

DEVOTIONAL

*The **BIG PICTURE** for a **BIGGER LIFE***



GROWN-
UP
FAITH

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DAY ONE

*“I came so [you] can have real and eternal life,
more and better life than [you] ever dreamed of.”*

JOHN 10:10 MSG

Why do believers get stuck in life? We still need to grow up. When we were kids, our lack of *emotional* maturity often made us do dumb things and threatened to blow up our lives. As adults, a lack of *spiritual* maturity threatens even greater blowups—in our marriages, our family relationships, our finances, our careers, and our health. Our underdeveloped faith holds us back from living the life we desire.

Most Christians try to hide how immature they really are spiritually. They believe, but then don’t grow. As a result, many Christians live no better than people who have no faith at all. And they miss living their best dreams. They fail to make the most of their best talents and ideas. Their relationships are less satisfying than they hoped. It’s why so many people have empty careers, wrecked finances, broken families, unfulfilling faith, and untransformed lives.

What is the answer? It is a genuine faith in Christ that has grown-up and developed maturity. That is the answer to all of humanity’s problems. It is the one thing that can give us the kind of life we want, the bigger life that Jesus promises. When you have a grown-up faith that develops real maturity, you can meet any and every challenge life throws at you. It doesn’t lead to a perfect or trouble-free life, but it delivers a whole life, a fulfilling life, one that really works on every level.

DEAR GOD, *please help me to grow up
into a deeper faith and a bigger life as I follow you.*

DAY 2

“The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing...’ So Abram went, as the Lord had told him.”

GENESIS 12:1-4

When my daughter Julisa was in middle school, she was being bullied on the school bus, and I had to intervene on her behalf to stop the bullies. What I did for her, God is doing for us. He’s our loving dad, and this means he is always fighting for our best. But just as Julisa had to do her part, we need to do ours. What was Julisa’s part? Trust. She had to trust me—trust my motives, trust my heart, trust that I loved her, trust that I was fighting for her best.

“Trust me,” is what God is saying to us. “Trust the wisdom I offer. Trust that I love you. Trust that I want the best for you. Trust that I want you to have the bigger life, and I can deliver it. Trust me!”

Will you trust him? That is the key question in life. Your very soul depends on how you answer this question of trust with God your Father. Your trust will shape your eternity. It will shape your life on earth. It will shape how you see your life purpose. It will shape how you define truth and what matters most. It will give meaning to your marriage, your family, and all your other relationships. It will define your career, your morals and ethics, and your attitude toward money. Your entire life hinges on your answer to the trust question.

DEAR GOD, *please help me to trust you more
and embrace your good purpose for my life.*

DAY 3

*“Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them,
and we will come to them and make our home with them.”*

JOHN 14:23

How do you live your life? Who makes the rules? You can decide that it's your life and you will be the rule maker. If we do, God makes it clear in Scripture that if we choose this, we are deceived, and Satan is really our ruler whether we know it or not. God gives each of us the freedom to reject him now and for eternity. It breaks his heart. And it will break your life. But you are free to live this way for the time you have on this earth.

Your other option is to acknowledge that God gave you life, he is your ruler, and he sets the rules, which can be found in the Bible. We know we can't follow those rules perfectly. Sometimes we stumble, and when we do, we never make excuses or flout the rules. Instead, we seek forgiveness, which Jesus provides, and we ask the Holy Spirit to give us the power to live the way Jesus did. This is grown-up faith. This is living the way God wants us to and pursuing the life he can bless. This is what I would hope for you.

This is the kind of life that I'm pursuing, that I've tried to teach to my children, and that I'm dedicating my life to sharing with others. I believe it is the only viable solution we have for the bigger life. God is making this invitation to you. I hope you accept it.

DEAR GOD, *I acknowledge that you are the rule maker who loves me
and will lead me to a full life as I seek to obey your commands.*

DAY 4

“So, friends, we can now—without hesitation—walk right up to God, into “the Holy Place.” Jesus has cleared the way by the blood of his sacrifice, acting as our priest before God. The “curtain” into God’s presence is his body. So let’s do it—full of belief, confident that we’re presentable inside and out.”

HEBREWS 10:19-22 MSG

Too many believers miss the importance of the Old Testament. When we learn about the tabernacle, the ceremonial law, and the sacrificial system of atonement, we gain an greater understanding of the old covenant. While God accepted the Israelites as his children, he was intolerant of the sin that was destroying their lives. So he made a way for them to dwell with him through the tabernacle system. Without the mercy of God allowing substitute sacrifices for sin, his people would have possessed no hope.

Furthermore, the practices in the tabernacle and temple prepared the way for Jesus. The bloody sacrifices made day after day, year after year, foreshadowed the sacrifice of Jesus, the Messiah, the lamb of God given to cover our sin debt.

The richness and glory of God’s grace in the new covenant can only be understood in the context of the old covenant and the sacrificial system. With the arrival of Jesus, God fulfilled his third promise to Abraham, that he would bless the world by providing a great Messiah, he completed the old covenant, and he initiated the new covenant—all in one fell swoop. It is the biggest moment in all human history—the apex of God’s big story with humanity. Merry Christmas. Jesus is born.

DEAR GOD, *thank you for coming to earth as merciful Savior,
the ultimate sacrifice to rescue me from the power of sin and death.*

DAY 5

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”

MATTHEW 7:13-14

We all like options. Moreover, we expect them. We like having at least three good ways to get to a destination. We like being able to choose from a variety of restaurants when we go out to eat. We like being able to choose where we live, what we drive, what we wear. That’s just normal today, especially in our culture where we have dozens of options even for the kind of toothpaste to buy. Whether we’re traveling or pursuing our educational dreams or chasing career goals, there are always options. There’s never just one way.

No wonder we have a difficult time with Jesus. He was very clear and direct when he said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” In other words, if you could input “heaven” as your destination in Google Maps, you would be given only one route: Jesus. There would be no other religions, no other ways, no other options.

Many people don’t like that. It’s unpopular. They think it’s offensive. It’s too narrow, too exclusive, too intolerant. Their feelings tell them it can’t be true. But we shouldn’t try to replace facts with feelings. While feelings have their place, they should not cause us to dismiss the facts or neglect our minds. We can accept God’s one way, or we can reject it. We don’t make the rules.

DEAR GOD, *I am deeply grateful that you have provided a way
for me to know you and to live with you forever.*

DAY 6

*“By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is
with me—a prayer to the God of my life.”*

PSALM 42:8

God’s motivation in dealing with human beings is love. It was love when he interacted with Adam and Eve. It was love when he made his promises to Abraham. It was love when he gave Moses the law. And it was love when he sent Jesus.

Some people think the Old Testament is all about the law and the New Testament is all about love. But that perspective is shortsighted. God the Father and God the Son are the same God. The law was given to humankind to invite us to love God as he loves us. When we refused to follow it, we brought judgment upon ourselves.

Still the law was always about love. Jesus pointed this out when he was asked which was the greatest commandment in the law. He replied, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:37-40).

In other words, everything God did that was recorded in the Old Testament was motivated by love. And so was everything Jesus did that was recorded in the New Testament. God goes to extremes motivated by his love for you and me.

DEAR GOD, *thank you for directing your love and kindness
toward me with extravagance today.*

DAY 7

“‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant....

‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God, and they will be my people....

‘For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.’”

JEREMIAH 31:31, 33-44

When we sinned, we violated the most important principle of life. God told us that if we sin, we will die. Sin always results in spiritual death. It is a spiritual law, an eternal principle that does not change. God cannot change that principle any more than he can change his holiness. We are dead in our sin, and we need a resurrection from death . . .

If you’ve never really understood this before, please let it sink in. This is the gravity of the human condition. We want God to look the other way and forgive a speeding ticket when we have in fact driven off a cliff and are headed for certain eternal death. We need to be saved, and there’s nothing we can do to save ourselves.

This was our condition when Jesus arrived on the scene. Jesus is at the pinnacle of the big picture of God’s story with humanity. Jesus’ arrival fulfills the old covenant and introduces the new covenant. God does not dismiss his laws. Instead, he has created a way to fulfill them and still show us mercy. That’s what he did at Easter. He extended a new covenant to humankind. And when you look at the story of humanity in its entirety, it makes sense. It fulfills the law and offers us a way to live out a grown-up faith and to enjoy eternity with God.

DEAR GOD, *when I needed to be rescued,
you came to save me and give me new life. Thank you.*

DAY 8

“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”

JOHN 1:12-13

Calling Jesus “Lord” does not make someone a follower of Christ, a mature believer, or a person with grown-up faith. The way you tell the difference between a poser and a mature follower is the fruit of that person’s life, which comes from doing the will of the Father. One time Jesus reiterated this while he was teaching, and someone interrupted to say his mother and brothers wanted him to stop and go to them. Jesus replied, “Here are my mother and my brothers,” pointing to the disciples. “Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Matthew 12:49-50).

Doing God’s will is a sign that we are transforming in our identity. The problem is that we still have a will of our own that doesn’t want to die. That’s true for me. It keeps resurrecting itself each time I try to sacrifice it on the metaphorical bronze altar of the tabernacle. So what can we do? We need to learn to depend on God. That’s what his children do.

This idea runs counter to what we’re used to. As we grow up physically and emotionally, we are supposed to become more independent from our parents. However, growing up spiritually is just the opposite. As we grow, we must become more dependent on God. Ironically, it’s the only way we can grow up in our faith.

DEAR GOD, *help me to become more dependent on you,
loving you and doing your will joyfully.*

DAY 9

“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 of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

MATTHEW 28:18-20

God could bring an end to our world as we know it right now. Jesus could have come back at any time. He could come back today. But God is giving us time during the era of the church for more people to repent and come to him through faith in Jesus. God wants more people to be forgiven, to be restored in their relationship with him, to share in the bigger life, and to spend eternity with him.

After his resurrection but before he ascended into heaven, Jesus defined the church’s purpose or mission. Jesus was and is in possession of all authority in heaven and on earth. That means he alone establishes what is significant and relevant. So when he tells us what we are to do while we’re here on earth, he’s letting us know what matters most, and that’s the eternal, not the temporal.

The work of Jesus’ church is the biggest thing happening on earth. Nations will fade just as the Roman Empire did. Billion-dollar businesses will come and go the way Oldsmobile, Borders bookstores, and Blockbuster Video did. The church will outlive and out-influence everything else on earth. All human accomplishments will wither and be forgotten when the end of time comes. And when it comes, all people will bow to the only true God. Let’s join Jesus’ mission. Let’s grow up in our faith, share God’s love, and help more people to join God in eternity.

DEAR GOD, *please empower me to share your love
with others today and every day.*

DAY 10

“My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

JOHN 14:2-3

Just as God’s story with humanity began in paradise, it will end in the paradise of heaven. The Tree of Life that was lost to us in the garden of Eden will be ours to enjoy again. It will be for our healing. Imagine, if you can, complete physical healing. No sickness, pain, aging, or death. Complete emotional wholeness. No more sorrow, tears, anxiety, or depression. No more conflict, loneliness, hatred, or division. Imagine adventure with no end, with meaning and purpose in all that you do.

Then we will see our heavenly Father face-to-face. We will be with Jesus, the one who died for our sin and gave us eternal life. Our relationship will be restored. Jesus talked about this when he was on earth with his twelve disciples. Heaven is more about a person than a place. It’s always been about our relationships, being with those we love. The re-creation of a new heaven and new earth will be ours to enjoy forever with God. If your name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, then this will not just the best day ever; it will be the best day forever!

The story of God’s interaction with humanity brings everything full circle. The big picture ends the way it began—with humankind in paradise with God. This is what God wanted for us from the beginning. Through Jesus, he made a way back.

DEAR GOD, *thank you for the promise of a day when all will be restored and made whole, and I will be with you and Jesus.*