried to make you feel inadequate, remember that Jesus called him “*the father of lies*” (John 8:44 NIV). Then, ask God what He’d have you do, knowing that your Heavenly Father loves you and has a purpose for your life.

PRAY: *Lord, protect me from Satan’s attacks. Make it clear what you would have me to do, and clear the way to make it possible. Provide what I will need, and keep my heart and eyes on you as I serve.*

*What
Do I
Have?*

Day 1

“The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, ‘Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the Lord. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves.’ Elisha replied to her, ‘How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?’ ‘Your servant has nothing there at all,’ she said, ‘except a small jar of olive oil’”

2 Kings 4:1-2 NIV

Records from ancient times reveal that when people couldn't pay their debts, creditors might take their sons as payment. Imagine for a moment that a creditor is taking one of your children as payment for a debt. Because this action is legal, there is nothing you can do. Now, imagine how hopeless the widow in this story must have felt.

God met her need, as we will read in Day 2, but all of us can probably recall times in our past when hope seemed impossible. Maybe you're going through such a time now. In Romans 15, the Apostle Paul refers to God as the "God of hope." He writes, *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit"* (Romans 15:13 NIV).

If you are a believer, you have a living hope: Jesus Christ, who sits at God's right hand. You are God's child, and you are not alone. The Apostle Paul said that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you (1 Corinthians 3:16). He later wrote, *"For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people'"* (2 Corinthians 6:16 NIV). In the Book of Romans, Paul said the Holy Spirit *"helps us in our weakness"* and intercedes for us *"in accordance with the will of God"* (Romans 8:26-27 NIV). And beyond this life, we also have the hope of a heavenly inheritance, which the Bible describes as a place where there will be *"no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away"* (Revelation 21:4 NIV). Take heart in God's unfailing promises, both now and in the future. Seek His wisdom, and call on His name. Walk closely with Him, and trust that He loves you beyond anything you can imagine. Turn your circumstances over to Him and be assured that *"in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose"* (Romans 8:28 NIV).

What Do I Have?

PRAY: *God you are my father. Your love for me is greater than I can understand, and your provision for me is perfect. You know my fears God, and I trust that you are beside me as I face them. Help me to always feel your presence, and bring your promises to my mind whenever I am anxious.*

Day 2

“Elisha said, ‘Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don’t ask for just a few. Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side.’ She left him and shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. When all the jars were full, she said to her son, ‘Bring me another one.’ But he replied, ‘There is not a jar left.’ Then the oil stopped flowing. She went and told the man of God, and he said, ‘Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left’”

2 Kings 4:3-7 NIV

Yesterday, we read about a widow whose creditors were going to take her two sons as payment for her debts. Today, we’ll look at how God rescued her. Notice in the above verses that Elisha told the widow to go inside her house and shut

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the door. God had enabled Elisha to perform great miracles. But when the widow's oil was multiplied, Elisha was not around. It was obvious that God, not the prophet, had met her need. If you're looking for God to meet a need, keep your focus on Him. Otherwise, you may be tempted to speculate about the way in which He will provide. For example, if your need is financial, you may expect God to meet your needs with a gift from a person you know who has an abundance of resources. But the truth is that God may meet your needs through an unknown and unexpected source.

Another important point to keep in mind is found in C.S. Lewis' book *God in the Dock*. Lewis noted that when Jesus fed 5,000 people, He did not make bread out of nothing. He took five loaves of bread and two fish that His disciples had available and multiplied them (Matthew 14:13-21). "Bread is not made of stones, as the Devil once suggested to our Lord in vain," Lewis wrote. "A little bread is made into much bread." Remember Elijah's question in yesterday's devotion: "What do you have in your house?" God multiplied the oil that the widow had available, just as Jesus multiplied the bread and fish that were available when He fed the 5,000. We're tempted to believe that God will provide something new, magnificent, and magical to rescue us from our situation. But remember that God can do amazing things with what we already have. "*The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you*" (Psalm 9:9-10 NIV).

ACT: *Walk around your home, and look at all God has given you. After your walk, pray and thank God for the resources He has given you. Ask Him to help you make the most of what He has provided.*

Day 3

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work”

1 Corinthians 12:4-6 NIV

Each of us have tangible and intangible assets that are important to identify. These assets include the gifts that the Holy Spirit gave to you when you became a Christian. There are many gifts listed in the New Testament, and they vary considerably. For example, the list of gifts in Romans 12 includes encouragement and mercy. Encouragers have the ability to come alongside fellow Christians and help them excel in their daily walk. People with the gift of mercy have great sensitivity toward individuals who are suffering. They help these people overcome challenges by speaking comforting words and performing acts of service. In 1 Corinthians 12, the list of gifts includes faith. People with

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this gift don't give up praying and don't stop trusting God in difficult circumstances. Ephesians 4 provides another list of gifts, including pastors, who have a God-given ability to carry out the duties of leading congregations.

In Ephesians 4:8, the Apostle Paul says that when Jesus "ascended on high" He "gave gifts to his people" (NIV). These gifts are diverse, just as the parts of the body are diverse, and each part performs a necessary function. Paul illustrates this point when he says, "But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. How strange a body would be if it had only one part! Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. The eye can never say to the hand, 'I don't need you.' The head can't say to the feet, 'I don't need you'" (1 Corinthians 12:18-21 NLT). Earlier in this chapter Paul noted that a spiritual gift was given to each of us "so we can help each other" (verse 7). Therefore, we don't need to look at the gifts others have received and wish they were ours. We need to remember that the Holy Spirit chose our particular gift especially for us. Make the most of your gift by putting it to work. When you do, you'll play the vital role that God has selected for you in building His church.

PRAY: *Lord, thank you for equipping me with your Spirit. You have entrusted me with a gift, help me use it to serve you. Show me where and how you would have me to serve.*

Day 4

“Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob, ‘Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I’m famished!’ ... Jacob replied, ‘First sell me your birthright.’”

Genesis 25:29-31 NIV

At the time that this event occurred, the concept of birthright determined the privileges that a son received based on his order of birth. Esau was the firstborn son. His brother, Jacob, was born second. In those days, if a father died or was absent, the firstborn took over the father’s responsibilities. In addition, the firstborn received a double portion of his father’s goods as an inheritance. If you asked people to guess how this story ends, most would probably say that Esau never would have traded something as valuable as his birthright for a pot of stew. But that’s exactly what he did! In Hebrews 12:16 we are warned against being “*godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son*” (NIV). Values matter,

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and the best values are based on the principles God has given us in His Word.

In their book *Your Career in Changing Times*, Larry Burkett and Lee Ellis listed eight key values: service to God, family, wealth (prosperity), recognition, helping others, integrity/honesty, achievement, and security. Let's take a quick look at several of these. Regarding service to God, 1 Corinthians 15:58 says, *"Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain"* (NIV). When it comes to family, we need to treat others the way we want to be treated: *"Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves"* (Romans 12:10 NIV). Chasing after wealth (prosperity), as well as supposed "security," recognition, and achievement, can cause us to ignore God and our families. But Solomon, who learned hard lessons about the futility of wealth, warned, *"Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless"* (Ecclesiastes 5:10 NIV). And Paul wrote, *"So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal"* (2 Corinthians 4:18 NIV). In the coming days, take time to dig deeper into what the Bible has to say about each of these values, remembering that whatever the issue, God's Word is the most important and essential source of wisdom for your life.

ACT: *For the next week, take a few moments at the end of the day to reflect on how you spent your time. When did you feel close to God, and when did you feel far? Mentally categorize how much time you devoted to the different eight key values listed above, and consider if you need to shift your priorities.*

Day 5

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand”

Isaiah 41:10 NIV

Larry Burkett often asked, “Do you trust God or just say that you trust God?” In line with that question, the biblical story of King Asa is a good example. When an enemy army of one million soldiers attacked Asa’s kingdom, he prayed, “O Lord, no one but you can help the powerless against the mighty! Help us, O Lord our God, for we trust in you alone” (2 Chronicles 14:11 NIV). God gave Asa the victory over an army that was twice the size of his. But years later, when Asa faced another military threat, he didn’t ask God for help. He gathered silver and gold treasures and used them to hire mercenaries to defend his kingdom. The amazing thing is that some of those treasures came from God’s temple! When a prophet rebuked Asa for his actions, he put the prophet in prison. And when Asa was stricken with a

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severe disease in his feet, he refused to ask for God's help. He died two years later.

None of us want to end our lives in such a tragic way. In all things we need to trust God completely. Larry Burkett defined faith as "trusting God for things you cannot see or manipulate into happening." He said most of us desire to exercise such faith, but the world around us "tells us to do just the opposite." As Asa grew older, he may have fallen victim to such advice. His young and energetic faith was replaced by a cold reliance on what he could do for himself instead of what God could do on his behalf. A stark contrast to Asa's behavior is the attitude displayed by Paul, who wrote, "*For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength*" (Philippians 4:13 NLT). What was the result of Paul's faith? Encyclopedia Britannica says he is "often considered to be the most important person after Jesus in the history of Christianity." The world will tell us to put our trust in anything but God, but we need to make Him the object of our trust. "*And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you*" (Psalm 9:10 ESV).

PRAY: *Take a prayer walk or drive around your neighborhood. As you look where God has placed you, thank Him for His provision, and pray that He shows you how you can use your home for His glory. Try and see your neighborhood in a new light! Instead of it simply being a place you call home, dwell in the truth that this is the place the Lord has provided for you to live in this season.*

Day 6

“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 ESV

Several days ago, we learned how God provided for a widow who owed so much that her creditors were going to take her sons as payment for her debts. Her predicament may have led her to question God’s love for her and her children. When times are tough, the voice inside your head will probably tell you that God doesn’t care. But God has already proved His love for us in the highest way possible. *“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:6-8 NIV). As sinners, we were spiritually dead. There was nothing we could do to save ourselves. But the Bible says that God sent Jesus to give us life. *“This is love:*

What Do I Have?

not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:9-11 NIV).

Peter was perhaps the boldest man among Jesus’ disciples. He said he would never deny his Lord, but he did so three times at Jesus’ trial. The Bible tells us that Jesus turned and looked at Peter, who went outside and “wept bitterly” (Luke 22:62 NIV). Jesus was crucified and buried. But days later, when three women visited his tomb and found it empty, an angel told them, “*He is risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you*” (Mark 16:6-7 ESV). Notice the words “*and Peter.*” It was obvious that despite his failures, Jesus still loved him. So, as you consider the question “What do I have?” remember that for starters, you have God’s amazing love. Beyond that, remember that He will equip you for the work He wants you to do, and if anything is lacking, He will provide. “*He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*” (Romans 8:32 NIV).

PRAY: *Reflect back on times in your life where God’s presence has been the most obvious — moments when you could not deny that He loves and is watching over you. Thank the Lord for His everlasting love for you and for the world! Ask Him to fill any emptiness, discontent, or worry in your life with His love.*

*How Do
I Use
What
I Have?*

Day 1

“Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful”

1 Corinthians 4:2 ESV

A steward is a manager of something that belongs to someone else. God owns everything, and we are stewards of the things He has entrusted to us. This responsibility includes our time. The world often fails to recognize God and His sovereignty over all things. Everything is a gift from Him, including our days, and we should use them wisely. The world’s attitude is, “Life is short, so get everything you can while you can.” People spend their time seeking positions, power, pleasures, and possessions, but such things lose their luster. When that happens, they seek higher levels of things in a never-ending search for fulfillment. The Bible teaches that we should live for God because everything on this earth will be destroyed. *“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare”* (2 Peter 3:10 NIV).

You have been given life, and every second is a gift from God. What will you do with your time? Don't sacrifice your relationship with God in an effort to accumulate temporary things. Moses wrote, *"Teach us to realize the brevity of life, so that we may grow in wisdom"* (Psalm 90:12 NLT). If we compare this fleeting world to God's everlasting Kingdom, making wise choices with our time shouldn't be difficult. We cannot take the things we accumulate in this world into eternity. Those things will stay behind and will belong to someone else. But when our time is focused on building God's Kingdom, God can use our witness to bring others to Christ, and they will *"be with the Lord forever"* (1 Thessalonians 4:17 NIV). In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul wrote, *"Be very careful, then how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil"* (NIV). Now is the only time you have to make choices that will influence eternity. Invest your time and your focus on building God's Kingdom.

ACT: *Be intentional today to turn everything you spend time on over to God. Before working, washing dishes, gardening, watching TV or any other activity, thank God for the opportunity, and ask Him to make the most of your time. Whether it is to make your work fruitful or impactful for the Kingdom, or to allow your hobbies to refresh you, ask that He be part of it.*

Day 2

“And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father”

Colossians 3:17 NLT

Several days ago we looked at spiritual gifts, which are given to us by the Holy Spirit when we become believers. Today we look at talents, which are special abilities that are found in everyone, whether saved or unsaved. Talents come from God, and they vary. One person may be great at singing, another at sports, another at business, and so on. When people are focused on this world rather than on God, Satan can use their talents for his purposes. For example, some celebrities use the platform their talents have given them to set bad examples, which encourage their fans to do things that are contrary to God’s will. Some advocate for causes that are not biblical. Some use their income to fund destructive lifestyles. And some, though successful, become obsessed with the pursuit of higher worldly goals, which prevents them from supporting God’s work with their time and resources.

Among God's people, one of the most glaring abuses of talents is found in Exodus 32. Moses, the leader of the Israelites, had spent weeks on top of Mt. Sinai, where he spoke with God and received the Ten Commandments. In his absence, the Israelites asked Moses' brother, Aaron, to make them an idol. He collected gold from the people and "made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool" (Exodus 32:4 NIV). When Moses returned from the top of the mountain, he was furious. Nevertheless, he prayed for the Israelites, because God was angry enough to destroy them. Moses later wrote, "And the Lord was angry enough with Aaron to destroy him, but at that time I prayed for Aaron too" (Deuteronomy 9:20 NIV). The making of the golden calf was an improper use of talent. It satisfied Satan's plan for Israel. Don't let Satan use your talents to benefit his causes. Live for God's glory and honor Him with the talents He has entrusted to you. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago" (Ephesians 2:10 NLT).

PRAY: *Lord, thank you for the talents you have given me. If I have not discovered them, or do not realize exactly how you have gifted me, make it clear. Help me use them for your glory. Create opportunities for me to nurture your Kingdom with the gifts you have given me.*

Day 3

“Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from him”

Psalm 127:3 NLT

On Day 1 we noted that we are stewards (managers) of what God has entrusted to us. This responsibility includes our children. Psalm 24:1 says, *“The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it”* (NIV). In Ezekiel 18:4 God said, *“For everyone belongs to me, the parent as well as the child—both alike belong to me”* (NIV). God has entrusted us with our children, and in order to be good stewards, we must train them properly. When you and your children experience something together, and when you carry on conversations with them, you’ll have opportunities to teach them about life from God’s perspective. In Deuteronomy 11:19, God told the Israelites to teach His commandments to their children when they were sitting at home, walking along the road, lying down and getting up.

Failing to train our children properly can produce tragic results. The Bible’s account of King David is a good

example. David was one of Israel's best kings, but apparently, he wasn't the best father. Three of his sons, Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah, met with disaster. Amnon raped his sister and was assassinated because of his crime. Absalom was killed while trying to lead a rebellion against his father. And Adonijah was executed for trying to take the kingdom from his brother, Solomon, the man David chose to be king when he died. Regarding Adonijah, the Bible says, "Now his father, King David, had never disciplined him at any time, even by asking, 'Why are you doing that?'" (1 Kings 1:6 NLT). We should never forsake our roles as parents in order to pursue other goals, no matter how valuable society says they are. Our responsibility for managing the upbringing of our children is too critical to ignore completely or to handle in a half-hearted way. We must teach our children how to live in a way that is pleasing to God. And in this effort, our textbook is the Bible. "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16 ESV).

ACT: *Teach a young person in your life a biblical solution to something they are encountering. Offer them an alternative to a worldly way of handling their issue. If you do not have children in your home or who you regularly see, ask for the Lord to send a young person into your life to mentor. An encouraging and wise word from a loving adult can be life-changing to a child or teenager. Do not be afraid to form new relationships and share what the Lord has taught you.*

Day 4

“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you’”

Hebrews 13:5 NIV

In Day 3 we touched on the subject of God’s ownership. Exactly how much does He own? Deuteronomy 10:14 says *“To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it”* (NIV). Whether we have much or little according to the world’s standards, God owns it all. Recognizing this truth is a key step in learning to be content, which will save us from a lot of worry and frustration regarding money and possessions. If you believe the items entrusted to you are yours, not God’s, the circumstances surrounding them will affect your peace and happiness. Will they be damaged? Will they be stolen? Will they lose their value? The list of questions goes on and on.

In Matthew 6:25 Jesus told us not to worry about our basic needs being met. *“So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need”* (Matthew 6:31-33 NLT). When we don’t seek God’s Kingdom *“above all else,”* we’re in danger of becoming obsessed with this earth. We won’t be content with having our needs met but will seek more than our needs require. We’ll see people with things we don’t have and slavishly work to acquire such things for ourselves. Instead, we should be content with what God has entrusted to us and acknowledge our responsibility to properly manage it according to His financial principles. Don’t be fooled into believing that when it comes to stewardship of God’s resources, you can follow His way and the world’s way at the same time. In Matthew 6:24, Jesus warned us that in the realm of money, it is impossible to be on both sides of the fence: *“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money”* (Matthew 6:24 NIV).

REFLECT:

What is ‘enough’ for you? Take time to think about what God has provided and how He has met your needs. If you see excess in your life, pray on how God would have you use it to glorify Him.

Day 5

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will”

Romans 12:2 NIV

When it comes to possessions, the world’s pattern is to continually accumulate more. Jesus told a parable about a rich man whose land was so productive that he didn’t have enough storage for his crops. His solution was to tear down his barns and build bigger ones. He would have so much stored up that he could take it easy for years. But God’s response to him was, “*You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?*” Jesus concluded the parable by saying, “*This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God*” (Luke 12:20-21 NIV). If this man had been rich toward God, he might have considered sharing his surplus with the poor.

Unfortunately, his attitude remains prevalent in our world, thousands of years later.

We're continually exposed to advertising that tells us we don't have enough. We see people who are obsessed with acquiring the things of this world. They're always looking to get something new. They discard items because they're "old"—not because they've stopped working. And their lack of contentment drives them to higher and higher levels of accumulation. But here's what the wealthy king, Solomon, said about all the things he had accumulated: *"I came to hate all my hard work here on earth, for I must leave to others everything I have earned. And who can tell whether my successors will be wise or foolish? Yet they will control everything I have gained by my skill and hard work under the sun. How meaningless!"* (Ecclesiastes 2:18-19 NLT). If we want to be rich toward God, our focus must be on drawing closer to Him and doing His will, not obtaining possessions. The Apostle Paul knew what it meant to be rich toward God. He wrote, *"Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ"* (Philippians 3:8 NLT).

Pray: *God, I am surrounded by distractions. Shine your light so that I can only see your truth and your way. Keep me close to you, and be the center of my contentment.*

Day 6

“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work”

1 Corinthians 3:11-13 NIV

In the last sentence of today’s Scripture, the Apostle Paul says that the “*quality*” of every Christian’s work here on earth will be tested by fire. It’s comforting that this sentence doesn’t say “*quantity*,” because some of us have less means and gifts than others. However, we should all be striving to do as much as possible within our means to build God’s Kingdom. The Lord will test the quality of

our work in this life, and only those works having eternal spiritual value will remain. Verses 14-15 say, *“If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames”*(NIV). Believers who end up *“escaping through the flames”* won’t lose their salvation, but their work will not survive because their energy was spent on worldly, temporal things.

The *“Day”* to which Paul refers is the time of the judgment seat of Christ. *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad”* (2 Corinthians 5:10 NIV). Our Lord, who sees and knows all things, including our motives, will judge fairly and accurately. Paul wrote, *“So don’t make judgments about anyone ahead of time—before the Lord returns. For he will bring our darkest secrets to light and will reveal our private motives. Then God will give to each one whatever praise is due”* (1 Corinthians 4:5 NLT). We are citizens of heaven, and this world is not our home. The Apostle Peter refers to Christians as *“foreigners”* in the world (1 Peter 1:17 and 2:11 NIV). Therefore, we should invest our time in a way that brings intimacy with the Lord and leads to the greatest possible rewards and responsibilities in heaven. When our lives are over, there will be no more chances to do God’s work on earth, including praying, sharing the Gospel, supporting the work of God’s Kingdom, and sharing with the needy. May God bless you as you make the most of your time and use what He has entrusted to you for His honor and glory, and may your work for Him play a key role in the advancement of His Kingdom.

How Do I Use What I Have?

ACT: *As you have studied this devotional, you have taken the time to question who God made you to be, what He has given you, and how you can use both well. Stewardship is a lifelong and daily journey. Today, choose one next step. It may be a gift you want to more fully cultivate and use, a step toward consuming less, or an outpouring of generosity! Let the Lord guide you through this prayerful decision.*

How Do I Use What I Have?

