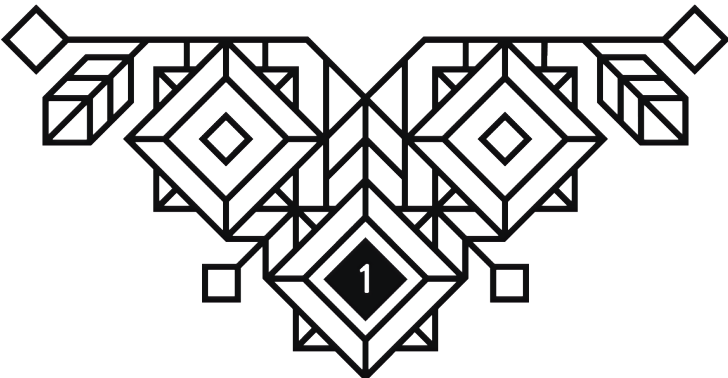


TRUTH
FOR
LIFE

365 DAILY DEVOTIONS

ALISTAIR
BEGG



INTRODUCTION






God's word is a glorious gift. Our Father has given it to us in order that we might know His Son and that we might live in the power of His Spirit, in obedience to His truth.

It is worth pausing to consider this reality: when we read the Bible, we're dealing with the words of the Creator of the universe, spoken to His creation. It is impossible for us to understand ourselves, our world, or anything else without His word. As we read a newspaper, as we try to make sense of our society, and as we look to our history and to our future, it is the Bible we need if we are to get a handle on it all. God's word is the truth that you and I need to navigate every day of this life, and to point us to the one in whom we find the life that really is life.

So in this devotional, by far the most important words on each page are the ones at the top, just under the date and title. Those are the words of the living, reigning, eternal God. My aim in the comments below those divinely inspired words is simply to explain them, to encourage you from them, and to reflect on how they inspire and equip us to enjoy living for Christ in every area of our lives. God's word says of itself that it is able to "make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" and that these God-breathed words are "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

This is a *daily* devotional, because man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4). That is, God's word sustains us each day and is as necessary to our spiritual health as food is to our physical health. On some days you may find reading God's word a delight, and on other days it may be done more out of duty, but every day it is essential. Think of it like exercise. If you're a runner, there are times when you're running around the track and it feels amazing; and there are others when it feels like an effort and you need to push on and push through. Most of us will not tumble out of our beds each morning thinking how fantastic our time in God's word is going to be. If we approach the Scriptures thinking that we need to be stirred as we read them, or that we ought to "get a blessing" whenever we open them, then we will either be intermittent or disappointed Bible readers. There will be times of delight and excitement and feeling something as you read and meditate on God's word—but do not worry if those times do not come every day, or even most days. Make a commitment to turn to the Bible every day (and if you realize you have fallen out of the habit of doing so, simply jump back in), for God's word is living and active, and it will be going to work in you in ways far deeper and more profound than your feelings can intuit.

And the Scriptures will—or they should—make a difference to our minds, to our hearts, and to our lives. Therefore, at the bottom of each devotion you will see

three icons:   . These are a prompt to say to yourself, *Now that I have read and considered these verses...*

- *how is God calling me to think differently?*
- *how is God reordering my heart's affections—what I love?*
- *what is God calling me to do as I go about my day today?*

It may be that God's word does not speak to all three of those areas each day; but learning to ask yourself these questions will ensure that you are open to what God's Spirit may be saying about your mind, heart, and life. And they will be helpful prompts to pray in response to what you have read, too.

Beside those icons you will see a passage that is linked in some way to what we have been considering; if you have time, turn up that passage and enjoy going deeper into God's word. I have also found it very profitable to read through the whole of the Scriptures from start to finish in a year, and so, at the very foot of each page, you'll see a Bible-reading plan that enables you to do just that.

God's words are the words that we need. And so I am praying for you: that, in taking you to those words each day, this book would be life-changing for you, God's beloved child, as His Spirit works through His word to show you His Son. Why not make that your prayer too? You could begin each day by using the words of my friends Keith Getty and Stuart Townend and praying:

*Holy Spirit, living breath of God,
Breathe new life into my willing soul.
Let the presence of the risen Lord,
Come renew my heart and make me whole.
Cause Your word to come alive in me;
Give me faith for what I cannot see,
Give me passion for Your purity;
Holy Spirit, breathe new life in me.¹*

1 Keith Getty and Stuart Townend, "Holy Spirit, Living Breath of God" (2005).

JANUARY 1



KING OF CREATION

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” GENESIS 1:1

There was never a time when God did not exist. Before there was time, before there was anything, there was God. And since His nature is unchanging, so He has also always existed in the Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

When reading the Bible, we discover that each member of the Trinity was involved in creation: God the Father took the initiative, God the Spirit is described as “hovering over” the proceedings, and God the Son was the agent of creation in all that was made (Genesis 1:2-3; John 1:3).

“All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small”² should leave us in awe; they were all fashioned by God’s command. And He is not only the Creator of all; He is also the Lord of all that He has created. All of nature is in His hands, under His control. As we see waves crashing against the shoreline, it’s wonderfully encouraging to know that each one is there as a result of God’s sovereign rule. He hasn’t stepped away from His creation, nor will He ever.

It’s important to remember that God is also transcendent. He is on His throne, above, beyond, and distinct from all that He has made. This is what distinguishes Christianity from pantheism, the idea that the natural world is a manifestation of God and therefore everything is somehow a part of Him. With this belief, we dare not kill a fly or step on an ant because those insects are divine. Similarly, we should not chop down a tree or eat meat, because these too are “parts of God.” Teachings like these are mistaken and misguided and tend to lead to idolatry. Scripture makes it clear that time and time again that people will choose to worship “the creature rather than the Creator” (Romans 1:25). When we see a great painting, we rightly admire and enjoy the painting, and then we praise the painter. All of creation is God’s canvas, and all of it speaks of “his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature” (v 20).

Only God is to be worshiped, for creation exists by His power and for His glory. His existence knows no beginning or end, and He will reign forever. He is the King. Today, exalt Him as He alone deserves. Go for a walk or look out of the window and praise Him as you see His beauty displayed in what He has made. Praise Him as He continues to rule over His creation, holding you in His sovereign hand.

 REVELATION 4

2 Cecil F. Alexander, “All Things Bright and Beautiful” (1848).

JANUARY 2



BEHOLD YOUR GOD!

“Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, ‘Behold your God!’” ISAIAH 40:9

During the prophet Isaiah’s lifetime, God’s people had been taken captive into a foreign territory. They were dejected, unable even to sing songs of praise to the Lord (see Psalm 137:1-4). Yet while they were in that state of exile, God came to His people with words of comfort (Isaiah 40:1)—comfort found only in the fulfillment of His promise: that the glory of the Lord would be revealed, not only to Israel but to all mankind.

These good tidings were nothing to be quiet about. God’s people were meant to give a triumphal shout, captivating each other with the glory of their hope. Once described as “people who walked in darkness,” they now saw “a great light” (Isaiah 9:2).

The distinction between the darkness of this fallen world and the light of heaven is a striking picture that runs all the way through Isaiah, and indeed through the whole Bible. Darkness is a result of disinterest in God, rebellion against Him, and unwillingness to do what He says. There is but one message that shines light into such darkness, refreshing hearts and minds: “Behold your God!”

This message is just as relevant to God’s people today as it was in Isaiah’s time. The darkness often feels very heavy and the light sometimes looks very dim. Yet often the message of hope also dawns during uncertain times. God promised, “The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken” (Isaiah 40:5). Ultimately, God fulfilled this promise when He took on flesh and established His presence among us.

When John wrote his Gospel, he looked back on the same scene to which Isaiah had been looking forward, saying, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Here was—*He* was—the Light of the world, and “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (v 5). Isaiah was describing the one who would come—but we, like John, are able to reflect upon the completed work: the promised glory that has now been revealed.

God has come to us, breaking through our darkness and bringing salvation. You can behold your God in a manger, on a cross, walking out of a tomb, and now reigning on high. It is not hard to see the darkness—but we must nevertheless look to the light, for there we find hope that casts out fear and good news that is worth heralding. Today, behold your God!

ISAIAH 40:1-31

JANUARY 3



EVERY PROMISE FULFILLED

“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”

MATTHEW 1:1

The beginning of the New Testament may not immediately strike us as inspiring. In fact, if someone were reading through the Bible for the very first time and reached the end of Malachi, which points forward with anticipation, their excitement might falter when the next book begins with... a genealogy. They (and we!) might even be tempted to skip Matthew and begin with another Gospel altogether.

Keep in mind, though, that the promises God made to His people in the Old Testament all looked forward to their fulfillment. As we read through the New Testament, we realize that in fact it couldn't open in a more fitting manner, since the genealogy in Matthew draws the line from Abraham to David and at last to Jesus as the one who fulfills all these promises.

Similarly Mark, throughout his Gospel, reaches one hand back to the prophets who pointed forward to the one who was yet to come. Mark uses the Old Testament to set the stage for this striking reality, his second sentence beginning “As it is written in Isaiah the prophet...” (Mark 1:2). And the first words he records Jesus as saying are, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand” (v 15). Jesus' disciples had the privilege of witnessing what prophets and kings had longed to see (see Luke 10:24)—a privilege that even now continues through the illuminating work of God's word.

The New Testament shows us that the means by which God's promises are fulfilled can be summed up in two words: *Jesus Christ*. God made His promises to Israel using terminology and categories that they understood—words like *nation* and *temple*. Christ's coming redefined Old Testament concepts in light of the gospel: Old Testament prophecies, we discover, are all fulfilled christologically—by and in the person of the Christ. Therefore, instead of looking for a new temple in the state of Israel, we meet with God through His Son, the Lord Jesus; enjoy His presence in each of us by His Spirit; and look to the reality of Christ's reign to transform our lives both now and forevermore.

The coming of the Son of God breaks the boundaries of Old Testament categories. This is not meant to be unsettling for God's people; it is meant to be thrilling! Christ is the perfect fulfillment of all God's promises. He is the reality of all God's great assurances.

Wait no more, then, to see how God will fulfill His every promise. We know now that each one was, is, and ever will be satisfied through Christ. He has promised to be with you, to work for you and through you, and to bring you to an eternal kingdom of perfection. There are times when it is hard to hold on to those promises. When those times come, we look back to a man born of Abraham and David's line, conceived of the Spirit, who was able to announce, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand” and who hung on a cross and rose from the grave so that all God's promises would become “yes” in Him.

 MATTHEW 1:1-18

JANUARY 4



CONTENTED IN CHRIST

"I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound." PHILIPPIANS 4:11-12

We live in a society permeated by discontent. Commercials condition us to be envious. The real issue, though, is not so much the society we live in but the state of our own hearts and minds. We're drawn away from contentment by so much which clamors for our attention: titles, possessions, influence, or fame. Yet all of these and more seek to rob us of any sense of joy in what God has given us, persuading us that it will never be enough. The chase is never-ending.

Paul, though, could say not only that he was content but that he could be content "in whatever situation I am." This is what everyone is searching for! What was the secret, then? It was to ground his sense of self and his outlook on life in the sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul didn't champion a stiff upper lip in the face of hardship or offer a false gospel of self-sufficiency. No, his contentment was the result of bowing his heart and mind to God's will, no matter what conditions he faced.

Not everyone has lived on both sides of the street. Not everyone knows how the other half lives. But Paul did. He knew what it was to be warm and fed, and he knew what it was to be cold and naked. If he had derived contentment from his circumstances, his life would have been a constant roller-coaster ride, leaving him intoxicated by wonderful luxuries one minute and overwhelmed by their absence the next. Such a fickle spirit would have neutralized Paul, making him unable to serve Christ.

Paul was a normal man with normal needs. In a letter to Timothy from a dungeon in Rome, Paul wrote, "Do your best to come to me soon ... Bring the cloak ... the books, and above all the parchments" (2 Timothy 4:9, 13). He had been deserted by others and lacked certain possessions. Yes, Paul wanted things like clothing, books, and company—but he knew he would be fine without them, for his peace rested in something greater.

Like Paul, your contentment can and should ultimately be grounded in your union with Jesus. Refuse any ambition other than belonging to Him and remaining entirely at His disposal. When you know Christ and how wonderful He is—that He is your all in all, more precious than silver, more costly than gold, more beautiful than diamonds, and that nothing you have compares to Him³—the way you view your circumstances and the measure of your contentment will be completely transformed.

   PSALM 73

3 Lynn DeShazo, "More Precious Than Silver" (1982).



OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST

“Every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins ... No one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you’; as he says also in another place, ‘You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.’” HEBREWS 5:1, 4-6

The concept of priesthood and the sacrificial system is far removed from our contemporary Western world, but understanding it is fundamental to Christian living. The practice of animal sacrifice in Old Testament Israel was not a man-made system created as a futile attempt to reach God and make humans acceptable to Him. Rather, it was meant to help God’s covenant people understand His character, His expectations, and the wonder of His plan of redemption (and it can still help us in this way today). In all of its nuances, God was pointing His people toward the finished and perfect work of the Lord Jesus Christ, who would come both as His people’s Great High Priest and as the one perfect sacrifice offered on their behalf.

Historically, Israel’s high priest would have come from the line of Aaron, Moses’ brother, and would have been considered “chief among his brothers” (Leviticus 21:10). This individual would have experienced the same societal conditions, pressures, and trials as the men and women he was representing, which would have helped him to be a more compassionate advocate on their behalf.

Long before the arrival of Jesus, however, the historical pattern of high-priestly appointments had been corrupted by Herod the Great and other rulers, who chose the high priest for themselves. They didn’t understand that the high priest’s role was not an honor to be bestowed by man but ultimately a call from God, as it had been for Aaron. High priests were not to represent the political establishment; they were to represent God’s people to God Himself.

That is one of the factors that makes Jesus the very best high priest: He did not take upon Himself the glory of becoming a high priest; rather, He was appointed by the Father. He acknowledged, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God’” (John 8:54). He perfectly endured the same hardships we face. He has gone before Almighty God for our sins even though He was sinless. With a spirit of gentleness, Jesus spurs us toward righteousness. Because He offered the perfect sacrifice—indeed, because He was the perfect sacrifice—you and I can enjoy God’s presence both now and forevermore. No sin or suffering, no disappointment or despair, makes this glorious reality any less true: that you have a priest, forever, and therefore you have a place with Him, forever.

 HEBREWS 4:14 - 5:10

JANUARY 6



CHERISHING GOD'S WORD

“My son, keep my words and treasure up my commandments with you; keep my commandments and live; keep my teaching as the apple of your eye; bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart.” PROVERBS 7:1-3

I find it a dangerous thing to go grocery shopping when I'm hungry. I find myself tempted to buy food that under normal circumstances would not appeal to me at all. I am not alone, according to King Solomon: “One who is full loathes honey, but to one who is hungry everything bitter is sweet” (Proverbs 27:7).

This same principle can be applied to our pursuit of purity. There is a real danger in going through our days spiritually hungry because we have not fed well upon the word of God.

If we are going to make any meaningful attempt at maintaining our purity, it is imperative that we not only read God's word; we must also *cherish* it. Solomon—the king of Israel to whom God gave wisdom that surpassed anyone else's (1 Kings 3:3-14)—uses language that gets at the notion of cherishing God's word when he tells his son to “keep” his words, to “treasure” them, to keep them “as the apple of [his] eye,” to “bind” them, and to “write” them on his heart.

To relate to God's word this way requires us to get beyond using the Bible merely as a textbook to study, a book of proof texts for arguments, or a promise book to which we occasionally turn. Cherishing God's word requires us to seek the perspective of the psalmist who, distancing himself from the proud and the scoffers of his day, says of the man who is walking with God, “His delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:2).

There is a direct correlation between delighting in God's word—allowing it to control and guide our lives—and maintaining a zeal for purity. If we fail to cherish Scripture, the question is not *if* we will stumble in the matter of purity but *when*.

Every one of us can keep our way pure by hiding God's word in our hearts (Psalm 119:9). Do you have a plan for memorizing Scripture? Let me challenge you to make a commitment to memorize a verse of the Bible, whether it's every other day, every day, every week, or whatever it might be. Make a plan, and stick with it.

Feast on God's word and be satisfied. Cherish the Scriptures and be pure.

   PSALM 119:1-16

JANUARY 7



THE GOSPEL DISPLAYED

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.” PHILIPPIANS 1:27

The way we dress, the way we smile or scowl, the way we carry ourselves, the tone and content of our speech... Every day, we are always making statements to those around us about what really matters and what life truly consists of.

For Christians, such statements should be in harmony with the gospel.

So Paul called the Philippians to close the gap between their beliefs and their behavior—between the creed they professed and the conduct they displayed. Christ’s call to us today is no different. Even so, however mature we are in our faith and however much we close the gap, there always remains more to do.

Paul’s phrase “let your manner of life” comes from the Greek verb *politeuesthe*, which the NIV translates as “conduct yourselves.” The root of this word comes from *polis*, which means “city,” and gives us other words like *police* and *politics*. In a very real sense, Paul is concerned with Christian citizenship and conduct. As we understand ourselves to be members of the city of God, we learn what it means to live as strangers and ambassadors in that other city, the city of man. When we close the gap between belief and behavior, others will get a foretaste of heaven through their interactions with us.

So what kind of statement should our actions make? Simply this: the gospel of Christ is a gospel of love. We see this in the words of John: “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:10-11). In other words, just as God loves us, so we should love those around us—even those whom we, or others, tend to see as unlovely or unlovable—and we should do it with hope and joy! This message of love is the challenge that Paul gives us.

*Not merely in the words you say,
Not only in the deeds confessed,
But in the most unconscious way
Is Christ expressed.*⁴

So pause to think about how you will dress today, when you will smile and when you will scowl today, how you will carry yourself today, and the tone and content of your speech today. What kind of statements are you making to the world? Let them be ones that are worthy of the gospel of love.

 1 JOHN 4:7-21

⁴ Attributed to Beatrice Cleland, “Indwelt,” in, for instance, *Our Aim: A Monthly Record of the Aborigines Inland Mission of Australia* 68, no. 7 (17 March, 1955), p 1.