

To Our Abundant Faith Family:

As we transition to a new “**Lifestyle**” level”, Gods word tells us in **John 14:25-26:** (25) “These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. (26) But the **Hepler**, the **Holy Spirit**, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”

Praise the Lord, God has not abandoned us. He is with us on a continual basis. His spirit is, and can be active in every aspect of our live. It is our choice to activate the power within.

As we read and study these daily devotionals, the **Holy Spirit** will speak to us about us! We must make the conscious choice to hear, obey and walk in his teachings.

Gita and I urge you to continue to allow the **Holy Spirit, “your invisible Helper:’ to lead, guide and instruct** you during the next (21) days as we dwell in His presence.

We assure you, it will be a blessing to you and those you encounter on a daily basis.

Blessings to You,

Pastor’s Jerry and Gita Doss

Be in Constant Communion with God

Day 1 - August 5

“Never stop praying.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17 NLT)

You will never grow a close relationship with God by just attending church once a week or even having a daily quiet time. Friendship with God is built by sharing *all* your life experiences with him.

Of course it is important to establish the habit of a daily devotional time with God, but God wants more than an appointment in your schedule. He wants to be included in *every* activity, every conversation, every problem, and even every thought.

You can carry on a continuous, open-ended conversation with him throughout your day, talking with him about whatever you are doing or thinking *at that moment*. “Praying without ceasing” means conversing with God while shopping, driving, working, or performing any other everyday tasks (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

A common misconception is that “spending time with God” means being *alone* with him. Of course, as Jesus modeled, you need time alone with God, but that is only a fraction of your waking hours. *Everything* you do can be “spending time with God” if he is invited to be a part of it and you stay aware of his presence.

The classic book on learning how to develop a constant conversation with God is “Practicing the Presence of God.” It was written in the 17th century by Brother Lawrence, a humble cook in a French monastery. Brother Lawrence was able to turn even the most commonplace and menial tasks, like preparing meals and washing dishes, into acts of praise and communion with God.

The key to friendship with God, he said, is not changing what you do, but changing *your attitude* toward what you do. What you normally do for yourself, you begin doing for God, whether it is eating, bathing, working, relaxing, or taking out the trash.

Today we often feel we must “get away” from our daily routine in order to worship God, but that is only because we haven’t learned to practice his presence all the time. Brother Lawrence found it easy to worship God through the common tasks of life; he didn’t have to go away for special spiritual retreats.

This is God’s ideal. In Eden, worship was not an event to attend, but a perpetual attitude; Adam and Eve were in constant communion with God. Since God is with you all the time, no place is any closer to God than the place where you are right now. The Bible says, “He rules everything and is everywhere and is in everything” (Ephesians 4:6b NCV).

Talk About It --

- Have you wished that you could “get away” and have time alone with God? How can you change your attitude and posture toward God today so that this day has the same effect as a spiritual retreat?
- Do you feel God’s presence more at one time than another? Why?

You Are Part of God's Inner Circle

Day 2 - August 6

“I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.” (John 15:15 NIV)
The word for “friend” in this verse does not mean a casual acquaintance but a close, trusted relationship. The same word is used to refer to the best man at a wedding (John 3:29) and a king's inner circle of intimate, trusted friends. In royal courts, servants must keep their distance from the king, but the inner circle of trusted friends enjoy close contact, direct access, and confidential information.

That God would want me for a close friend is hard to understand. But the Bible says, “He is a God who is passionate about his relationship with you” (Exodus 34:14 NLT).

God deeply desires that we know him intimately. In fact, he planned the universe and orchestrated history, including the details of our lives, so that we could become his friends. The Bible says, “He made the entire human race and made the earth hospitable, with plenty of time and space for living so we could seek after God, and not just grope around in the dark but actually find him” (Acts 17:26–27 MSG).

Knowing and loving God is our greatest privilege, and being known and loved is God's greatest pleasure. God says, “If any want to boast, they should boast that they know and understand me These are the things that please me” (Jeremiah 9:24 TEV).

It's difficult to imagine how an intimate friendship is possible between an omnipotent, invisible, perfect God and a finite, sinful human being. It's easier to understand a Master-servant relationship or a Creator-creation relationship or even Father-child. But what does it mean when God wants me as a friend?

Talk About It

- What do you think about the truth that the Creator of the universe desires an intimate relationship with you?
- In what ways can you pursue a deeper relationship with God?

You Can Have Friendship with God

Day 3 - August 7

“Since we were restored to friendship with God by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be delivered from eternal punishment by his life.” (Romans 5:10 NLT)

Your relationship to God has many different aspects: God is your Creator and Maker, Lord and Master, Judge, Redeemer, Father, Savior, and much more (Psalm 89:26, 95:6, 136:3; Isaiah 33:22, 47:4; John 13:13; 1 John 3:1; Jude 1:4).

But the most shocking truth is this: Almighty God yearns to be your Friend!

In Eden we see God’s ideal relationship with us: Adam and Eve enjoyed an intimate friendship with God. There were no rituals, ceremonies, or religion — just a simple loving relationship between God and the people he created. Unhindered by guilt or fear, Adam and Eve delighted in God, and he delighted in them.

We were made to live in God’s continual presence, but after the Fall, that ideal relationship was lost. Only a few people in Old Testament times had the privilege of friendship with God. Moses and Abraham were called “friends of God,” David was called “a man after my own heart,” and Job, Enoch, and Noah had intimate friendships with God (Genesis 5:22 (NLT), 6:8; Exodus 33:11, 17; 2 Chronicles 20:7; Job 29:4; Isaiah 41:8; Acts 13:22; James 2:23).

But fear of God, not friendship, was more common in the Old Testament. Then Jesus changed the situation. When he paid for our sins on the cross, the veil in the temple that symbolized our separation from God was split from top to bottom, indicating that direct access to God was once again available.

Unlike the Old Testament priests who had to spend hours preparing to meet God, we can now approach God anytime. The Bible says, “Now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God — all because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us in making us friends of God” (Romans 5:11 NLT).

Friendship with God is possible only because of the grace of God and the sacrifice of Jesus. “All this is done by God, who through Christ changed us from enemies into his friends” (2 Corinthians 5:18a TEV).

The old hymn says, “What a friend we have in Jesus,” but actually, God invites us to enjoy friendship and fellowship with all three persons of the Trinity: our Father, (1 John 1:3), the Son (1 Corinthians 1:9), and the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:14).

Talk About It

- How would your relationship with God change if you trusted and confided in him as you do your best friend?
- Talk about how Jesus’ death and Resurrection changed your position with God?
- What would enjoying fellowship with all three persons of the Trinity look like?

God Is with You in Your Struggle

Day 4 - August 8

“Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And at that moment he disappeared!” (Luke 24:31 NLT)

Ever feel like God is a million miles away? The truth is, he's not. Whatever struggle you're going through, you can rest assured you're not alone. You have God in your corner.

But you're not the only one who has ever wondered where God was during a struggle. On the very first Easter morning, right after Jesus' Crucifixion, the disciples wondered the same thing. In Luke 24, we learn about one particular pair of these disciples who were walking down the road to Emmaus, talking about all that had transpired over the past few days — Jesus' arrest, beating, Crucifixion — and trying to make sense of it all. They thought Jesus was the Messiah; their dream was crushed. They had heard reports that Jesus' grave was empty. They were very confused.

Suddenly Jesus himself came alongside the disciples and joined them in their journey. Yet they were in so much grief, they didn't notice him. Jesus asked about what they were discussing, and so the disciples let him in on the discussion. Jesus went on to share Old Testament passages that explained the events of the past few days.

That night, as they ate dinner with Jesus, the Bible says that “Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And at that moment he disappeared!” (Luke 24:31 NLT)

Imagine what that experience was like for these disciples. The guy they thought was God was crucified and dead. Then they hear he's been resurrected, but they don't believe it. Then a stranger walks along the road with them, eats with them, and suddenly they realize that it's God himself! And then he disappears.

The disciples couldn't see Jesus in their grief. They needed God to show himself to them.

You do, too. I don't know what you've lost this year — whether it's a loved one, your health, your job, a relationship, or a really big deal. But, if you've had a loss like that, you may have missed the fact that God has walked through the entire experience with you.

You were never, ever alone during that time. You couldn't see him, but he was there.

Ask God to show himself to you. He wants you to see him. He wants you to know you were never alone.

Talk About It

- How does God show his presence to you?
- How do you think grief blinds us to the ways that God is providing for us?

God Opens Your Eyes to Barriers

Day 5 - August 9

“Then the LORD opened Balaam’s eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown.” (Numbers 22:31 NIV)

You have some things you’ve wanted to do your whole life. You have goals and dreams you’ve been waiting to get started on. You want to start a business, start a family, or pursue a particular career. You’re trying the best you can, but you can’t seem to get started. You don’t know why.

You need the Holy Spirit to open your eyes — or illuminate — the barrier in your way.

You need God to do with you what he did with Balaam in Numbers 22. You may remember the story. Balaam was a prophet of God who agreed to help the bad guys. As Balaam started his journey to help the wrong people, God put an angel in his way to block his path. But Balaam couldn’t see the angel; his barrier was invisible. Yet Balaam’s donkey did see the angel and wouldn’t go anywhere near it. So Balaam angrily beat the donkey. In fact, Balaam beat the donkey three times. Balaam was so hard-headed that his donkey spoke up to try and talk some sense into him!

Finally, the Bible says, “Then the LORD opened Balaam’s eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown” (Numbers 22:31 NIV).

Something was blocking Balaam’s progress, but he couldn’t see what it was. Then God opened his eyes. The biblical word for that is “illumination.”

God wants to open up your eyes, too. You have plans in your life that aren’t working out. You’re blocked at every turn. And you’re getting mad at everyone else in the process — your husband, your wife, your kids — everyone. You’re mad at everyone else because you can’t see what the real problem is.

When your progress is being blocked, you have two choices. You can either beat the donkey or let God open your eyes. Either get mad at everyone around you, or turn to God for help.

Your problem is, you can’t see the problem! But God does. Ask him to open your eyes as he opened up Balaam’s.

Talk About It

- What problem have you been facing that needs God’s clarification?
- Are you prepared to accept whatever clarification and solution God gives you once you ask for illumination?

Let God Open Your Eyes to a Solution to Your Problems

Day 6 - August 10

“Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.” (Genesis 21:19 NIV)

I don't know what problem you're staring at right now, but I'm sure you have at least one for which you don't have an answer — a problem for which you just keep running into dead ends.

You need the Holy Spirit to enlighten your mind so you can find the answer for your problem in God's Word. The Bible calls that *illumination*.

In Genesis 21 the Bible tells us a story about a woman and her child who were in desperate need of illumination. The story starts with Abraham and Sarah, who had been promised a son in their old age. At 90, Abraham still didn't have a son. Sarah decided to take the situation into her own hands. She suggested that her husband have a baby with one of her servants. But that was Sarah's plan — not God's.

When Sarah eventually had a son of her own, she resented her servant, Hagar, and Hagar's son, Ishmael. Eventually, she kicked Hagar and Ishmael out. Hagar feared her son would die of starvation, so she began to cry. She had a problem, and only God could help her.

After God encouraged her, the Bible says, “Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink” (Genesis 22:19 NIV).

That's what we all need. We need God to open our eyes so we can see the answer to our problems in his Word. Truth is, we're incapable of finding the answers to the problems that plague us on our own. Like Hagar, we desperately need the Lord.

Hagar had the solution right in front of her — a well of water — but she couldn't see it until God opened her eyes and helped her see from a different perspective.

You need the Holy Spirit to enlighten your mind, too. When God opens your eyes, you see the resources that are literally right in front of you.

Talk About It

- What problem does God want to show you the answer to today?
- Have you asked him to open your eyes to the solution he has for you?

Your Best Bible Teacher

Day 7 - August 11

“But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” (John 14:26 NIV)

Recently, I had to go to the hardware store to buy a new lamp for my study. I spend a lot of hours reading and studying. I had a very strong halogen lamp that is extremely bright and makes everything really clear. I loved it. But recently the lamp died. The only lamp I could find was a new-fangled one that only uses new wimpy light bulbs, which only have about a third of the brightness.

My purchase reminded me of an important truth: The brighter the bulb, the clearer you see. Brightness increases clarity. If you want to get a portrait made of yourself, you don't want a bright light on you. It'll show every blemish, wart, and pimple. You want less light. Everyone looks good in the dark!

The same general principle is true of God's Word. The more your mind is illuminated, the more you'll see in God's Word.

That's the Holy Spirit's job: to show us the meaning of God's Word and how it applies to our lives. Jesus said in John 14:26: “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26 NIV).

One of the Holy Spirit's jobs is to help you see in the Bible what you wouldn't see otherwise. If you don't have the Holy Spirit, you're going to miss a lot in the Bible. The Holy Spirit is the best Bible teacher you'll ever have.

God has not only given you revelation — the Bible — but he has also given you *illumination*, the ability to understand what he has given you.

The Bible is the only book you'll ever own where you can talk with the author while you read it! As you read the Bible, you can ask the Holy Spirit, “What does this mean? How can it make a difference in my life?” Do that, and God will speak to you. He'll whisper in your ear, put thoughts in your head, and leave you with impressions.

Talk About It

- When you don't understand the Bible, ask the Holy Spirit for understanding?
- Is it difficult for you to accept that the Holy Spirit is at work in your life? Why do you think this is so?
- When was the last time you felt led by the Holy Spirit? How did you respond?

The Invisible Army on Your Side

Day 8 - August 12

“Then Elisha prayed, ‘O LORD, open his eyes and let him see!’ The LORD opened the young man’s eyes, and when he looked up, he saw that the hillside around Elisha was filled with horses and chariots of fire.” (2 Kings 6:17 NLT)

We all feel under attack from time to time. In fact, you may feel under attack right now. Maybe it’s the economy. Maybe you’ve lost your job, your income, or your retirement. Or maybe you’re feeling under attack from your friends or family — or even your own mind.

You think you’re all alone in this attack, and you can’t even fathom how God is going to help.

Yet you’re not alone, and God can help. You simply need him to show you all that is at your disposal for your protection.

That’s what happened in 2 Kings 6. The nation of Aram was always at war with Israel. Yet every time they would attack Israel, God would tell Elisha, a prophet of God in Israel, what the king of Aram’s war plans were. So Israel would win over and over again. When Aram’s king learned that Elisha was the one who was giving away his plans, he sent an army to get him. Elisha’s servant woke up and went outside one morning to see that he and Elisha were surrounded by enemy troops.

Scared, he ran back in and asked Elisha, “What are we going to do?” Then Elisha said something that must have seemed very odd to his servant: “Don’t worry. The people on our side far outnumber those against us.” I’m sure that statement must have really surprised Elisha’s servant. As far as he knew, only two people (Elisha and himself) were on their side!

So Elisha prayed, “O Lord, open his eyes and let him see!” (2 Kings 2:17 NLT). And so God did. Suddenly, Elisha’s servant saw an army of angels on the hills outside ready to protect them from the army of Aram.

The servant wasn’t scared anymore, and God gave Elisha just the right tactics to defeat the enemy Aram (without ever firing a shot at them, by the way).

Just like Elisha and his servant, you have things attacking you right now. You’re tempted to panic. The truth is, you have a whole lot more that’s for you than against you. But when you’re in the midst of being attacked, you just can’t see it.

God needs to open your eyes to all that is on your side. Like Elisha, you just need to ask him for help.

Even though you can’t see them, God has released his forces to protect you. Will you ask him to open your eyes to them?

Talk About It

- What is it that you feel attacked by today? Have you asked God to give you the courage to face it?
- Have you ever been amazed at how something that seemed impossible “just worked out” or how you managed to overcome the obstacles? Did you acknowledge God’s unseen forces working on your behalf?
- How do you think God wants you to react in difficult situations?

Want to Get Along? Humble Yourself.

Day 9 - August 13

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” (James 4:10 NIV)

If you want to stop the conflicts in your life, if you want to get along with other people, then you have to learn to ask forgiveness from God and from those you hurt. James 4:8 says, “Wash your hands ... and purify your hearts” (NIV). Our hands represent our conduct, and our hearts represent our attitude.

Paul is basically saying: Clean up your act. Be sorry for your self-centeredness. It is a big deal when your spouse’s feelings are hurt. Take it seriously. If someone says you hurt him, then you did! It may not be a big deal to you, but it was to him. You must be willing to ask forgiveness.

Think of the person who causes the most conflict in your life. Would you like to begin to resolve the conflict with that person? Are you willing to apologize for your part? Maybe he or she is 95 percent at fault, but your responsibility is to take care of your 5 percent and let God handle the rest.

How humbling would it be for you to say, “I know we’ve had our differences, and I know I haven’t always been thoughtful. A lot of times I’ve thought more about myself than your needs.” It wouldn’t just be humbling; it would be impossible without God’s grace. The only way you’re going to change is to be humble, and the only way to be humble is to ask forgiveness.

The first step is the hardest, but it’s also the most important. It’s humbling, sure, but *God gives grace to the humble*. Maybe this week you need to write a letter or make a call. Take the first step.

God doesn’t want to keep you down on the ground. James 4:10 says, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” The way to honor is humility. I used to think the way to be honored by my wife and my kids was to never admit that I was wrong. I figured if my kids thought I was wrong, they wouldn’t respect me any more. It wasn’t a surprise when I found out they already knew I wasn’t perfect. I found that the way I gained honor before my kids and my wife was to admit I was wrong. If you want to be honored by your husband or wife and the Lord, you must humble yourself.

To stop the fighting, you have to give in to God, get wise to Satan, grow closer to God, and be willing to ask forgiveness.

Talk About It

- Think of the last time you were the recipient of someone’s humble apology. What impact did it have on your relationship with that person and with the Lord?
- Is there someone you need to forgive today? Is there someone you need to go to and ask forgiveness?
- Do you believe that God can restore a relationship that you have given up on? What do you think he wants you to do to help make that happen?

Draw Near to God to Avoid Arguments

Day 10 - August 14

“You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!” (Isaiah 26:3 NLT)
I have made an amazing discovery: The more time I spend alone with God, the better I get along with other people. I can count on it!

When the argument level rises in your marriage, it means somebody is not spending time with the Lord. It's that simple. You must grow closer to God if you want to avoid arguments.

Isaiah 26:3 says, “You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!”
When you spend time with the Lord, you turn your thoughts to him. Then, you get along better with others, because he keeps perfect peace in your heart, and you're not as irritable.

Have you noticed some people only draw close to God when they're in trouble? They only pray when they have a need. You need to spend time with God. Bible study, Sunday morning, daily quiet time — make time for these things. Think you're too busy? Then maybe you are. Maybe you need to cut some things out of your schedule to make more time to spend with the Lord. Get up 15 minutes earlier each morning. Read and pray, and then notice the difference in your attitude and relationships the rest of the day.

The more you spend time with God, the more you will enjoy the rest of your time. It will be more productive and more beneficial. You'll get along better with others and have fewer arguments because you're drawing closer to God.

The conflict in your life is in direct proportion to the time you're spending with God.

There is a great promise in James 4:8: “Come near to God and he will come near to you” (NIV). He doesn't back off. He draws close to you. When you move toward him, God moves toward you.

To avoid arguments, you have to give in to God, get wise to Satan, and draw close to God.

Talk About It

- Would you characterize your prayer life as an ongoing conversation with God or as sporadic cries for help?
- You will make time for the things that are important to you. What does your current schedule say to others is most important to you?

Select One



Get Wise to Satan, Day 11 - August 15

“I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.” (2 Corinthians 2:10b-11 NIV)

The devil wants to destroy your marriage. He wants to destroy every other good relationship. Why? Because he loves conflict and arguments. He wants to cause confusion, arguments, stress, hurt feelings, disappointment, anger, chaos. He loves to do it. James says you have to give in to God and let him have control. Then, you have to do some defensive action. You have to resist the devil and realize what he’s doing. If you get up in the morning and you don’t run into the devil head-on, then you’re already going in the same direction.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2, “I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.” (v. 10b-11 NIV) In other words: Wise up! Recognize Satan’s tactics. Know how he operates.

How does the devil operate? He doesn’t stand around with a pitchfork and a red suit, like Underwood deviled ham. He plays on our pride — particularly wounded pride. He tells us what we want to hear. He whispers in our ear and gives us little thoughts, suggestions, and ideas. When you’re in the middle of an argument, he starts whispering things in your ear, like “You don’t have to take this kind of stuff. Retaliate. Who do they think they are? Get even. Assert yourself. Don’t put up with this kind of stuff. Show ‘em who’s boss.” He tells you all the things your pride would love to hear.

In response, you have to say, “Satan, I know that’s you.” Resist him.

You resist the devil the same way Jesus did: He quoted Scripture. Memorize Proverbs 13:10: “Pride leads to conflict” (NLT). The next time you get into an argument, the Lord will bring this verse to mind. Stop and ask yourself, “How am I being prideful here? What am I not willing to admit? Why am I not willing to compromise? Why am I only thinking of myself and not the other person’s needs, desires, and attitudes?”

There is a great promise in James 4:7: “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (NIV). You don’t have to put up with him. Give in to God, and get wise to Satan.

Talk About It

- Think of the last time you had an argument. How was your pride involved?
- Ask a friend to help you memorize Scripture, starting with Proverbs 13:10?

When God's in Charge, Peace Rules

Day 12 - August 16

“Submit yourselves, then, to God.” (James 4:7 NIV)

Conflict starts early in life, even before we can talk. Have you noticed that a baby always lets you know if his needs are not instantly gratified? You can argue even if you don't know how to talk.

In the book of James, the author says that the cause of arguments is conflicting desires. When my wants conflict with your wants, the sparks are going to fly. The three basic desires we have that cause conflict are possessions, pleasure, and pride.

James also gives four specific actions that need to be taken in order to stop the fighting. The first thing to do to diffuse a conflict is to give in to God, whether the conflict is between you and your children, you and your spouse, or you and someone at work,

James 4:7 says, “Submit yourselves, then, to God” (NIV). Give God control of your life. Put him in charge. Yield yourself to him. Quit trying to run your own life!

In verse one of the same chapter, James says that conflict happens with other people because you have conflict on the inside. You don't get along with other people because you have a civil war in your life. The starting point is identifying the real conflict: deciding who's in charge of your life. If you're in charge, then anytime someone comes along who doesn't go the way you want to go, then you get uptight. You get irritable. You get upset. But if God's in charge of your life, it shouldn't irritate you as much.

Colossians 3:15 says, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.” When we have the peace of Christ in our heart, then we'll be at peace with other people. If we don't have God's peace in our hearts, then we try to manipulate others, control them, and move them around to get what we want out of life.

Give in to God. This means learning to say “Thy will be done” instead of “Me first.” When you say, “Lord, whatever you want is what I want,” then the peace process starts.

Talk About It

- In what areas of your life are you still trying to be ‘in charge’ rather than submitted to God?
- How do you think giving God control of your life will help with conflict?

Humble Yourself to End the Argument

Day 13 - August 17

“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?”
(James 4:1 NIV)

As I talk with couples, one of the most common complaints I hear from people is, “We just can’t seem to get along. We argue so much. We love each other, so why is it we have major blowups over such minor issues?” I talk with parents who say, “With my kids there is constant tension. I don’t understand why we’re always in an argumentative mode.”

James doesn’t beat around the bush. Long before modern psychology came along, he had some profound insights on the cause of conflict. James 4:1 says, “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?” James says that the cause of arguments is conflicting desires. When my wants conflict with your wants, the sparks are going to fly.

The Bible makes very clear that there are three basic desires we have that cause conflict: possessions, pleasure, and pride. These desires are legitimate and God-given unless they’re out of control. When you put them above other people and they become the most important things in your life, they will cause conflict.

So what is the cure for arguments? It’s one of the hardest lessons to learn: humility.

Grace is God’s power to change. What would you like to change about yourself? Whatever it is, you need grace to do it. What do you want to change about your relationships, your marriage, or your family? Whatever you would like to change, you can’t do it on your own. You need grace, and there is only one way to get it: You humble yourself. God doesn’t give grace to people who are full of pride and think, “I can do it on my own.” He gives it when we come and say, “God, I need your help.”

That’s where you get the power to make the changes you want to see.

Talk About It

- Think about the last argument you had. Can you identify which of the three desires was the cause?
- What one thing do you most want to change about yourself or your relationships? Do you believe that God’s grace can help you accomplish it?
- How will your conversations and actions change today if you take a humble approach?

Don't Let the Fear of Rejection Keep You Quiet

Day 14 - August 18

“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.” (Hebrews 11:1-2 NIV)

The fear of rejection is the main reason most people don't share their faith with other people. You're afraid of what they will think. God has given us good news, yet we're afraid to share it. We worry that our friends will reject us or people will think we're fanatics or “Jesus freaks.”

So, how do you overcome the fear of rejection? You put God in first place, you put people in their place by taking their opinions with the right perspective, and you put yourself in the proper place.

Have you been looking to other people to meet a need that only God can satisfy? Have you been living to please the wrong person? Watch out! You're headed for trouble. God wants to be your light and your salvation. He offers his love, acceptance, and approval. He knows everything about you, and he still loves you. Jesus Christ paid for your sins so you can be forgiven and acceptable to God.

I encourage you to simplify your life by saying, “I'm going to concentrate on God's approval. That's what counts. I want my life to be pleasing to him. At the end of my life, I want to stand before God and hear him say, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’”

How do you get God's approval? The Bible says there is only one way to get God's approval. Hebrews 11:2 says it is by faith we win God's approval. We accept his love and what he's done for us. We trust our lives to him. If you've never done that, you can do so right now by praying, “God, I want to switch the focus of my life from living for the approval of other people to living for yours alone. I put my faith in you and trust what Jesus Christ has done for me. I commit my life to you.”

If you are already a Christian, then who around you needs the love of Jesus Christ? Who can you invite to church this week? Don't let your fear of rejection keep your friend from hearing the greatest news in the world.

Make this your commitment today: “I want to live for an audience of one and be pleasing only to God.”

Talk About It

- Have you ever let your fear of rejection keep you from sharing the Gospel or inviting a friend to church? Think about what this means for your friend?
- Do you feel unworthy of God's love? How does your perspective toward God's grace need to change?
- What is something you believe God wants you to do that the fear of rejection has kept you from doing in the past?

Let God's Acceptance Save You from Fear

Day 15 - August 19

“Yet you made them inferior only to yourself; you crowned them with glory and honor.” (Psalm 8:5 GNT)

You don't realize how unique and valuable you are — none of us do. The reason you are so vulnerable to the fear of rejection is because you're full of self-doubt. That's why when criticized by another person, deep down inside, you have the doubt and fear that they're right. So it hurts even more.

The effect of sin is always insecurity. The more we sin, the more insecure we become. When someone ignores you at a party, you might say, “They must not like me!” Maybe they just didn't even see you there. But because you were seeing through the eyes of fear, you were vulnerable.

What's the antidote to the fear of rejection? The antidote is to put God in first place. Second, you put people in their place by putting their opinions in the right perspective. Then, you must accept what God says about you.

Psalm 8:5 says, “Yet you made them inferior only to yourself; you crowned them with glory and honor” (GNT). You were created by God, and God does not make junk.

Not only were we created by God, but Christ made us acceptable — not because of what we've done, because we could never be good enough to be acceptable to a perfect God. Ephesians 1:4 says, “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight” (NIV). Jesus Christ died on the cross, paid for all our sins, and covered us with his love. God looks down at you and says, “What Jesus did was acceptable. You are acceptable.” All you have to do is accept what he's done for you.

You were created by God. Christ has made you acceptable. It doesn't matter what you say about yourself; it doesn't matter what other people say about you. If God says you're OK, then you're OK.

No matter who rejects you, God never will.

Talk About It

- How would your life change if you began to see your worth in light of the fact that God considered you worth the sacrifice of his son?
- How can you reach out to someone today who needs to understand this message as much as you?

Let God's Salvation Save You from Fear

Day 16 - August 20

“The Lord is my light and my salvation. I will fear no one.” (Psalm 27:1 GNT)

I love the way my wife Kay watches horror movies. If something like *Alien* comes on television, she turns on every light in the room and sometimes pulls up the comforter to cover her eyes. Would she watch a horror movie in the total dark? Absolutely not. Many of you won't, either, because light helps you see things more clearly.

David says in Psalm 27:1, “The Lord is my light and my salvation. I will fear no one” (GNT). God is described in two ways: as light and as salvation.

Yet many Christians live their lives in fear of rejection, completely ignoring the fact that if God is our salvation, then we have nothing to fear — not even losing the approval of those around us. Living for the approval of others is a miserable way to live. It will cripple your life.

But God is your light and salvation!

Light does three things: It illuminates and lets you see things more clearly. It protects and provides a source of security. And, it energizes you.

David is saying in Psalm 27 that his relationship with God has the same three effects as light, so he's not going to be afraid. Do you have a relationship with God like that? If you don't, you're probably susceptible to the fear of rejection.

To overcome the fear of rejection, you have to realize that the Lord is your light and salvation, not anyone else. Don't look for anybody else to brighten up your day. Don't look for anybody else to save your life. The Lord is your light and salvation. Don't be afraid!

What does God save you from? Psalm 119:39-42 says, “Save me from the insults I fear ... I want to obey Your commands ... Show me how much you love me, Lord, and save me according to your promise. Then I can answer those who insult me.”

Here's the thing: There is no fear in love. When you understand how deeply God loves you, it will simplify your life. It will illuminate, protect, and energize you. Bask in the light of God's love. Let it save you from a lifetime of fear.

Talk About It

- If you trusted your salvation to save you from daily fear, what would that look like in your life?
- When you make decisions this week, ask yourself, ‘Am I making this decision through my fear, or am I making it through my trust of Jesus?’



You Need the Bible in Your Heart, Not Just in Your House

Day 17 - August 21

“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly.” (Colossians 3:16a NIV)

Just like you need physical food for physical strength, you need spiritual food for spiritual strength. The Bible describes itself as spiritual food — the water, milk, bread, and meat of our spiritual lives. It’s everything you need for sustenance.

If you were a construction contractor, you wouldn’t consider sending out a guy who hadn’t eaten anything in two weeks. If you were a commander in the Army, you wouldn’t send a person into battle who hadn’t eaten in a month. Right? We need to feed ourselves to have the strength to accomplish the tasks ahead of us.

You’re not going to have much success in winning the spiritual battles you face if you’re starving yourself to death. That’s why we need to feed ourselves on the Word of God.

Unlike eating physical food, whenever I feed on the Word, I get even hungrier. The more I taste and see how good God is, the more I want.

The Bible says in Colossians 3:16, “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly” (NIV). Paul is telling us to let the Bible take up residence in our lives in a rich, profound, and life-giving way.

So how do we feed ourselves on the Word of God and allow that to happen?

- **Receive the Word with your ears.** Commit yourself to go to church and listen to God’s Word being preached.
- **Read the Word with your eyes.** As I said, having a Bible in your house is not going to bless your life. You have to have the Bible in your heart.
- **Research the Word with your hands and mouth.** When studying the Word of God, keep a pencil in your hand. Write down what God teaches. Talk about what you’re discovering with other believers in a small-group environment.
- **Reflect on the Word with your mind.** Think about and chew on God’s Word.
- **Remember the Word with your heart.** You’ll rarely have a Bible with you when you need it. Commit God’s Word to memory.

Talk About It

- Are you feeding yourself by following all of the points above, or do you normally just stop after the first? What changes do you need to make in your life so that you are spiritually nourished?
- Do you write down what God teaches you? What you are memorizing from Scripture?
- What spiritual battle are you fighting today? Have you turned to God’s Word for sustenance?

Use the Bible to Stabilize Your Life

Day 18 - August 22

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” (Matthew 7:24 NIV)

The foundation of a house tells you how big the house can get. You can't put a big house on a small or faulty foundation. It'll collapse every time.

The same is true for our lives. You can't become what God wants you to be on a faulty foundation. We're given a lot of different options for what will be the foundation of our lives:

- **Popular culture.** Some people think they'll simply do what every other person is doing. If it's popular, that's what they do, too. Yet what's popular today won't be popular tomorrow. Basing your life on popular culture is like building a house on a constantly moving foundation. It doesn't work!
- **Tradition.** Other people build their lives on what has always been done — or how their parents did it. That does make a little sense. Tradition becomes tradition because it works. But no tradition lasts forever. It eventually wears out, becomes obsolete, and is invalid. In Mark 7:8 Jesus tells the Pharisees never to put tradition before truth. It's a good reminder for all of us.
- **Reason.** God gave us the ability to reason; we need to use it. But our reason isn't infallible. Proverbs 16:25 says, “There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death” (NIV). The reason is the smartest among us will falter at times. It's to be expected. Only God can be trusted all the time.
- **Emotions.** Some build their lives on a feeling. If it feels right, they do it. But feelings lie — they lie all the time. You lie to yourself more than anyone else. If you live by your feelings, you'll spend your life manipulated by your moods.

If it doesn't work to build your life on popular culture, tradition, reason, or emotion, what should we build our lives upon? God's Word.

Jesus says this in Matthew 7:24: “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”

If you build your life on the rock of God's Word, truth never changes. Popular culture changes, traditions grow stale, reason can be faulty, and emotions lie.

Yet God's Word never changes.

You may not always understand his Word. You may not always like it. It won't always be politically correct.

But it's the only thing stable enough to build our lives upon.

Talk About It

- On what have you built the foundation of your life? How is it holding up?
- What distractions in your life keep you from fully building your foundation on the Bible?

Select One

Open Your Bible and Unlock Your Potential

Day 19 - August 23

“You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31-32 NLT)

Truth be told, you can't even fathom your full potential. Only your Creator can. Only God, the one who made you, knows all you are capable of being. Your parents, your spouse, your friends, your boss — they only get a glimpse of your potential.

Most people live for the approval of others. They spend all of their time worrying about what others think of them. Your life has been limited by replaying tapes in your head of people who lied to you. They may not even mean to lie to you, but they still do. They've told you that you can't do something, that you shouldn't even bother because you're not worth much anyway.

You've played these tapes over and over in your mind. And they're lies. The people that made those statements about you have no idea about your potential. You have to talk to your Creator for that.

Only he knows what he can do through your life. And only he can unlock that potential. How does he do it?

The Lord frees us through his Word. Jesus said this in John 8:31-32: “You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (NLT). God's Word will unlock all you've been made to do and be. Through it, you'll be able to do things you've never thought possible.

How do you do that?

1. **Learn God's Word.** God won't unlock your potential until you actually open the Word and learn it. You won't unlock potential by osmosis. You'll start to do it by learning what the Bible says.
2. **Accept God's Word.** The Bible has to be the authority in your life. You may not like what you're reading, but — if you want God's best for your life — you need to accept what it says as the final authority for how you live.
3. **Obey God's Word.** You can't just learn God's Word and accept God's Word. You have to do what the Bible teaches. You don't get blessed for the parts of the Bible you know. You get blessed for the parts of the Bible you *do*.

You were made for much more than you ever imagined. The Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians 2:9, “What God has planned for people who love him is more than eyes have seen or ears have heard. It has never even entered our minds!” (CEV)

So open up God's Word, and get ready to do what only God can imagine.

Talk About It

- Have you been inconsistent about opening God's Word? What will you do about that today?
- In what area of your life are you praying for God's blessing? Is this an area in which you are faithful to him?

Let the Bible Light Up Your Life

Day 20 - August 24

“Understanding your Word brings light to the minds of ordinary people.” (Psalm 119:130 CEV)

Everyone needs light. You need physical light to make sure you can see the world around you, to avoid running into obstacles.

Through his Word, God wants to provide light for your mind, too. The Bible says, “Understanding your Word brings light to the minds of ordinary people” (Psalm 119:130 CEV).

God wants to give light — his light — to every single person. He wants to light up our minds with the truth of who he is and his next step for our lives.

Biblical meditation is often the key to turning on that light. You have to soak your mind in the light. Biblical meditation isn't losing your mind to the universe; it's focusing it on the Word of God. When you do that, you bring light to your life.

Through his Word, God helps you to see life through a different perspective. Psalm 119:105 says, “Your Word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.” God's Word gives us direction in life; it shows us the path God wants us on.

When that psalm was written, the “lamp” was a candle in a lamp people would carry around. Today, it would be a flashlight. If you hold a flashlight and you want more light down your path, you have to take the next step. Many times I've been stuck and looking for a light from God for my whole path. But God gives us just enough light for the next step. You take that next step, and God gives you light for the step after that.

One of the best ways to turn on the light of God's Word is to pray God's Word, like Psalm 119:18: “Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.” You want to see wonderful things from God's Word, right? Ask God to open your eyes to what he wants to do through your life.

He's ready to turn the light on.

Talk About It

- How has God seemed like a mystery to you? In those times, did you turn to God's Word for answers?
- Do you just wait for God to make something clear, or do you ask him for his clarity and discernment?
- What do you think the difference is between reading the Bible and biblical meditation?

Want to Know God's Promises? Read the Bible!

Day 21 - August 25

“I commit you to God and to the Word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” (Acts 20:32 NIV)

You have an inheritance coming to you. If you read God’s Word, the Bible promises one for you.

The Bible says in Acts 20:32, “I commit you to God and to the Word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

An inheritance is what you get for being part of a family that’s rightfully yours.

Pretend your father was Warren Buffet, and he dies. If you never took the time to read the will, you’d be foolish. You wouldn’t get what was rightfully due to you. You wouldn’t benefit from what belongs to you as a child of Warren Buffet.

When you become a follower of Jesus, you’re not just a believer — you’re a *belonger*. You become a part of God’s family. Family privileges come along with that decision. You have a spiritual inheritance.

But if you walked through your entire life and you didn’t know what benefits were available to you as a child of God, that would be sad — and foolish. God wants you to grow and know what’s available to you from him. You need to read the Bible to do that.

The Bible says in 2 Timothy 3:16-17: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

The purpose of the Bible is to help you live out the purpose God has for your life; it’s God’s inheritance that’s due to you. God wants you to be thoroughly equipped for what you’ve been made to do. To do that, he does four things through Scripture:

- He teaches you. God shows you the path on which you should walk.
- He rebukes you. God shows you when you’re off the path.
- He corrects you. God shows us how you can get back on the path.
- He trains you. God shows you how you can stay on the path.

That’s how God’s Word helps you grow and get that great inheritance God has prepared for you.

Talk About It

- How would your life change if it reflected the TRUTH that you have an inheritance from the King of Kings?
- What benefits from your inheritance have you not yet accepted?
- Is the Bible a useful tool for you each day? Are you taking full advantage of its instruction?