Friendship Baptist Church

A 31-Day Spiritual Devotional

Taking the Limits off our Expectations

imagine

Equip, Engage, Enlarge with Excellence

Prayer

Prayer is a vital component of the ***Imagine*** Campaign. Please join us in praying the Campaign Prayer and asking for the Lord's Help for not only a better Friendship Baptist Church but a better way of walking by faith without limits in our personal lives.

Say This Prayer:

Gracious God, source of all life, love and holiness
you call us to be one with you and each other.
Over the years you have generously
blessed this Friendship Baptist Church
and we are grateful.

We ask you now to strengthen us as we assume the task to
Imagine: Equip, Engage, Enlarge, with Excellence a better life built on Faith.
In these difficult times may our collaborative efforts
lead us to renew bonds with family, friends
and build new relationships with others thereby providing Your love
through our presence, programs and ministry.

Strengthened our Faith, make us all willing participants in this work
to believe You can do above what we can ask or imagine.
Give us Your spirit of wisdom as we move on
and may our part in this Imagine effort give honor and glory,
to You, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God forever and ever.

Amen.

Imagine…

Areas of Concentration

I. Imagine – What God Can Do In You

II. Imagine – What God Can Do In Your Family/Family Members

III. Imagine – What God Can Do In Your Finances/Job/Career

IV. Imagine – What God Can at/with Friendship Baptist Church

V. Imagine – What God Can Do In the Community

Day 1

I Can Only Imagine

"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think (imagine), according to the power that works in us." **- Ephesians 3:20**

At times we feel as if we could impress God with all we are trying to do for Him and His church. Yet God has yet to be impressed with even the most grandiose human aspirations (Psalm 8:3–4). You will never set a goal so big or attempt a task so significant that God does not have something far greater that He could do in and through your life. Saul of Tarsus worked harder than anyone else to impress God with his efforts, only to discover that his greatest achievements were but rubbish compared to God's will for his life (Philippians 3:7–8).

Our problem is that we become too easily enamored with our own plans or problems. If we are attempting to do noble or difficult things, we assume that we must be experiencing the maximum potential for our lives and that God must, therefore, be pleased with us. Until we have heard from God, we cannot even imagine all that our lives could become or all that God could accomplish through us.

We need to remind ourselves that the Father sees the "big picture," that His power far exceeds our limited imagination. We must set aside our own agenda, however lofty. We must never become satisfied with our own dreams, for they are finite at best. When we follow God's direction we will witness things happening in our lives that can only be explained by His powerful presence. How could we be satisfied with anything less?

Day 2

Resolutions

So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" **- John 21:15**

Jesus has a wonderful way of restoring us when we fail Him! He does not humiliate us. He does not criticize us. He does not ask us to make a resolution to try harder. Rather, He takes us aside and asks us to reaffirm our love for Him. Peter miserably failed his Lord when he fled with the other disciples from the Garden of Gethsemane. Later, he publicly denied that he even knew Jesus. Peter must have wondered if he had been capable of being Jesus' disciple when he was unfaithful to Jesus in His most crucial hour.

As you begin a new year, you may be painfully aware that you have failed your Lord in many ways. Perhaps you were not faithful. Perhaps you disobeyed His word to you. Perhaps you denied Him by the way you lived. Jesus will take you aside, as He did Peter. He will not berate you. He will not humiliate you. He will ask you to examine your love for Him. He asked Peter, "Do you love Me?" If your answer, like Peter's, is "Yes, Lord," He will reaffirm His will for you. If you truly love Him, you will obey Him (John 14:15). Jesus does not need your resolutions, your recommitments, or your promises to try harder this year. If your resolve to obey God last year did not help you to be faithful, it will not make you successful this year. Jesus asks for your love. If you truly love Him, your service for Him in the New Year will be of the quality that He desires.

Day 3

Room for Dreams

"Joseph dreamed still another dream." Genesis 37:9

"Leave room in your heart for God to place His dreams there." What would life be without a dream? A lot less than is possible with one, I would suggest. Imagine what you might be able to do or become, if you made room in your future for dreams. Remember this; dreams can be pretty fragile so be very careful with yours, and how you handle others'. You've seen people who have lost their dreams. Maybe you are that person. If you lose your dream, you lose a little part of yourself, becoming something less than you could have been. Life then can seem hollow, shallow even, and more confined and mundane.

Joseph was a grandson of Abraham. Maybe when growing up, he heard Jacob, his father, telling stories of how God gave Joseph's grandfather a dream, showing him a future family more numerous than the stars and a place of inheritance given him by God. Joseph seemed to come by dreams naturally. Joseph's brothers' jealousy of him and his dreams grew until they reasoned, *"Here comes the dreamer…let us kill him… then we'll see what will become of his dreams."* (Genesis 37:19). Isn't that what life is about – seeing what will become of your dreams? There will be people who stopped dreaming who will want to take away your dream too. Your dream is costly, but it is also priceless!

Circumstances, opposition, weariness, distraction, misplaced priorities, difficulty, impatience – any or all conspire to kill dreams and leave lives without inspiration, direction, hope, and assurance. Make sure your dreams come from God's heart. He best knows you, and your future. Leave room in your heart for God to place His dreams there.

Day 4

Barricades & Barriers

"Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.'" **- John 11:39**

"Obedience opens unforeseen possibilities." Much of the time, people resign themselves to a life hindered by barricades and/or barriers. Barricades are things and ways with which you make it difficult for God and others to get up close or too personal. Barriers are things that stand in your way from becoming what you want to be and doing what you need to do. Allowing either measurably reduces the life that you could enjoy. It is the rare person who does not struggle with one or both. Sometimes you may see the effect without recognizing the cause. What do you see limiting your progress? Eventually, you will have to deal with that in order to grow and succeed. There will be plenty of reasons, excuses really, why you might avoid dealing with the real issues. It's too much trouble; it's hard work; you aren't convinced your efforts will make any difference; and you may have grown accustomed to your situations. Whatever your excuse, you will make no progress until you come to terms with whatever is hindering you.

John relates an amazing and true story in his Gospel – the story of Lazarus' death and astounding resuscitation by the power of God, four days afterwards. Read John 11:1-45 NKJV. Lazarus, a beloved friend who frequently hosted Jesus at his home in Bethany, had become sick and the sisters of Lazarus, Martha and Mary, sought Jesus' assistance. When Jesus arrived at Bethany four days had passed, Lazarus had died, mourners were gathered, and a large stone covered the entrance of the cave where Lazarus was buried. Jesus was not deterred. Even death was neither final nor irreversible in Jesus' considerations; it never is! *"And Jesus said, 'Take away the stone!'"* John 11:39 NKJV. Martha wrongly concluded that it had been too long and now it was too late. Ever feel that way? She was wrong; maybe you have been too at times. Jesus doesn't ask you to undo what's been done or understand how something good can come out of bad. Don't argue; just obey – *"take away the stone"* - and He will do what you could not imagine! The external, physical barrier was just a stone; the internal, mental, emotional and spiritual barricades were more complicated – the sisters' inability to believe Jesus was Lord of all. Remove the barriers you allow and the barricades you erect, new life will replace the struggles and disappointments that impede your progress and growth. Obedience opens unforeseen possibilities.

Day 5

The Potter's Touch

"O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the LORD. "Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel! -
Jeremiah 18:6

God knows how to bring salvation to your family, your friends, your community, and your world. Accordingly, He looks for those who will allow Him to shape them into the instruments He requires to do His divine work. Clay has no plans of its own, no aspirations for service, nor reluctance to perform its given task. It is just clay. Moldable, pliable, totally submissive to the will of its master. At times we excitedly announce to God: "I've discovered my strengths and gifts, and now I know how I can best serve You!" At other times we inform Him, "I am aware of what my weaknesses are, so I know which tasks I'm not capable of doing for You." Yet this is not characteristic of clay. God is not limited to working with our strengths (2 Cor. 12:9–10).

He can mold us into whatever kind of instrument He requires. When God's assignment demands humility, he finds a servant willing to be humbled. When His work requires zeal, He looks for someone He can fill with His Spirit. God uses holy vessels, so He finds those who will allow Him to remove their impurities. It is not a noble task, being clay. There is no to it, nothing boast worthy, except that it is exactly what almighty God is looking for. Compliant, moldable, yielded clay. If your tendency is to tell the Father what you can and cannot do for Him, submit to His agenda and allow Him to shape you into the person He wants you to be. Like clay.

Day 6

Faith Means Taking Risks

"You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength." – Mark 12:30

Faith always means risk. Everything in life is a risk. Ecclesiastes 10:8 says, "When you work in a quarry, stones might fall and crush you! When you chop wood, there is danger with each stroke of your ax! Such are the risks of life" (NLT). There's nothing we can do that doesn't have some element of risk in it. But the greatest risk of all is how we relate to other people and how we relate to God – the risk to do something about those relationships. Mark 12:30 says, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength" (NLT). You take a risk when you love with all your heart. Is it worth it? Absolutely. Jesus reminded us that one of the greatest mistakes we can make is to play it safe with our lives. He said, "If you try to keep your life for yourself, you'll lose it."

You probably remember the part in the third Indiana Jones movie where Indiana Jones came to the edge of a cliff. He was challenged to step out over the cliff even though he couldn't see a bridge beforehand. That's not a bad picture of genuine faith. Faith is stepping out and doing what God has asked you to do when you can't see what will happen in the end. You don't know exactly what God's going to do in the end, but you know he's asking you to step out in faith.
Many times we'll come to the edge of faith in our own lives. We're not sure where things are headed. Maybe it is a decision to start a relationship with Jesus for the first time. Maybe you need to trust him with a business decision or something related to a relationship. There is a risk in stepping out in faith. Who will you trust? Will you trust in the Lord with all your heart? What if you're wrong? Is it really God telling you to take the step of faith?

Day 7

Great Faith

With the sting of "little faith" still fresh in their memories; the disciples were no doubt astonished when Jesus commended a foreigner for having "great faith." They, the Twelve, had "little faith" and this woman, a Canaanite, had "great faith" ? Shortly after Jesus came to them on water, a Canaanite woman came to them in agony, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed." - **Matthew 15.21-28**

What characterized this desperate woman whom Jesus commended for having *great faith*?

- *She sacrificially committed to her cause.* She risked embarrassment, rejection, and possible disappointment for the love of her daughter. (v. 22)
- *She was unmoved by other voices.* The disciples wanted her sent away, yet no voice could deter her. (v. 23)
- *She was tenacious.* Certain of Jesus and His power, she did not waver in either worship or petition. (v. 25)
- *She was humble.* Even when Jesus' words humbled her, she kept pressing in. (v. 27)

After an initial silence, Jesus offered this praise: "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." Her daughter was healed that very hour! Not all persevere like this humble mother. The proud are offended by God's silence and feel they deserve better treatment. The impatient take offense at God's delay and wonder why they aren't receiving faster service. It's a humble heart indeed that can hold fast to God's character, wait in desperation for His voice--and risk hoping for miracles.

Day 8

Family Foundation

"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." – **1 John 4:10**

How do you know that a member of your family loves you? Do you know it when he or she says something nice to you, gives you a gift, or helps you with your homework? Or is it when that person corrects you or tries to teach you a difficult lesson in life? Love can be shown in all kinds of different ways, some of which are more "lovely" than others! Have you ever thought, though, that we only know what love truly is because God the Father showed it to us when He sent Jesus to the cross to die for our sins? The Bible tells us that all people have sinned and disobeyed God. Because of our sins, we all deserve to be punished and to spend eternity away from God. But God wanted to have us in heaven with Him, so He sent His Son Jesus to be punished instead of us by dying on a cross. Our sins can be forgiven if we confess to God that we are sinners, receive the gift of forgiveness, and agree to obey God and follow Him. What an amazing example of love! God didn't have to send Jesus to die in our place. He did so because He loves us. That's how you know someone loves you, by the way: he or she makes sacrifices for you and puts your needs first, even when doing so isn't required. That kind of love will serve as a great foundation for your family.

Day 9

Love one Another Sincerely

"Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for one another, love one another deeply, from the heart." - **1 Peter 1:22**

What is one of your first or maybe favorite memories of being loved by your family? Maybe it was something really exciting that happened to you, or perhaps it was a time of crises in your life when you really felt loved. Maybe your memory is a simple one like mine in everyday life. As I look back at my experiences with my family, one that sticks out is when my dad would make his amazing pancakes on Sunday morning before church. We would all gather around the table preparing and waiting in anticipation for those tasty pancakes. We would talk and joke as a family and enjoy just being together. We always seemed to love each other more as we would work together on something, especially when there was a reward afterwards…like pancakes!

Although we enjoyed those Sunday mornings, it wasn't always easy to show love to each other. When families come together, personalities, opinions and attitudes often clash. How can families overcome this? How are we called to love each other? In 1 Peter 1:22, Peter says "now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for one another, love one another deeply, from the heart." As we have been cleansed and purified by Christ we now need to turn toward others, especially family to show the same sincere love. Our love for each other needs to be sincere love, deep from the heart. Whether it is a relationship with a family member or a crisis in a life situation, as a family we are to love each other deeply from the heart.

Day 10

Biblical Marriage: Growing In Christ Together

"I have set an example for you, so that you will do just what I have done for you**".** -
John 13:15

Any successful marriage is built upon the biblical truth that God designed each of us with five purposes in mind: worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and missions. You and your spouse were both created to become like Christ. God uses your spouse to build his values, attitudes, morals, and character within you. God uses your spouse, and your relationship with each other, to form you into an image of Jesus.

Once you understand this, a lot of what happens within your marriage will begin to make more sense. When you start to ask, "*Why is this happening to me*?" The answer is — to make you more like Jesus! If God's purpose for each of our lives is to make us look more like Jesus, what better tool could he use than the marriage relationship? Who better for God to use to chisel you than the person you live with seven days a week? God is using each of you to shape the other person more and more into the image of Jesus. God's work within your marriage is designed to produce "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control" within you and your spouse. (Galatians 5:22-23)

Day 11

Spending Time at Church

"I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD." – **Psalm 122:1**

The first Christian communities met in the homes of believers. They gathered to hear and learn God's Word, worshipped together, broke bread (not just the Lord's supper), prayed, evangelized, and fellowshipped. We might say that the families of believers and the family of God shared the same roots – the Lord Jesus Christ. By the end of the first century the witness of these believers had turned the world upside down. (Acts 17:6) As the church age continued gradual changes and shifts occurred that affected the ministry to both the saved and the unsaved. The work of the ministry became a segregating factor of the clergy and the laity. Even though there were still believers meeting in homes as they are today, the trend was to erect separate places to congregate. Congregations became united into denominations. As denominations grew, the need for training their members called into full time ministry led to seminaries and Bible institutions to keep the continuity of sound doctrinal truth and the great commission of Our Lord. (Matthew 28:18-20)

That brings us to the present. Though the church still has the same man (Jesus), same message (the gospel), and the same mission (go into a lost world), it is facing a daunting challenge: ministering to the family in a time when the family has become so fragmented. Jesus was aware of these, and all the challenges, His church has had to confront through the church age. His church is still the vehicle He is using to evangelize the world. His church is still the foremost place for the family unit to be inspired and equipped to worship and serve Jesus Christ. Spend time at church. It's the backbone of our faith and the conduit to build unity in our family.

Day 12

Setting Goals As A Family

"Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." - **James 4:13-15**

Goal-setting should be a part of each person and each family's life! When we set goals, we are making a plan for the future to make sure we don't waste time and energy on the wrong things. We set goals for saving money, losing weight, getting a good grade on a test or project at school, and many other things. But how can a family set goals together? The first step is to think about what God wants for your family and from your family. In the passage you read, James had some pretty strong words for people who make plans and set goals without thinking about how those goals please God. Any goal should first be matched up against the Bible. Is the goal God honoring and is it God's will? When you start setting goals for your family, you should start with what pleases God, not what pleases you!

Day 13

Spending Time as a Family

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." - **Deuteronomy 6:4-7**

Are you ready to give your family a jump start toward a life lived for Christ? Quality family time together can be a great way to help them on the right path. Family time is particularly important for Christians, as it provides unity and allows family members to grow spiritually in a loving and encouraging environment. Family time can be used to help shape a family's faith and values, but not all family time must be spent at home. There are many activities that allow families to grow in faith while doing something enjoyable together.

Do you worship together at home? Home is a good place start. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16). Sing songs together, read the Bible together, and pray together! Let all participate and become involved. Even the little children can say a few words in prayer if they cannot read. They can be taught songs in which all can take part. Make it fun! The goal here is spending time together. Though it may sound corny but with the busyness of life that our family time often is the first to suffer. Build family bonds they will have a lifelong benefit.

Day 14

Believe God Will Save Your Family/Family Member

"So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." – **Acts 16:31**

We have a right to believe for the salvation of all our family members. God's desire is for everyone to know Him and enjoy life with Him. The Lord is . . . not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9) God never forces anyone to accept Him and love Him. But when we pray for people, God releases His forces and strongly influences them with His truth. When people are confronted with the reality of God, they will accept Him. Spiritual blindness is the only reason anyone rejects Jesus Christ. Praying for those we love, gives God a valid invitation to work in their lives, so they can know the truth. We should also use the authority of Jesus' Name to break the devil's blindness over our loved ones. But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. (2 Corinthians 4:3-4)

There is a spiritual reason why people have not accepted the Lord Jesus Christ. We must deal with the root of the problem, not just the outward circumstances. We can command the devil to release them and stop blinding them to the truth. When we pray for others it may not seem like anything is happening outwardly, but behind the scenes we can be certain that God is working. We should continue in faith and resist any thoughts of doubt.

SAY THIS: I believe God will save my family.

Day 15

Your JOB is Part of God's Plan

"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do**."** - **Ephesians 2:10**

*"*The gifts, the abilities, the talents, even the interests you have — they were genetically encoded into you by God*."* Your work can be an act of worship. No matter what you do, it's never just a job if you are a believer. This is because God designed you with talents, gifts and interests that He wants used for His glory. You are custom-made. There's nobody like you in the whole world. And the gifts, the abilities, the talents, even the interests you have — they were genetically encoded into you by God. God made you with a specific mission in mind — and He wants you to use the gifts he's given you in your work.

The Bible says you are God's workmanship. The Greek word used for workmanship is*poema*. That's where the English word poem comes from — you are God's poem! You are God's work of art. You are God's masterpiece.
Your work is part of God's plan for your life and that is why, as you work, you worship God.

Day 16

God Alone Supplies

"Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness**."** - **2 Corinthians 9:10**

You must decide you will look to GOD ONLY as your source of supply. You need to tell God that you're going to look to Him alone to provide for your needs and that you won't look anywhere else. We get ourselves in trouble when we confuse the channel with the source. God may use your paycheck from work as the channel to supply your needs, but your employer is just the channel for God's provision – and he can shift to another channel anytime he wants.

When you start to look to something or someone else to meet your needs, when you begin to confuse the channel with the source, there is a clear warning sign: Worry**!** Say you've started looking to your job as the source, instead of the channel. You may start worrying, *"What if I lose my job*?" You know what – the channel may have closed, but the source of your every need is still active and providing for you. When God turns off one channel, He can turn on another one. Once you know what you're lacking, you need to give God the right to choose whatever channel He chooses to fulfill the need. It may be a channel different than you choose; in fact, God may deliberately choose a different channel in order to teach you to keep looking to him for all your needs. As a Christian it should be exciting to just to let God be God. It's exciting to watch God meet a need in a way that you never imagine possible or could have never thought up on your own. God alone is the source of your supply!

Day 17

One Awesome Resume

"The Lord reigns, he is robed in majesty; the Lord is robed in majesty and is armed with strength. The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved. Your throne was established long ago; you are from all eternity." – **Psalm 93:1-2**

In today's job market, the basic requirement is to have an electronic resume and letter. Then, too, you might have a personal Web site, a LinkedIn profile, as well as a social marketing gimmick such as a Facebook profile. All those things let the world know who you are and what you can do for a potential employer. If God were to write a resume, what do you think he would put on it? Just in the past few days, we've included two character traits that surely would be included: He loves us, and he is righteous. What about that creation thing; do you think that would be a resume builder. Just how would he word that? Would someone think He was being pompous by stating he had created the world, universe and heavens in six days way back when? "Did you get a bonus for that job?"

The Bible tells us who God is in every book. He is not some fly-by-night god who needs to come up with flowery characterizations of himself just to pump himself up for mankind. This short psalm gives us a window of who God is. "He is robed in majesty." He "is armed with strength." The "world is firmly established" and "it cannot be moved." His "throne was established long ago," and, finally," he is "from all eternity." Powerful stuff, our God. Nothing else can match his accomplishments. And yet the world keeps finding things in God's creation to worship and take the place of the creator. We hug trees and rocks, but don't want a hug from God. We cherish the life of an animal, but not the fetus inside a woman's womb. We make false idols out of work, money, play, and lust after the things of this world. We want credit for everything good that happens in our lives, and blame God when things go bad. We worship at the foot of "me" every day. God hasn't changed in thousands of years; if anything changes it's us. We can look at the world around us and know that God cares for us, because he put so much thought into his creation. Each of us is special because God created us in his image—not in the image of a rock, a tree or an animal. Our God has a resume filled with awesome accomplishments. All that remains is for you to hire him, and make him No. 1 in your company.

Day 18

Only God Can Give You Financial Security

"But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today." - **Deuteronomy 8:18**

As you enter the New Year, it is important that you trust God with your finances. If you want God to bless you financially, you must remain focused on the truth that he is the source of your finances and he is the one who supplies your needs. What does that mean? It means I'm not looking to an employer for my security. I'm not looking to my savings for security. I'm not looking to anyone or anything other than God to supply my needs. Let me illustrate it this way: When I turn on the water, I don't really think the water comes from the faucet. I know that the water really comes from a reservoir. It just comes to me through the faucet. In the same way, the income that God wants to give you may come through a job or through something else. But the source is God.

If you trust in a bank account, the bank account can be taken away. If you trust in your savings, you can lose it. The only true security you can have is when you put your trust in God. He is the starting point of your finances. He is the one and only true source of your finances. This means you don't need to worry about which faucet He uses to supply your needs**.** In a sense He says, 'If I turn off one faucet, I can just as easily turn on another. If you lose one job, I can give you another. I am your source, not your job. I am your source, not your bank account.

Day 19

Giving Back to God

"Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the first produce of your entire harvest; then your barns will be completely filled, and your vats will overflow with new wine.**"** - **Proverbs 3:9-10**

Brace yourself…this is a message on tithing. Here is where some people stop but continue to read. The purpose of tithing is to teach us to always put God first in our lives. God doesn't need our money. He wants what it represents: our gratitude, our priorities and our faith. Now look at these verses in Proverbs 3. Do you see where it says, '*Honor the Lord by giving him the leftovers of all your income*'. Now, you can see, that's NOT what it says at all. It says, "*Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the first produce of your entire harvest* ..". We give to God first, before anyone else, right off the top of our income.

And here is the promise, "*Then your barns will be completely filled, and your vats will overflow with new wine*". Many currently live this way; giving the first 10% to God. But if we're going to be in debt, we should be in debt to other people and not going to be in debt to God. (But still pay those debts as soon as you can). You and I are called to give back to God in gratitude, but also as a demonstration of our priorities. And, it is a demonstration of our faith in his promises. In Malachi 3:10, God says, "*Bring all the tithes into the storehouse ...*". That means the place where you worship. Then God says, "*Put me to the test*!" In a sense, '*Test me and see how I will bless you for your obedience*'. God says he will provide all that you *need*. He doesn't say he'll provide all that we greed, but all that we need.

Day 20

God's Provision Provides Glory

"Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me." - **Psalms 50:15**

Did you know that you bring glory to God by calling upon Him when you are in distress? God promised He would deliver you if you turned to Him. You deny the Lord honor that is rightfully His every time you find yourself in difficulty and you fail to call upon Him for help! There may be times when God allows you to reach a point of need so that you can call upon Him, and thus let Him demonstrate to a watching world the difference He makes in the lives of His children. If God never allowed you to experience need, people around you might never have the opportunity to witness God's provision in the life of a Christian. If you never faced a shortfall, you might be tempted to feel self-sufficient and without any need of God in your daily life.

Pride will tempt you to think that you do not need to seek God's assistance. Self-regard will seek to convince you that you can handle your dilemma through your own wisdom, resources, and hard work. Pride will also rob glory from God and seek to give it to you. Don't allow your pride to take what rightfully belongs to the Lord. Call upon your Lord and wait exclusively upon Him to rescue you. Then give Him the glory that He deserves. Self-sufficiency can greatly hinder your ability to experience God and bring Him honor. The next time you are in distress, turn to Him!

Day 21

Contentment Comes When You Give Yourself to Others

"And all of you must put on the apron of humility, to serve one another; for the scripture says, 'God resists the proud, but shows favor to the humble.'**- 1 Peter 5:5**

If you will begin giving yourself to others, sharing what things you do have, sharing your time and your talents, you will find yourself learning to be content.

Helping others will give you an appreciation for what you have and who you are, but more importantly, God designed you to serve and share with others. Until you do that, you will never be truly content.
Real servants don't serve for the approval or applause of others. They are content to live for an audience of One. They are content with quietly serving God.

You may be serving in obscurity in some small place, feeling unknown and unappreciated. God put you where you are for a purpose! He has every hair on your head numbered, and he knows your address.

Day 22

Remember

"I thank my God every time I remember you." - **Philippians 1:3**

What do you remember about people? The good experiences or the bad experiences? Paul said, "I like to remember the good things about people, focus on the good times we've had, remember the positive experiences."
When Paul said this he had not had an easy time in Philippi. Acts 16 tells us that when he went to Philippi he was illegally arrested, whipped, humiliated, and thrown into prison — before finally being asked to leave town. Yet he says, "*I thank God every time I remember you*." Paul could have dwelt on the negative. He could have remembered the painful memories. He chose not to remember the painful; instead, he focused on the things he could be grateful for.

Maybe you have been hurt in the past by a family member, friend, church member or co-worker and you're still holding on to that hurt. As a result you can't enjoy being around them today. You're still focusing on the bad and the negative. Be grateful for the good in people. Pleasant memories are a choice. I can choose what I'm going to remember about the past. I'm not saying that you deny the hurts you've had or that you excuse the weaknesses in other people. That is psychologically unhealthy. But focus on the good and choose to emphasize the strengths. I hear wives say, "*He's a good man, but … .*" Anytime you hear "but" it means the emphasis is on the negative not the positive. Be grateful! Perfect outside of God is hard to come by! If you want to enjoy others, you've got to focus on their strengths and not their weaknesses. Also remember at some point you let someone down too. With some people it takes a lot of creativity. But you can find something good in everybody. Give them all of God and none of your bad memories.

Day 23

A Specific Ministry

"Your hands shaped me and made me**"**. - **Job 10:8**

God formed every creature on this planet with a special area of expertise. Some animals run, some hop, some swim, some burrow, and some fly. Each has a particular role to play based on the way they were shaped by God. The same is true with humans. Each of us is uniquely designed, or "shaped," to do certain things. Before architects design any new building they first ask, **"***What will be its purpose? How will it be used*?**"** The intended function always determines the form of the building.

Before God created you, he decided what role he wanted you to play on earth. He planned exactly how he wanted you to serve him, and then he shaped you for those tasks. You are the way you are because you were made for a specific ministry. The Bible says, "*We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works*" (Ephesians 2:10). Our English word "*poem*" comes from this Greek word translated "*workmanship*." You're God's handcrafted work of art. You're not an assembly-line product, mass-produced without thought. You're a custom designed, one-of-a-kind, original masterpiece. God deliberately shaped and formed you to serve him in a way that makes your ministry unique**.** He carefully mixed the DNA recipe that created you. David praised God for this incredible personal attention to detail God gave in designing each of us: "You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous" (Psalm 139:13-14).

Day 24

We Cannot Grow Without A Teachable Spirit

"Practice these things. Devote your life to them so that everyone can see your progress." - **1 Timothy 4:15**

"There is only one way to develop the habits of Christ-like character. You must practice them – and that takes time.**"** While you were given a brand new nature at the moment of conversion, you still have old habits, patterns, and practices that need to be removed and replaced. We are afraid to humbly face the truth about ourselves. I have already pointed out that the truth will set us free but it often makes us miserable first. The fear of what we might discover if we honestly faced our character defects keeps us living in the prison of denial. Yet, we often build our identities around our defects. We say, "*It's just like me to be …*" and "*It's just the way I am*." The unconscious worry is that if I let go of my habit, my hurt, or my hang-up, who will I be? This fear can definitely slow down your growth. Only as God is allowed to shine the light of his truth on our faults, failures, and hang-ups can we begin to work on them. This is why you cannot grow without a humble, teachable attitude.

Godly habits take time to develop. Remember that your character is the sum total of your habits. You can't claim to be kind unless you are habitually kind—you show kindness without even thinking about it. You can't claim to have integrity unless it is your habit to always be honest. A husband who is faithful to his wife most of the time is not faithful at all! Your habits define your character. There is only one way to develop the habits of Christ-like character: You must practice them—and that takes time! There are no instant habits. Paul urged Timothy, "*Practice these things....*" (1 Timothy 4:15**)** If you practice something overtime, you get good at it. Repetition is the mother of character and skill. These character-building habits are often called "spiritual disciplines," and they include such things as meditation, prayer, fasting, Bible study, simplicity, stewardship, solitude, submission, service and evangelism.

Day 25

Surrender is the Heart of Worship

"Give yourselves to God … surrender your whole being to him to be used for righteous purposes." **- Romans 6:13**

The heart of worship is surrender. Surrender is an unpopular word, disliked almost as much as the word submission. It implies losing, and no one wants to be a loser. Surrender evokes the unpleasant images of admitting defeat in battle, forfeiting a game, or yielding to a stronger opponent. The word is almost always used in a negative context. Captured criminals surrender to the authorities. In our competitive world we're taught to never quit trying, never give up, and never give in – so we don't hear much about surrendering. If winning is everything, surrendering is unthinkable.

Yet, the Bible teaches us that rather than trying to win, succeed, overcome, and conquer, we should instead yield, submit, obey, and surrender. And by surrendering to God, we enter into the heart of worship. This is true worship: bringing pleasure to God as we give ourselves completely to him. Surrendering is best demonstrated in obedience, cooperating with your Creator. You say "*Yes, Lord*" to whatever he asks of you. In fact, "*No, Lord*" is a contradiction. You can't claim Jesus as your Lord when you refuse to obey him. Peter modeled surrender when, after a night of failed fishing, Jesus told him to try again: "*Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets*." Surrendered people obey God's word, even when it doesn't make sense. God is not a cruel slave driver or a bully who uses brute force to coerce us into submission. He doesn't try to break our will, but woos us to himself, so that we might offer it freely to him. God is a lover and a liberator, and surrendering brings freedom, not bondage. When we completely surrender ourselves to Jesus, we discover that he is not a tyrant but a savior; not a boss, but a brother; not a dictator, but a friend.

Day 26

Now is the Acceptable Time

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn. **- Isaiah 61:1-2**

God's timing is perfect! When He speaks, the time to respond in obedience is now. We often act as if we have all the time in the world to obey Him, but history doesn't wait on our commitments. There is no such thing as postponing a decision with God. Either we obey, or we disobey. It is faith or unbelief, obedience or disobedience.

When God announces that now is the acceptable time, what you do next is critical. How often people have been unprepared when a word came to them from the LORD. God said, "Now is the time for you to respond to Me" and their response was, "But I'm not ready. I have some things I need to do first. I'm too busy!" (Matt. 8:21). God's timing is always perfect. He knows you, and He is fully aware of your circumstances. He knows all that He has built into your life until now, and He extends His invitation knowing that His resources are more than adequate for any assignment He gives you.

That is why Scripture tells us God is concerned with our heart. If we do not keep our heart in love with Jesus, our disobedience when God speaks could affect the lives of others. When God speaks it is always out of the context of eternity. We don't have to know all the implications of what He is asking. We just have to know that it is a word from almighty God. "Now" is always the acceptable time to respond to the Lord!

Day 27

Christian Discipleship

"Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus".- **Colossians 1:28**

Discipleship is personally transferring the full dimensions of your relationship with Christ to the person you are walking with. It is not the imparting of spiritual disciplines as much as it is acquainting another with a Person you love. Paul said that he would teach and urge with all his strength that every person God placed in his life would come to a complete experience of the person of Christ (Col. 1:29). He was not satisfied with people becoming partially like Christ. He would not rest until those around him were perfect, or complete, in Christ. That is, that the fruits of the Spirit were being fully expressed through each life and the character of Christ was reflected in each person (Gal. 5:22).

We can mistake Christian activity with becoming like Christ. Christian activity and Christlikeness are not the same things. We must not assume that because our friend attends church and reads her Bible, she is growing as a Christian. Christian activities are an important expression of your relationship with Christ. They can lead you to a relationship, but the danger is assuming that your religious activity is the relationship. If you are only encouraging those around you to attend Christian activities, then you have not "discipled" them the way Paul did. You do your fellow Christians an injustice by teaching them that Christian activity is equal to Christian maturity. Do not rest until those around you have become "perfect" in Christ. If God has put new Christians under your care, you have an obligation to "stay with them" until they have reached Christian maturity.

Day 28

Called of God

"Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me." - **Isaiah 6:8**

God did not address the call to Isaiah; Isaiah overheard God saying, "Who will go for us?" The call of God is not for the special few, it is for everyone. Whether or not I hear God's call depends upon the state of my ears; and what I hear depends upon my disposition. "Many are called but few are chosen," that is, few prove themselves the chosen ones. The chosen ones are those who have come into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ whereby their disposition has been altered and their ears unstopped, and they hear the still small voice questioning all the time, "Who will go for us?" It is not a question of God singling out a man and saying, "Now, *you* go." God did not lay a strong compulsion on Isaiah; Isaiah was in the presence of God and he overheard the call, and realized that there was nothing else for him but to say, in conscious freedom, "Here am I, send me."

Get out of your mind the idea of expecting God to come with compulsions and pleadings. When our Lord called His disciples there was no irresistible compulsion from outside. The quiet passionate insistence of His "Follow Me" was spoken to men with every power wide awake. If we let the Spirit of God bring us face to face with God, we too shall hear something akin to what Isaiah heard, the still small voice of God; and in perfect freedom will say, "Here am I; send me."

Day 29

Care for Those Jesus Cares About

"The Lord replied, *"*Don't say, 'I'm too young,' for you must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you*."* - **Jeremiah 1:7**

"*Maybe you've been waiting for some supernatural feeling or experience, but God has already stated his call for you. The Great Commission is your commission, and doing your part is the secret to living a life of significance*."
Whether it was Sarah claiming she was too old to be used by God or Jeremiah claiming he was too young, God rejected their excuses. "*Don't say that*," the Lord replied*, "for you must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you. And don't be afraid of the people, for I will be with you and will protect you.*" Jeremiah 1:7-8

Maybe you've believed that you needed a special *"call*" from God, and you've been waiting for some supernatural feeling or experience, but God has already stated his call for you. He doesn't want to use just some of his people; he wants to use all of his people. We're all called to be on-mission for God. He wants his whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world. If you want to be like Jesus, you must care about what he cares about most; you must have a heart for the whole world! You can't be satisfied with just your family and friends coming to Christ. There are over six billion people on earth, and Jesus wants all his lost children found. The Great Commission is your commission, and doing your part is the secret to living a life of significance. Jesus said, "O*nly those who throw away their lives for my sake and for the sake of the Good News will ever know what it means to really live.*" Mark 8:35

Day 30

Bearing One Another's Burdens

"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ".- **Galatians 6:2**

When God places people in your life who are in need, He is aware of what they lack, and He knows He has given you the resources (not always financial) to meet those needs. You know God does nothing by accident. When a need surfaces around you, immediately go to the Father and say, "You put me here for a reason. You knew this was going to happen. What did You intend to do through me that would help this person become closer to You?"

Recognizing a need in someone's life can be one of the greatest invitations from God you will ever experience. It's easy to become frustrated by the problems of others. They can overwhelm you as you become aware of need after need. Rather than looking at each new problem as one more drain on your time, energy, or finances, ask God why He placed you in this situation. Allow God to help you see beyond the obvious needs of others to the things He wants to accomplish in their lives. Don't miss God's activity because you're reluctant to carry the load of others. Is God blessing you materially? It may be He is developing a "supply depot" in your life through which He can provide for others. Has God granted you a strong, healthy family life? It may be that He requires such a home to minister to the hurting families all around you. Has God released you from sinful habits? Has God's peace comforted you in a time of great sorrow? Has God miraculously provided for your needs? It may be that He has been purposefully building things into your life so that you can now be the kind of person who will carry the burdens of others.

Day 31

Closet Christians

"In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." – Matthew 5:16

A businessman gave his heart to Jesus as a result of a Billy Graham evangelistic event. When he told his co-workers, his Christian business partner was elated. But the new believer hadn't known about his faith, and said, "You know, you're one reason I resisted becoming a Christian for several years. I figured that if someone like you could live a good life and not be a Christian, there was no need for me to become one."

A friend of mine and I were doing business in a local bank. He needed to change a $100 bill. By mistake the teller counted out six $20 bills. When my friend discovered the error, he walked back into the bank and quietly told her what had happened. The teller said, "I can't thank you enough. I would have had to make up the difference. Obviously, you are an honest man." He replied, "The reason I am honest is that I'm a committed follower of Jesus Christ. Giving you back the money is something He would want me to do." Christians should lead exemplary lives not only for God but because others are also watching. Our lives are the only churches and Bibles some may ever encounter. But it's important that we reveal the Source of strength and life who enables us to be different. As Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

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"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think (**imagine**), according to the power that works in us." **- Ephesians 3:20**

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