

AM.YOUTH - Better For It

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Better For It

A 10-day devotional book to help you grow in your relationship with God.

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Hey AM.YOUTH Students –

This devo book is intended to help you grow on your own in your relationship with God. If you are going to truly know the Lord and learn to live life with Him, you need to be able to grow on your own. This book is a small step to help you do that.

By spending time in the Bible, by praying to God, by spending time focusing on Him, your life can be completely changed.

So...we're going to encourage all students to go through this book at the same time. Starting Sunday, June 21, (which is Father's Day, by the way...don't forget to do something nice or get a present for your dad) you can start this devo book and know there are other students in your youth group going through the book at the same time.

Day 1 will be June 21. If you do all 10 days in a row, day 10 will be June 30 (which is the last day of June.) If you get behind, it's okay, just catch back up or keep going one day at a time until you finish.

Each day will have a specific character quality to focus on. And there will be some questions to answer (have a pen so you can write out the answers) and there will be some type of challenge to do something to help you live out your faith.

Don't rush through this book. Slow down on focus on what God has in store for you through it. And before you start each day, spend a moment praying to God about what He wants to show you through each day's devo.

Last thing – the name of this devo book is "Better for it." We all just went through the really **STRANGE** time which many people have come to refer to as "quarantine." So many things changed during that time. School, extra-curricular activities, sports, church, going places, etc. And when difficult times come, you can either choose to be bitter or to be better.

We want you to be better for having been through the days of quarantine. Better in your relationships with your family. Better in your attitude toward life. Better able to slow down and recognize God in your daily life. More thankful for the opportunities God provides to you. More aware of the needs of people around you and a renewed desire to help them. Simply put, you want you to be better for it.

In addition to that, we want you to be better for the things God has in store for you in the future. We do not know what the future holds. And you can't predict the future based on things of the past. But God will be with you every day for the rest of your life. And we want you to be better for the things that will happen next year and the next year and the next year.

And here is the most important thing to know about all of this: you can't really make yourself a lot better by yourself, but a closer relationship with God will always make you better. So grow closer to Him. Learn everything you can about Him. And you'll be better for it. Here we go...

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Day 1: Devotion

Here are some words or phrases which help define the word Devotion:

Love, loyalty, or enthusiasm for a person, activity, or cause.

Each day's devotional is a story we found which helps to represent the point of the day. Today's story is about a baseball game with the Chicago Cubs.

In the fall of 2015, a friend of mine invited me to go to Wrigley Field to watch the Chicago Cubs in Game 4 of the first round of the playoffs. I was so excited the night before that I could hardly sleep. I'm not even sure I ever did fall asleep. When it was time, I hopped out of bed, put on my Cubs gear, and went to the office. All day, I was talking nonstop to everyone about how I was going to the game. Later that afternoon, my friend picked me up and we made our way to Chicago. That night was incredible; the Cubs made a comeback and sealed their trip to the National League Championship Series.

I didn't get home until extremely late. I gave my son a kiss as he was sleeping and then snuck into bed, trying not to disturb my beautiful, sleeping wife. I remember lying there, and then suddenly my excitement turned into sadness. I was so excited about going to the game that I put God on the backburner. I didn't wake up early to do my daily devotional, and the only time I remembered praying was for a Kyle Schwarber home run late in the game (which he did hit).

There are few things in my life I consider myself devoted to: God, my wife, my son, family, ministry, Dr. Pepper, and junk food. I would like to say I put God first every day, but the previous story proves otherwise. As much as I desire that to be the case, sometimes the craziness of life distracts me.

Jesus was not shy about his desire for you to be completely devoted to Him. He doesn't just desire you to hang out with Him whenever you can fit Him into your schedule. Jesus wants you to give everything you have to Him. He desires to be your No. 1. In Matthew 22:37, Jesus says, "*Love the Lord with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your mind.*"

Wow! Is Jesus your No. 1? If not, how can you intentionally strive for that to be the case? First, you should know that it takes supreme devotion, just like any serious relationship in your life. Think about the most important relationship you have in your life right now. If you were not devoted to it, what would happen to the relationship? It wouldn't be as meaningful as it is. The value of that relationship is expressed by your devotion to it. When it comes to your relationship with Christ, giving a little and expecting a lot in return isn't going to amount to much. Real, meaningful relationships take two people who fully invest in growing it.

Take a few moments to answer the following questions. Remember, these questions are designed to challenge you and will do so only if you are completely honest with yourself.

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Reflection (grab a pen or pencil and answer these questions – really think about it)

1. How would you define your current devotion to Jesus?

2. What is distracting you from being more devoted?

3. How do you imagine your day would look if you lived it out entirely devoted to Jesus? How would it be different from any other?

Take a moment to read these scriptures...and really think about what they mean. Don't rush through them: Matthew 22:37, Luke 16:13, 1 Corinthians 7:5, Colossians 3:17

There are many distractions in our culture, many things that pull you away from your relationship with Jesus. It's easy to get so wrapped up in what's going on in the world that you forget what your real purpose is here. You are here to love, witness, and serve. To have a heart that demonstrates those qualities, you must first have a loving, transformative, and faithful relationship with Jesus.

The Challenge

1. Spend your day with Jesus. Include Him in everything you do today. Act as if He were physically there beside you.
2. Commit to completing this challenge for the next 10 days. Life will get busy and the Enemy will conjure up excuses in your mind to try to keep you from completing it. Commit to the end.

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Day 2: Prayer

Before we start today, think about the challenge from yesterday (spend your day with Jesus and include Him in everything you do.)

1. Were you able to do this?
2. What was difficult about this?
3. What was great about this?
4. How do you feel this challenge grew your relationship with Jesus?

Okay, now to get started on today's devotion which focuses on prayer.

Here is a definition of prayer: A solemn request for help or expression of thanks addressed to God.

My prayer life growing up was done more out of routine than a desire to have a genuine connection with God. I remember gathering around the kitchen table, closing my eyes and praying the same prayer I did the night before. The same was also true when it was time for me to go to sleep. I lacked passion. I wasn't speaking from my heart; I was speaking from my mind. I firmly believe that the bland routine of my prayer life prevented me from conversing with God on a real level. Because I only made God available when it was that time of day, I didn't understand how important it was to speak to Him on an intimate level in every moment of my life until I was older.

A couple of weeks after my wife, Tiffany, and I got married, we were enjoying a relaxing night at our home in Texas. She has type-1 diabetes, which I ignorantly thought I understood. That night she went into another room in the house. I thought she would be back quickly, but after around 15 minutes, she had not come back yet. I figured she was busy or maybe took a moment to read something or work on something. After 30 minutes had passed, I called out for her. There was no answer. I made my way through our room and found her unconscious on the floor. My heart sank. I frantically called 911, and when the paramedics arrived, they carried her through the house and put her in the back of the ambulance. I raced to my car to follow behind. Instead of immediately putting my car into drive, I prayed. With every emotion known to man, I prayed. And my wife ended up being OK. But unfortunately, it often takes circumstances like this to bring us to our knees and be real with God. He wants more.

You are clueless on the hour or the day, but death will eventually come to you. As far as I know, the mortality rate is still holding strong at 100 percent. Everyone dies. You are not the exception. But, pretend for a moment that you knew the day you were going to die. What would you spend your time doing the night before? I imagine you would gather with the people closest to you. You would want to share memories, express your heart to the people you have surrounded yourself with, and then you would want to say a heartfelt goodbye.

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However, your one real last act would be to pray. It would be the most intimate, real, and heartfelt prayer you have ever uttered. You wouldn't hide anything anymore, and for maybe the first time, you would lay it all at the feet of Jesus.

On the last night of Jesus' life, he gathered with His disciples, then went to the garden to pray. He prayed for Himself to be glorified, then prayed for His disciples, and then He prayed for us. That's right. On the eve of His arrest, on the eve of His crucifixion, in His final prayer, Jesus actually prayed for you. Full of emotion, and with sweat dropping like blood dripping from his face, Jesus looked to Heaven and prayed for you.

Take a few moments to answer the following questions. Remember, these questions are designed to challenge you and will do so only if you are completely honest with yourself.

Reflection

1. Do you feel like your prayer life is done more out of routine or a genuine desire to connect with God?

2. What would you pray for if you knew it was the last night of your life? (Then think about: Do you pray for these things now?)

3. How does it make you feel knowing that Jesus prayed for you in the last moments of his life?

Take a moment to read John 17. Look at the things Jesus prays for.

Today's Challenge

As you go through your day, stop and pray from your heart every time God reveals something to you.

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Day 3: Kindness

Reflection from yesterday:

1. How does prayer help you be closer to God?
2. How does being closer to God make you better?
3. How can your prayer life be closer to God in the future?

Here is a definition of Kindness: The quality of being friendly, generous, and considerate.

Sometimes we all make healthy choices. Sometimes we do not. One afternoon, I was working so hard getting ready for a youth event. The event was a couple of hours away from starting, and I had not stopped to eat lunch. My stomach was not happy with my neglect. I think I actually heard the words "feed me" coming from the growl within.

To my stomach's satisfaction, I got in my car and headed to the local fast food joint. I ordered my usual: two cheeseburgers and a Dr. Pepper. When I pulled my car around with my cash in hand, the drive-thru guy told me that the person in front of me had paid for my meal. After hearing this, I must have had an unpleasant look on my face because the guy asked me if I was OK. I was alright ... however, I was in shock.

On my drive back to the church building, I had a realization. My response of shock was a result of the lack of kindness I see on a regular basis, especially from strangers. Especially since they didn't want anything in return, and their motives were pure. Imagine a world where being shown kindness wasn't unusual.

Okay, so buying a meal for a stranger is kind, but there is so much more to the idea of being kind. Kindness is a characteristic you have the ability to demonstrate to others. Sadly, your ability to be kind isn't revealed as often as it should be. Jesus was the most compassionate person ever to walk this Earth. He purposely loved the unlovable, served the needy, and healed the sick, expecting nothing in return. In fact, there are several times in Scripture when Jesus demonstrates kindness, then tells the person to not speak to anyone about it.

Many passages in Scripture call you to be kind. One of them is Galatians 6:10. Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit proclaims, "*Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people.*"

Each day, there are endless opportunities for you to show kindness, but if you're like me, you probably overlook them. It's in your nature to be more focused on your own wants and needs. It's part of the selfishness we all have. However, Scripture calls you to do good whenever you have the opportunity.

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Reflection

1. Think about a time when you have been on the receiving end of an act of kindness? If so, how did it make you feel?

2. Why do you feel like it's so easy for us to pass up opportunities to demonstrate kindness?

3. Why do you think it's important to show kindness toward other people?

Matthew 6:1-4 (ESV): *"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and the streets, that others may praise them. Truly, I say to you; they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."*

In other words, when you do good, don't tell everyone about it. Sometimes, whether you will admit it, you do things because you want to be recognized. You want the world to notice you. Instead of shouting from the mountaintops about how wonderful you are, you need to let your actions speak for themselves. To show someone kindness and expect no recognition in return is an act of great humility.

Take a moment to read and reflect on: Proverbs 11:17, Proverbs 31:26, and 1 John 3:17

Today's Challenge

Do a random act of kindness for someone outside your home—but be completely anonymous about it.

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Day 4: Encourage

Reflection from yesterday:

1. When you focused on kindness yesterday, did it help you be more kind throughout the day?
2. Is it hard for you to be kind, or is it something which comes fairly easy for you?
3. Think of 5 people you can show kindness to today. Name them. Think about how you can be extra kind to those people. (and if the people you live with are not a part of this list you just made, then you should especially focus on them today.)

Here is a definition of what it means to encourage: Give support, confidence, or hope to someone.

I was never a standout athlete when I was in school, but that didn't stop me from playing. Baseball was without a doubt my favorite. I played 2nd base from the age of 9 all the way to 15. I was decent, but not a star by any stretch of the imagination. One game, I remember having an awful time at the plate. After striking out for the third time, I hung my head and walked back to the dugout. While I was sitting down on the bench waiting to take the field, I saw someone standing by the player entrance out of the corner of my eye. I looked over and saw my grandpa. He waved me over.

When I approached him, he asked me why I was so upset. I explained to him my frustrations, but he didn't want to hear any of it. He could have told me that it just wasn't my day, and I should just give up, but he didn't. He only asked me why I loved baseball. I told him a mountain of reasons, and he just smiled back at me. When I finished giving him my list, he reminded me that it's only a game and no matter what, I'm his all-star. That meant the world to me. He used his words to encourage me when I needed it. The next time up to bat, I wasn't thinking about my previous failures. I was thinking about what my grandpa had said, and sure enough, I got my first hit of the game.

Life isn't always easy, and there are times in your life when you probably could have used some encouragement. Why is encouragement so important to you? I think it's because a positive word always breathes a little life into a difficult situation. Maybe it's a teacher saying, "Great job," or a friend saying, "I believe in you." Regardless, when you hear words of encouragement, they usually have an uplifting effect on your spirit.

In our culture, many voices are telling you that you're not good enough. Think about all of the things you see in advertisements on TV, radio, online, or magazines; all of them telling you there is something about you that needs improvement, and they promise to have just what you need. However, Jesus knew there was going to be negative noise in your life and in the lives of others. Scripture provides direction on how to deal with it. Paul writes this powerful verse: *"Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up"* (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Take a few moments to answer the following questions. Remember, these questions are

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Reflection

1. When have you needed encouragement and didn't receive it? How do you think the outcome may have been different if you had?

2. Why do you think encouraging each other is so important?

3. Do you feel like you have missed out on some opportunities to encourage others? Why do you feel like you overlook them?

4. As a follower of Jesus, how can you use your faith to encourage others around you?

Take a moment to read and focus on: Hebrews 10:24-25, Hebrews 6:10, Galatians 5:13

In a world full of negativity, it is important that we use our love for others to bring in a little light. It may sound silly, but encouraging words can go a long way. There are so many different ways to show encouragement and so many circumstances that call for it. If you reflect on a typical day, you could probably think of few times when encouragement is needed.

The Challenge

Think of someone who could use a positive word. Write that individual a small letter of encouragement and mail it to them or leave it for them to find.

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Day 5:
Love

Reflection from yesterday:

1. How did you encourage someone yesterday?
2. How can encouraging others help you be closer to Jesus?

Here is a definition of love: An intense feeling of deep affection.

My biological father left our family when I was a baby. I wasn't old enough to remember him leaving, so it didn't have a huge effect on me at the time. A couple of years, later my mom got remarried to the best man I know. My stepfather stepped into the role of being my dad when he didn't have to be. As a result of my mom and dad's divorce, I got to see my dad every other weekend. We didn't do much when we were together, but I knew he still loved me.

I never knew why my mom and dad split up; my mom never told me when I was living at home. I suppose she had her reasons, but I wanted to know. One day when I was in college, I made a trip home to ask her. She told me that my dad cheated on her repeatedly. My heart broke, and then I was overcome with an undeniable anger. I immediately got in my car, drove over to my dad's house, and asked him how in the world he could do that to her. That's the first time I ever saw my dad cry, but at the time I didn't care.

I held on to that anger toward him. I didn't speak to my father for a long time. However, one Sunday morning I was sitting in church, and the preacher was talking about forgiveness. He said that if we don't forgive our enemies, all of the anger we have turns into bitterness toward that person and causes our hearts to be hardened. He was right; after spending some time in prayer I knew I needed to forgive my dad—not just for him, but for my own spiritual well-being. So I went to him and offered my forgiveness. It was one of the most liberating things I have ever done. That was the first time I realized what it meant to love my enemy.

I would be lying if I didn't admit that loving your enemies is a very hard thing to do. In fact, it's probably one of the hardest. However, loving your enemies is what Scripture calls us to do.

In Matthew 5:43-48, Jesus says: *"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

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designed to challenge you and will do so only if you are completely honest with yourself.

Reflection

1. Why do you think Jesus tells us to love our enemies?

2. Are there people in your life that you have a difficult time loving? If so, who are they?

3. What would it take for you to love your enemies? How do you feel like this can be accomplished?

Take some time to read and really focus on the words in these verses: Luke 6:27, 1 John 4:19, 2 Timothy 3:16

God knows love because He *is* love. He desires you to love others the same way Christ did. Jesus' love for you was so powerful, He died for your sins, and it wasn't a happy death, but one of the most ridiculing and agonizing deaths imaginable. Like me, you may often overlook the simple truth that Jesus died for everyone: the lost, the found, the sinners and the saints. He died for the very people who put Him on the cross. Jesus loved His enemies, and He calls you to do the same.

Today's Challenge:

Do an act of love towards someone you have a difficult time loving.

I know that his challenge is especially difficult, but it is extremely revealing and rewarding. There are many ways to do an act of love. However, this one is up to you. Only you know how you can love this particular individual.

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Day 6: Service

Reflection from yesterday:

1. Yesterday, did you do some kind of act of love for someone you have a difficult time loving?
2. What was the most difficult part of this challenge for you?
3. What was the most rewarding part of this challenge for you?
3. How do you feel this challenge helped you grow in your relationship with Jesus?

Here is a definition of service: The action of helping or doing work for someone.

In the summer of 2009, I went to Rwanda, Africa for a mission trip. The purpose of the mission trip was to work alongside other people from my church and help the people in the village where we worked to understand who Jesus is and what He has done for them. We spent most of our time in the schools, which was an incredible experience. I love to do missions, but before this trip, my perspective on serving others was skewed. See, I always thought that to make a difference I had to travel somewhere other than where I was.

One night, we took a bus to a remote village outside of the city of Kigali. As we walked along the street, I noticed that the people were all working on a small hut. The roof of the house was damaged, and the people came together in the evening, after a long day at work, to fix it. It wasn't a job they were getting paid for; someone simply had a need, and the village came together to provide it. It was a beautiful picture of what Jesus was speaking about in the book of John. I realized I didn't have to fly across the world to serve others. I could do it in my community, if I intentionally looked for opportunities to do so.

When Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, He gave a profound illustration of expressing love through an act of service.

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God. So he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a

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messenger greater than the one who sent him. "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." (John 13:1-17)

In a culture where people wore sandals and walked on dirt streets, it was customary for a low position servant to wash the feet of guests as they arrived. When Jesus humbled Himself by washing the feet of His disciples, He was demonstrating service. He was setting the example.

Take a few moments to answer the following questions. Remember, these questions are designed to challenge you and will do so only if you are completely honest with yourself.

Reflection

1. Why is serving others so important in our walk with Jesus?

2. Have there been times in your life where you should have served someone but chose not to? If so, why?

3. How do you feel when someone helps you when you are in need?

When you do acts of service, you should require nothing in return. You should willingly and happily give your time and energy to lend a hand to someone in need. Acts of service come from a heart of love and humility.

Take a moment to read and spend time focusing on: 1 Peter 4:10, Acts 20:35, Galatians 5:13-14

Today's Challenge: Complete an act of service for a friend or family member.

Again, you will have a lot of different opportunities to serve, so it's up to you how you are going to do that.

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Day 7: Humility

Reflection from yesterday:

1. Did you take time to complete an act of service for a friend or family member yesterday?
2. Think about how serving other people helps you focus on someone other than yourself.
3. Try to think of 5 different people you can serve today.

Here is a definition of humility: A modest or low view of one's own importance; humbleness, not being arrogant or prideful or haughty.

It is one of the most incredible things that has ever happened: the Son of God became a human and lived on this earth. This act of humility shows us as much about God's character as anything else possibly could. Not only did Jesus come to earth, but He died for your sins and gave you a way to know God and have life with Him.

Think about this: If I see a homeless woman sitting in front of the post office and offer to buy her a meal at the fast food restaurant across the street, do I order something for myself too and sit with her? Do I listen to her stories, or just offer her my "wisdom"? See, if I am just helping her because she is homeless, that's still great, but it's not humility. Humility is actually realizing this person is valuable and taking time to get to know her. Humility is realizing the value of others, and lowering the value of ourselves.

Think of your last mission trip or mission project. Why did you go? Why did you participate? Was the "mission trip" more of a "mission" or more of a "trip"? Did you see yourself as somehow above those you were serving – as the helper, the one with something to give? Or did you see yourself in the others, on equal ground, listening and receiving as much as sharing and giving? Did you give because that's what mission projects do, or did you give from a deep compassion that overflowed from within you? Either way, let's keep doing the mission projects, but maybe we can't use them to define humility.

So where do we get a true picture of humility? In Jesus. Seems we always have to go back to Jesus. Look at him as the woman washes his feet with her hair. Unbelievable, even for his culture. The disciples were appalled. How could he allow such a woman to touch him like that? Completely socially inappropriate, and an embarrassment to the disciples. Jesus felt no embarrassment and received the heartfelt action in the spirit in which it was given, unconcerned with what others were thinking.

According to a study done by Scientific America, your favorite thing to talk about is you. They give a lot of reasons, but the main one is pride. Pride is defined as "a feeling of deep pleasure or satisfaction derived from one's achievements."

You talk about yourself because a part of you wants other people to know you exist and that your life is important. Your life is important, but only because God uses that life to bring Him glory.

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Let's be clear: it is OK to talk about yourself when it's done in a meaningful context. But it's not OK when the sole motivation is to put an achievement of yours on display. And it's not okay to just show the best of yourself on social media just so others will think you're awesome.

You need to know something: you are a special person. No doubt. Your parents have shown you that because of their love for you. God made you and He loves you, and you have value just because you are His. But He made others too. You are not more important than them. So don't think of yourself as more important than other people. Instead, think about how we naturally have pride, but God calls us to get past ourselves and really love and serve others. In other words: be humble.

Take a few moments to answer the following questions. Remember, these questions are designed to challenge you and will do so only if you are completely honest with yourself.

Reflection

1. For you personally, why do you feel like you talk about yourself a lot?

2. Why is humility such an important character trait?

When you learn to be humble, you will begin to understand that your life belongs to Jesus and He has total control over it. You start to become slow to speak and quick to listen. Instead of saying, "Guess what I did?" you ask, "How are you?" You begin to put other people's needs above of your own. You become teachable instead of prideful. When you choose humility, you are not the center of the universe. When you are humble, you are honoring God to the highest degree.

Read and focus on: Philippians 2:3-11, Luke 14:11, John 3:30

Today's Challenge: Fill in the blanks of the following statements...

- 1. I am more important than _____
- 2. I am better than _____
- 3. I am so thankful I am not like _____

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Day 8: Evangelism

Reflection from yesterday:

1. Did you actually fill in any of the three blanks at the end of yesterday's devo? The point is to try to help each of us see that we are not actually better than anyone else.
2. Whether you filled in the blanks or not, do you actually feel like you are better than others? Most of us do, it's a constant struggle for most people. But thinking highly of yourself and thinking you are better than others really doesn't lead anywhere good. Instead it leads to pride and arrogance. Those are two qualities that will not lead anywhere. Having pride in your school or taking pride in a job well done is okay...but being prideful is not.
3. Maybe the first act of humility for you is to ask God to help you to consider others and their value before God.

Definition of evangelism: The spreading of the Christian gospel by public preaching or personal witness.

General William Booth, who founded one of the most well known benevolence and disaster relief services in our nation (the Salvation Army) once said that if he had his way, he wished part of the final training for Christians going into the work of evangelism would be for them to dangle over Hell for twenty-four hours. It wasn't so they would fear it for themselves, because they were already saved and they had the hope of Heaven. Rather, it was so they could see the reality of what awaits those who do not know Jesus Christ.

In Romans 9, Paul identified something that is essential for effective evangelism. He wrote, *"With Christ as my witness, I speak with utter truthfulness. My conscience and the Holy Spirit confirm it. My heart is filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters. I would be willing to be forever cursed—cut off from Christ!—if that would save them."* (verses 1–3) He's basically saying how hurt his heart is and he is filled with grief because of people who would not recognize Jesus as Lord. It is a remarkable act of love for others and a desire for them to know Christ as their Lord.

In fact, if we are lacking this quality of caring about others and their relationship with God, then everything else really is of no consequence. Paul had a God-given burden for those who did not know Jesus Christ. He cared. It burned inside of him. And in his case, it was for his own people, the Jews.

Do you have a God-given burden for those who don't know Jesus Christ? And if you don't, do you want one? Be careful. If you ask God to give you this burden, you may be surprised at how quickly He answers you. The results could be life changing.

You need to know something about sharing Jesus with others: God is not looking for ability; He is looking for availability. In time He will help you in your ability. He will help you know what to

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say and what to do. He will help you in all those things. But what you need to start with is a God-given burden for the lost.

Remember: *you* don't save anybody—God does—but how you respond to God's calling can have an eternal impact. The moment a person receives Jesus as Lord, Heaven rejoices because one of God's creations has just been adopted into the family of God. Another soul has been saved from the grasps of the Enemy.

Jesus wants His followers to pursue him through all avenues. When you confessed Him as your Savior, you also took on an awesome responsibility of sharing Him with other people. In Matthew 28:18-20, He tells His disciples: *"All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and 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."* This Scripture is known as the Great Commission, but it can also be scary because it seems so hard to do.

You need to know that you do not do this alone. God's Holy Spirit is with you when you are living for Him and when you are telling others about Him. Look at the end of the verse in italics in the previous paragraph...it ends with a promise that God is always with us. In other words: when you are helping to make disciples, God promises to be with you. See you don't have to do it alone. The supernatural power of God is with you.

Take a few moments to answer the following questions. Remember, these questions are designed to challenge you and will do so only if you are completely honest with yourself.

Reflection

1. Is it difficult for you to share your faith with others? If so, why?

2. What makes it so difficult for you to share your faith? What makes you afraid of sharing?

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3. To know that the Great Commission is a commandment, does this change your idea of your role as a Christian? How so?

Take some time to read and focus on: Mark 16:15-16, Romans 10:10-17, 1 Peter 3:15

By the way, if you have never given your life to Christ, if you have never been baptized, what is holding you back? Think about it and pray about it. We're glad to talk with you and tell you more...or just celebrate with you when you are ready to be baptized.

Then think about who you know that does not know Jesus. Today's challenge will be about that.

Today's Challenge:

Think about 5 people you know who do not know Jesus. Pray for each of those people, and pray God can use you to help them. Remember: let those who know you but don't know God, come to know God because they know you.

Tip: I have found it easier to begin a conversation when I am already in one. In other words, it's hard to just start talking about Jesus unless you're already in a conversation with someone. I try to think of a way I can relate the context of the conversation to something Jesus has done in my life. Once I have the connection, I share it and then ask them if they know Jesus. If not, I share.

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Day 9: Gratitude

Reflection from yesterday:

1. After you prayed for the 5 people you thought of yesterday, did you think of them again at any point during the day?
2. Ask God to continue to put those 5 people on your heart. Continue praying for them today.

Here is a definition of gratitude: The quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation.

Before we begin today, take a moment to read: Luke 17:11-17

Gratitude was not a quality I possessed growing up. All the things my parents did for me, how they provided for me ... I took all of it for granted; I came to expect it. It didn't take long after I moved away from home for God to show me just how blessed I was growing up and how blind I was to it. My laundry was no longer done and neatly folded, there wasn't a meal on the table for me to eat, and there certainly wasn't money being handed over at my request. It cost money to rent the place where I lived. Furniture wasn't just there for me. Bills had to be paid. Having loved ones around in the same house as me wasn't a part of my life anymore. There were so many things I had missed about the things my parents (and the Lord) had provided for me.

It was a season of growth for me. I had to learn how to do things on my own. I had to provide for myself in a lot of different avenues, and it was hard. However, this season of life also provoked in me a grateful spirit. It caused me to look back and reflect on all the blessings the Lord provided for me through my parents. There were many, but I couldn't remember ever thanking my parents for all they did for me; the sacrifices they made and the time they gave up. Everything they did was out of love for my siblings and me.

So one day, I picked up the phone and called my mom and dad. I conveyed to them how thankful I was for all they have done. I could tell by their response that it meant the world to them.

Leprosy is a skin disease that causes the flesh to decay, abnormal growths, nerve damage, and eventually amputation. One day when Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, He heard the cries of 10 men who were afflicted with this disease. They cried out to him, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us." If you had leprosy in those days, it was evident by your appearance. Unfortunately, if you found yourself with this sickness, you were considered unclean, banished from the city, and deemed unworthy of a relationship with God. You didn't have a home anymore, and everyone you loved would be left behind. The loneliness these 10 men felt had to be incredibly difficult.

When Jesus heard their cries, he didn't demonstrate disgust or show them hate. Instead, He said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as the men with leprosy made their way back

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into town, they were cleansed. Imagine the feeling of elation these men must have had. For so long, they were disgusting in the eyes of others, and their existence brought shame to their families. But now they were clean! They could return home with their lives restored.

You would think that all of these men would be grateful, but that wasn't the case. Only one of the men returned to Jesus after he had realized he'd been healed. He fell at the feet of Jesus, praising God, and giving Him thanks. He was the only one to return, and Jesus asked the man, "Were not all 10 cleansed? Where are the other nine?"

Take a few moments to answer the following questions. Remember, these questions are designed to challenge you and will do so only if you are completely honest with yourself.

Reflection

1. How would you feel if you had an illness that caused you to be isolated and cut off from family and friends?

2. How do you think the men felt as they made their way back into town and became healed? Why?

3. Why do you think only one of the men returned to show Jesus gratitude?

4. Who do you relate to more, the nine who walked away or the one who returned? Why?

Some people have trouble being grateful for things because they feel like they deserve them. There is a word for that: entitled. Entitled simply means you should get something, whether you did anything to earn it or not. The nine who didn't thank Jesus could have felt entitled to the forgiveness, or they could have simply thought gratitude did not matter. But there is

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something you need to know: Ingratitude feels the same as un-gratitude. In other words: if someone doesn't say thank you, it feels like they are not thankful. These nine guys didn't show gratitude and it seems like they were not thankful. But one guy did.

Being ungrateful is normal behavior for most people. They feel they deserve whatever they want. They are not grateful when they get it. Instead they are salty when they do not get what they want.

Think about the blessings the Lord has given to you. Try to think of 10 things from God right now in your head. And thank Him for those things. In addition, think about how you can show gratitude to other people like friends, parents, etc.

Last thing: Most students do not gratitude to their parents for all that they have done for them. They sacrifice so much and don't ask for anything in return. Yet, many students do not take time to truly be grateful. Take some time to be grateful to your parents – even if you disagree with your parents often or if your relationship is strained – take some time to be grateful and show it.

Today's Challenge:

Write a letter to your parents expressing your gratitude for all that they have done for you. Sit down with your parents or parent; share your list with them. Express your gratitude in a sincere way.

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Day 10: Forgiveness

Reflection from yesterday:

1. Did you write the letter to your parents? How did it feel to thank them?
2. Who are some other people in your life you need to thank? (God, teachers, friends, family members, etc.)

Here is a definition of forgiveness: The action or process of forgiving someone for something unfair or hurtful done to you

Take a moment and read: Matthew 27

Before I found Jesus, my life was a wreck. I hurt a lot of people whom I loved. What's even more shameful is that I knew I was doing it but didn't care. However, by the grace of God, I met Jesus for the first time in my living room. It was a normal night for me, but something pulled me to open up the Bible that was sitting on the table collecting dust.

I picked it up and randomly flipped to the book of Ephesians. I wasn't interested in Jesus at the time, but I kept on reading. Finally, I landed on Chapter 2, verse 8 and it read, *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God."* At that moment, this incredible feeling of joy came over me, and I began to weep. Right there on the floor, I realized that I was a sinner in desperate need of a Savior.

Immediately, the Lord healed a lot of my brokenness, and even though I was healed, I still had a lot of fences to mend. Part of my personal journey of following Christ was asking for forgiveness, not just from God, but from those I hurt the most.

At our next family gathering, after we had all had our fill of turkey, I found myself at the table with my mom, dad, aunt, uncle, and grandparents. All the people I needed to apologize to were right there. So I went for it. I shared my heart, confessed the pain I had caused them over the years, and asked for forgiveness. It was a life-changing moment. I didn't deserve it, but they gave it to me. Just like I didn't do anything to deserve God's forgiveness, He gave it to me out of love. It was His gift to me. That day my family followed the example Jesus set.

Just like I didn't deserve forgiveness, there is a profound example of a man in the Bible who you would likely say is unforgivable. He was expected to carry out the orders of his superiors without sympathy or compassion for the condemned. He was a vulgar and crude individual, for this was the requirement of a man who served in the Roman guard. He was the one overseeing the flogging, torture, and execution of Jesus.

I suppose, because he had probably executed many criminals in the past, he became bored with just the routine of things. So, he decided that just death wasn't enough for Jesus. No, Jesus also needed to be mocked; Jesus needed to have a crown of thorns forced upon his head.

If someone didn't deserve God's grace, it would be this man, wouldn't it? Your perspective would say he is undeserving, but Jesus doesn't see things the way we do. He has a heart filled with unconditional love, even for those who do not deserve it.

After the flogging, torture, and mocking, the Centurion then led Jesus through the crowds of people on the streets. Regardless of the pain and agony that Jesus experienced, the Centurion still felt that Jesus needed to be punished more. He allowed the crowd to spit on Jesus, throw stones at Him, and ridicule Him by any means they felt necessary. He didn't put a stop to it because he enjoyed the power he had over Jesus. He relished in the belief that he was the one in control of Jesus' fate. He was proud to make a statement on behalf of his superiors. However, Jesus was about to make a statement of His own. Jesus was about to save the very Centurion who was the cause of his misery.

Once on the hill where Jesus was to die, before the Centurion laid Jesus out on a cross, the Centurion and his companions ripped off His garments. Then they cast lots to see who got to collect the pieces Jesus' clothing. The mocking still continued. Once the nails had been driven through His hands and feet, they hoisted up the cross and began to watch Jesus die.

Jesus never retaliated toward them. In fact, Jesus prayed for them in spite of His circumstance. He lifted His head toward the sky and prayed one of the most remarkable things: *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."* Yes, Jesus was praying for the very people who flogged, mocked, tortured and executed him. Jesus had the capability to send Heaven's Army of Angels, but he hung on the cross because He had been sent for a purpose. He took on my sin, your sin, and the sin of the Centurion. In the heart of Jesus, His desire was that ALL should know His love one day.

Toward the end of Jesus' life, the sky above Him turned dark, and after a few more hours of agony, Jesus uttered the words, *"It is finished,"* and took His last breath. The Centurion grabbed a spear and shoved it into the side of Jesus, to ensure that He was dead.

Then, suddenly, an earthquake rattled the city, and the veil of the temple tore in two. After this is when, the Centurion, the man you would consider a lost cause, actually met Jesus for the first time. The Centurion fell on his face at the foot of the cross and began to worship Jesus. He declared with his mouth, *"Surely he was the Son of God."*

Despite who this man was, Jesus saw him for who he could come to be. He saw this man as His child and wanted to show him the love, grace, and mercy that only a great Father could.

Take a few moments to answer the following questions on the next page. Remember, these questions are designed to challenge you and will do so only if you are completely honest with yourself.

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Reflection:

1. Why do you think Jesus chose to forgive those who were crucifying Him? Do you think it was a difficult thing to do? If so, why?

2. Is there someone in your life who has sinned against you in a way that has profoundly affected you?

3. Have you chosen to forgive that person? Why, or why not?

4. What benefits do you see for not forgiving them?

God is great, and regardless of where you have been, what you have done, or who you are, Jesus still has room for you in His kingdom. He even has a place for the one who sinned against you. Offering forgiveness to someone will not only set you free from the pain they have caused, but you will demonstrate the love, grace, and mercy they so desperately need. Let your light shine before others by setting the example of forgiveness that Jesus set for you.

The Challenge

1. Think about this one. Who is someone who has sinned against you whom you have not yet forgiven. Think about how they hurt you, how it has affected you, and what it would look like to forgive that person.
2. Then pray that God would give you the ability to forgive that person. If you ask, He will. Then choose to forgive them. Let it go.

If you chose to forgive that person, reach out to them. Talk to them about how they hurt you, then communicate that you have forgiven them. Hopefully, this will open the door for reconciliation.

A word of caution. If you have the conversation with the person and they don't respond well, still choose to forgive them. Sometimes we have to forgive people who are not sorry for the things they have done. If we choose not to forgive, it can cause anger and bitterness. This is why we are called to forgive others just as Christ has forgiven us (see Ephesians 4:32).

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Hey — you made it to the end. Congratulations! And thank you for making time with the Lord a priority in your life over the past 10 days or however long it took. We hope you are truly better for it.

Think about the 10 character traits you have looked at as a part of this devo book...and notice the purpose of each one:

- Devotion — purpose: grow in your relationship with Jesus
- Prayer — purpose: talk with God
- Kindness — purpose: treat others with the same kindness God has shown you
- Encourage — purpose: help others by encouraging them
- Love — purpose: love others with the love God has shown you
- Service — purpose: help others by serving them
- Humility — purpose: see others the way God sees them
- Evangelism — purpose: love others enough to show them true life
- Gratitude — purpose: being thankful for the good things in your life
- Forgiveness — forgiveness: showing forgiveness to others because God has forgiven you

These 10 things, if you will grow in these areas by God's grace, will make an incredible difference in your life.

Okay, so we want to celebrate with everyone who completes this devo book. We'll have a snack day or an ice cream day or something just for those who finished. So...when you finish this book (whether it is within 10 days of starting or if it is anytime in the future) will you text Mitchell or Ingrid and let them know?

Ingrid — 979-571-2655

Mitchell — 979-574-5553



And now, we want you to continue to grow on your own in your relationship with the Lord. So look for a devo book you can go through or find a devo plan on the YouVersion Bible App. It will help you be better for all of the things God will have for you in the future.

We love you. We're proud of you. We're thankful you are a part of our church and our youth ministry. And we also want you to know we are always praying for you. Be cool. Be holy. God bless!

- Monty, Heather, Ingrid, and Mitchell

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