

STARTING POINT

A SEVEN-DAY JOURNEY EXPLORING YOUR NEW LIFE OF FAITH

MATT PEEPLES

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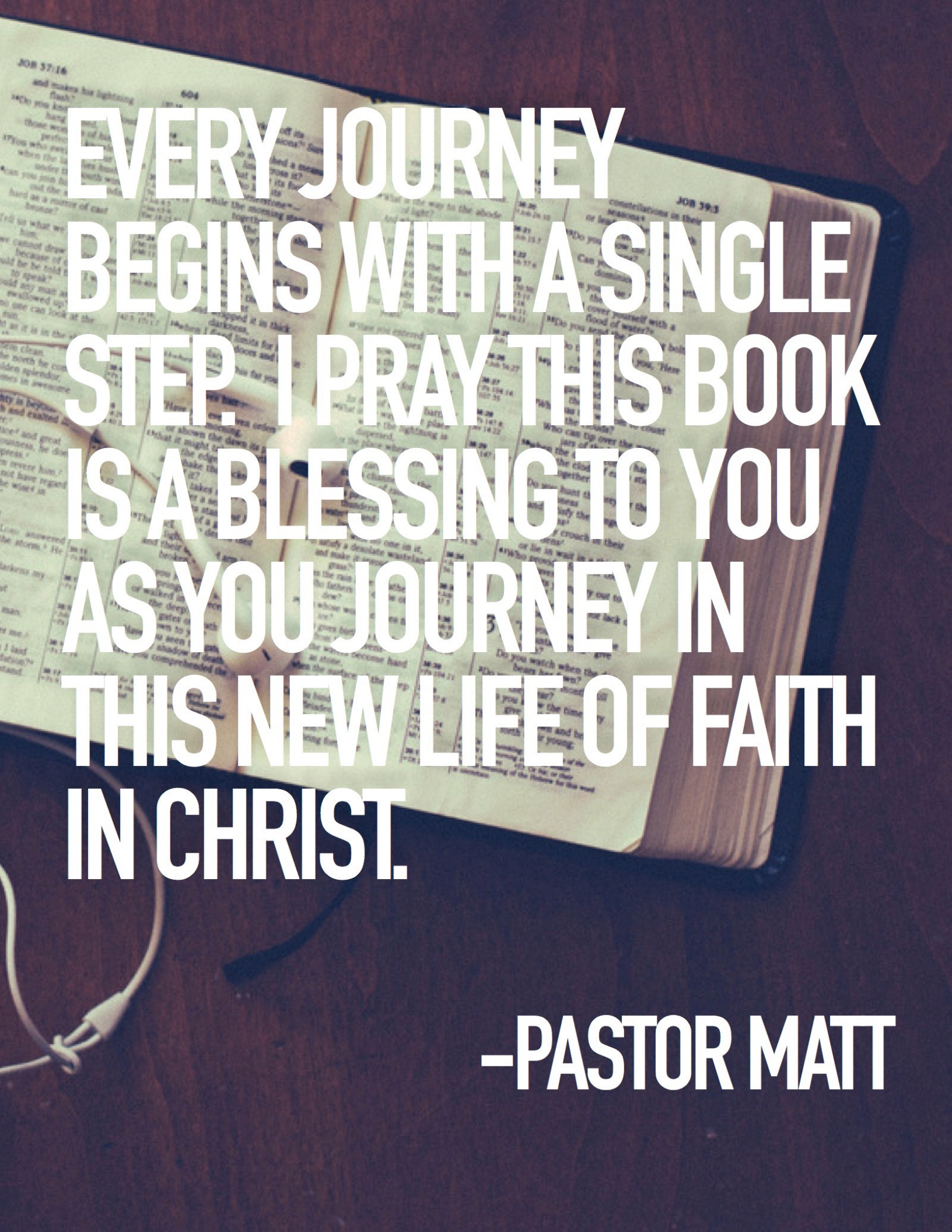
Acts 2
Peter's Sermon at Pentecost

11 But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judaea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. 12 For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. 13 But this is what was uttered through the prophet

Joel:
14 "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; and on my servants and female



The Lion Speaks
38 Then the
Job out of
said.
"Who is this that
counsel
with words with
knowledge?
"Since yourself like a
I will question you
and you shall answer
"Where were you when
the earth's foundations
Tell me, if you understand

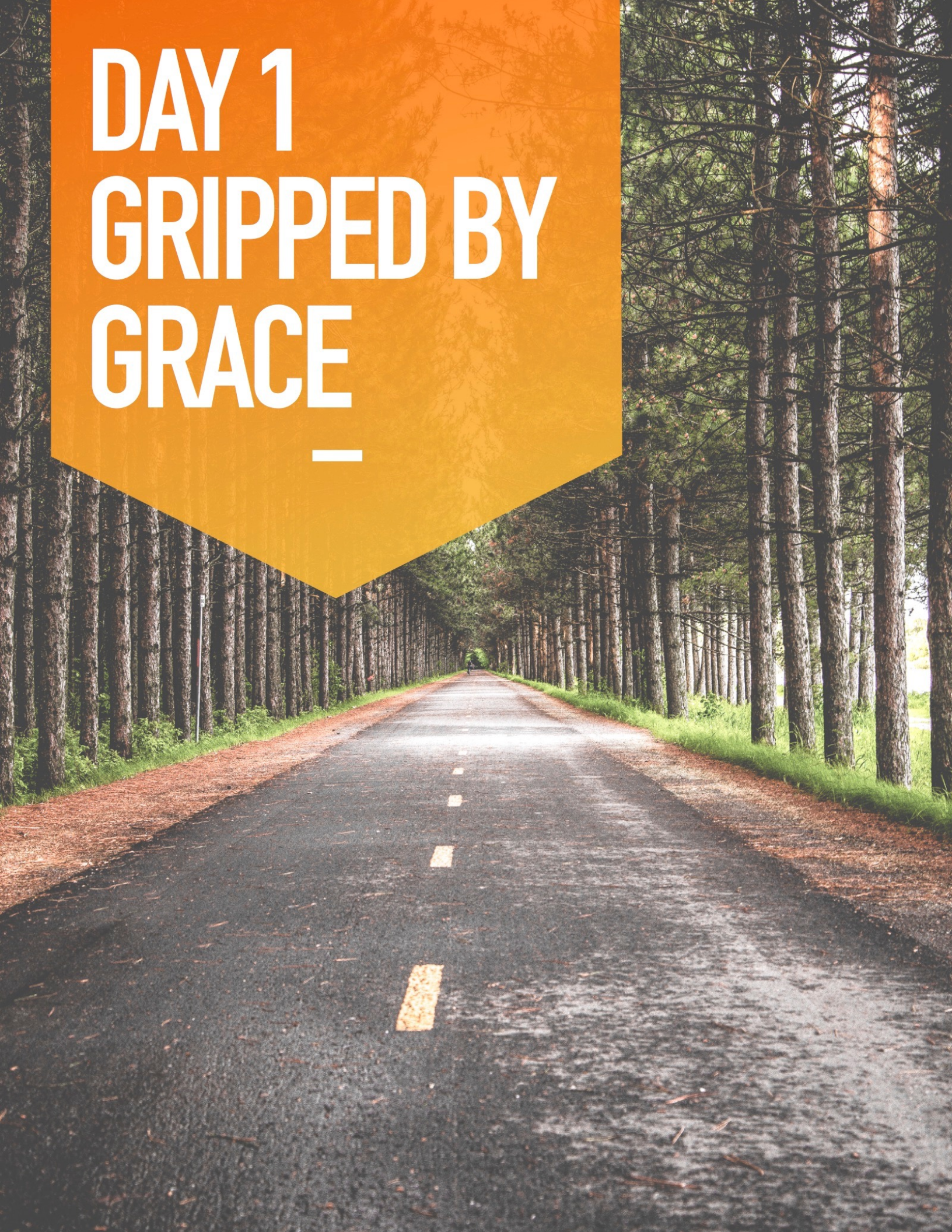


**EVERY JOURNEY
BEGINS WITH A SINGLE
STEP. I PRAY THIS BOOK
IS A BLESSING TO YOU
AS YOU JOURNEY IN
THIS NEW LIFE OF FAITH
IN CHRIST.**

-PASTOR MATT

DAY 1 GRIPPED BY GRACE

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GRIPPED BY GRACE



For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

- Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)

Thought: Faith is not about what you do for God. It is about what God has already done for you.

You are probably reading this book because you are on a search for something -- a search for meaning, a search for hope, a search for God.

What if I told you that God was actually searching for you?

Long before we started our journey toward God, God started a journey for us. Through Jesus, God came into the world to live for you, die for you, and rise from the dead. He did all this for one simple reason: to connect his life to yours. This is where "grace" begins.

That word, "grace" has many different definitions, but in the Christian faith it has one powerful definition.

Grace is the unearned favor of God. It is a reminder that God forgives our sins, not because of anything we could do for God but because of what God chose to do for us through Jesus.

As you begin this journey of faith, this new life in Jesus, realize that your life of faith is built, not on what you can or cannot do for God, but rather on what God wanted to do for you through Jesus. When you read the letter of Ephesians in the Bible, you hear the author Paul say, you are saved by grace, so that no

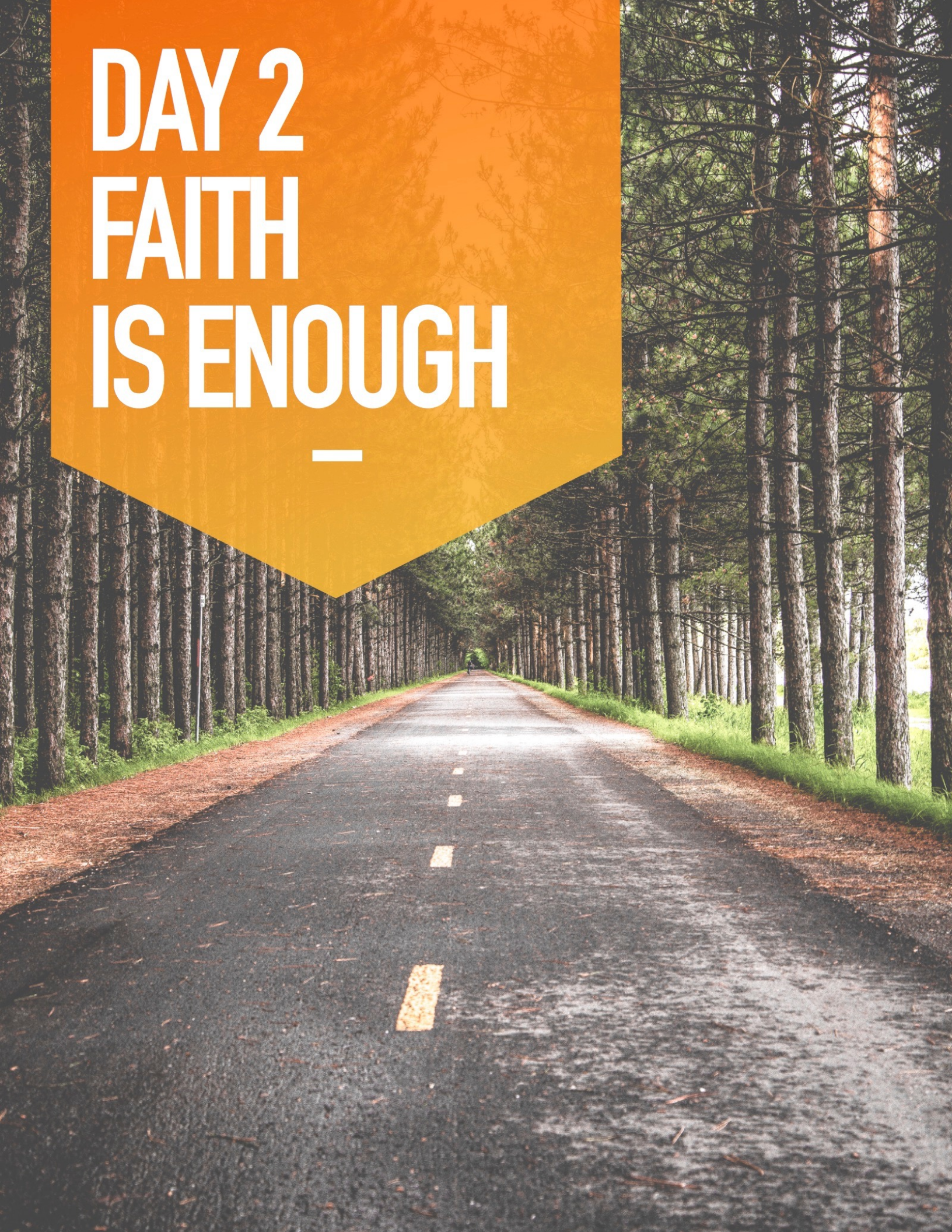
one can boast. This new life God offers you is a gift. It doesn't matter where you've been or what you've done, it is a gift God wanted to give you.

Read this story, Luke 15:11-32.

Jesus talks about a son who abandons his family only to find the love and forgiveness of his father when he comes home. Realize this is a picture of God's love and forgiveness for you.

DAY 2 FAITH IS ENOUGH

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FAITH IS ENOUGH



But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

-Romans 3:21–22 (ESV)

Thought: All we have to do is trust God's promise.

Faith? That's really all God asks us to do? Yes! This is what makes Christianity radically different from any other religion. Christianity is not about a list of do's and don'ts for you to be graded on. Christianity is about a promise - a promise God made to us and carried out through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. What was that promise?

The promise was that Jesus would forgive your sins. Check out what Peter, one of Jesus disciples, said when he was speaking to a crowd of people who were confronted with the weight of their own sin in the book of Acts:

37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Pe-

ter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." (Acts 2:37–39 ESV).

Peter doesn't say, "go live a good life and maybe God will forgive you." He doesn't tell the people to give a lot of money to his ministry and so he can put in a good word for them. He simply says to ask God for forgiveness and trust that you are forgiven because of what Jesus did for you on the cross. That is really all God asks us to do - to just trust in his promise!

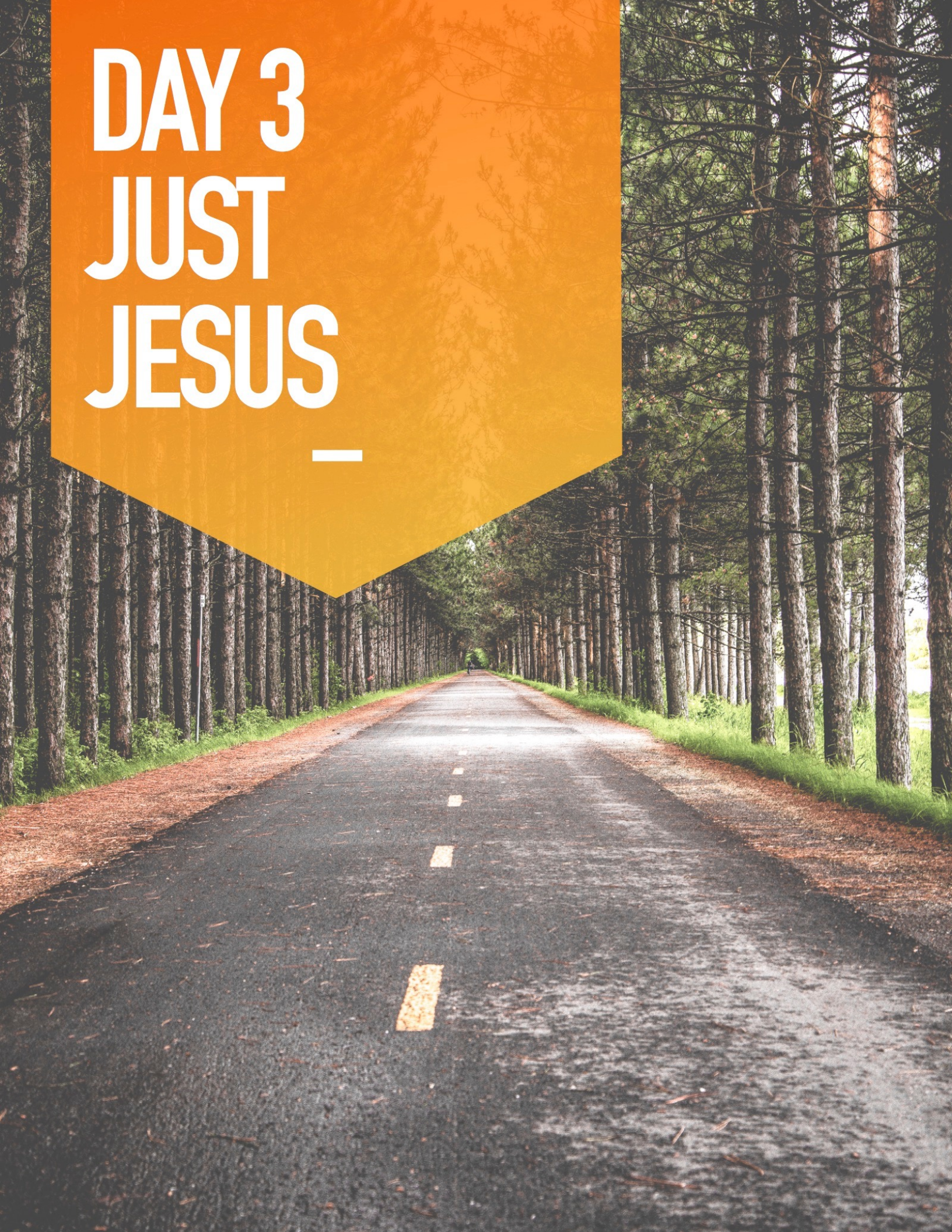
When you're a kid and your parents tell you to jump in the pool, you simply trust they'll catch you. Trust isn't about you making the promise come true. It's about understanding the person making the promise can follow through.

Read this story, Luke 7:1-10.

Jesus heals a Centurion's son. Even though the Centurion never physically stands in front of Jesus, and Jesus never physically stands in front of the servant, the Centurion is healed. Why? Because when God makes a promise he follows through on that promise every time. The Centurion trusts in the promise Jesus makes and is commended for his great faith.

DAY 3 JUST JESUS

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JUST JESUS



16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

-John 3:16–17 (ESV)

Thought: God knew the only way to reconnect people to him was to come into the world as a man and accomplish what we could not.

One of the biggest difficulties we have with God is that we think good is good enough. As long as I am a good person and as long as I live a good life, I should be good with God. The only problem with this is that the Bible tells us that God is “Holy.” The dictionary says one of the definitions of holy is “morally and spiritually excellent.” Scripture takes that definition up a notch by sharing with us in Psalm 18:30 that, “This God—his way is perfect”, and in Psalm 19:7, “The law of the Lord is perfect.” The bottom line is this: God’s standard is perfection. Jesus himself says, “You therefore must be

perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matt 5:48)”. Would you describe yourself as perfect?

Paul, one of Jesus’ own apostles, says no one can be! In Romans 3:23 he says, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” It sounds pretty hopeless for imperfect people to connect with a perfect God...unless of course God does something about it.

Enter Jesus. John 3:16-17 tells us that God in his perfection still loved imperfect people like us. He loved us so much he sent his only Son Jesus, God made man, into the world for us to live the perfect life that only God could live and to die the death that you and I deserve. He did all this so his perfection could become

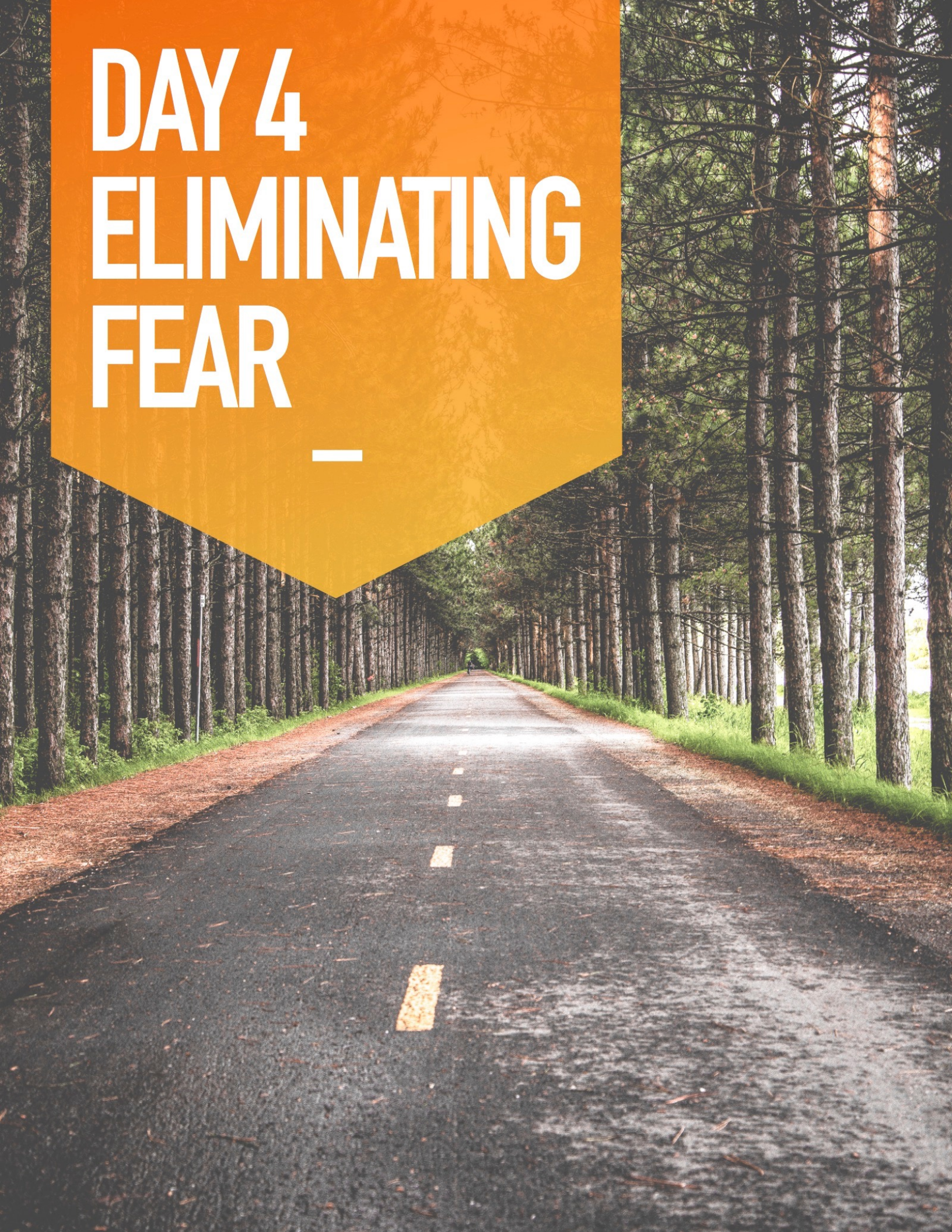
ours. That is why Paul goes on in verse 24 to say, “and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

When God says you are “justified” he is saying that through Jesus, it is “just as if I had never sinned.” Meaning through Jesus, God makes you holy and perfect in his eyes.

Read this story, Mark 2:1-11.

When Jesus heals the paralytic man, he does it for one simple reason: to prove to everyone there that he can do something even bigger than healing - forgive sins. This story is a reminder that God really does have the power to forgive sins, and through Jesus, God has chosen to forgive your sins.

DAY 4 ELIMINATING FEAR



ELIMINATING FEAR



for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

-Galatians 3:26-29

Thought: Am I really good with God?

When I am having a good day, I don't ask that question. There are days you feel like that, like a spiritual rock star - God is lucky to have you on his team. But what about the other days? The days where you realize you are still wrestling with sin in your life... Days you just don't understand why you keep messing up in the same area of your life? Those are the moments you ask the question, "Am I still good with God?"

The apostle Paul confessed that he wrestled with sin. In a letter he wrote to the church in Corinth (2 Corinthians 12:1-10) he confessed he felt like there was a thorn in his flesh, a messenger from Satan to harass him.

This powerful language describes

how we feel sometimes. Why do I keep messing up?!

God's words to Paul are even more powerful, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." God's grace is bigger than our shortcomings. God's grace is not dependent on our perfection. To give us assurance of His grace in our life he gave us the gift of baptism.

Baptism is another promise God makes to us. Through ordinary water and God's word, God promises that he will be our God and we will be his people. We are completely his. Peter says it like this in 1 Peter 3:21, "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an

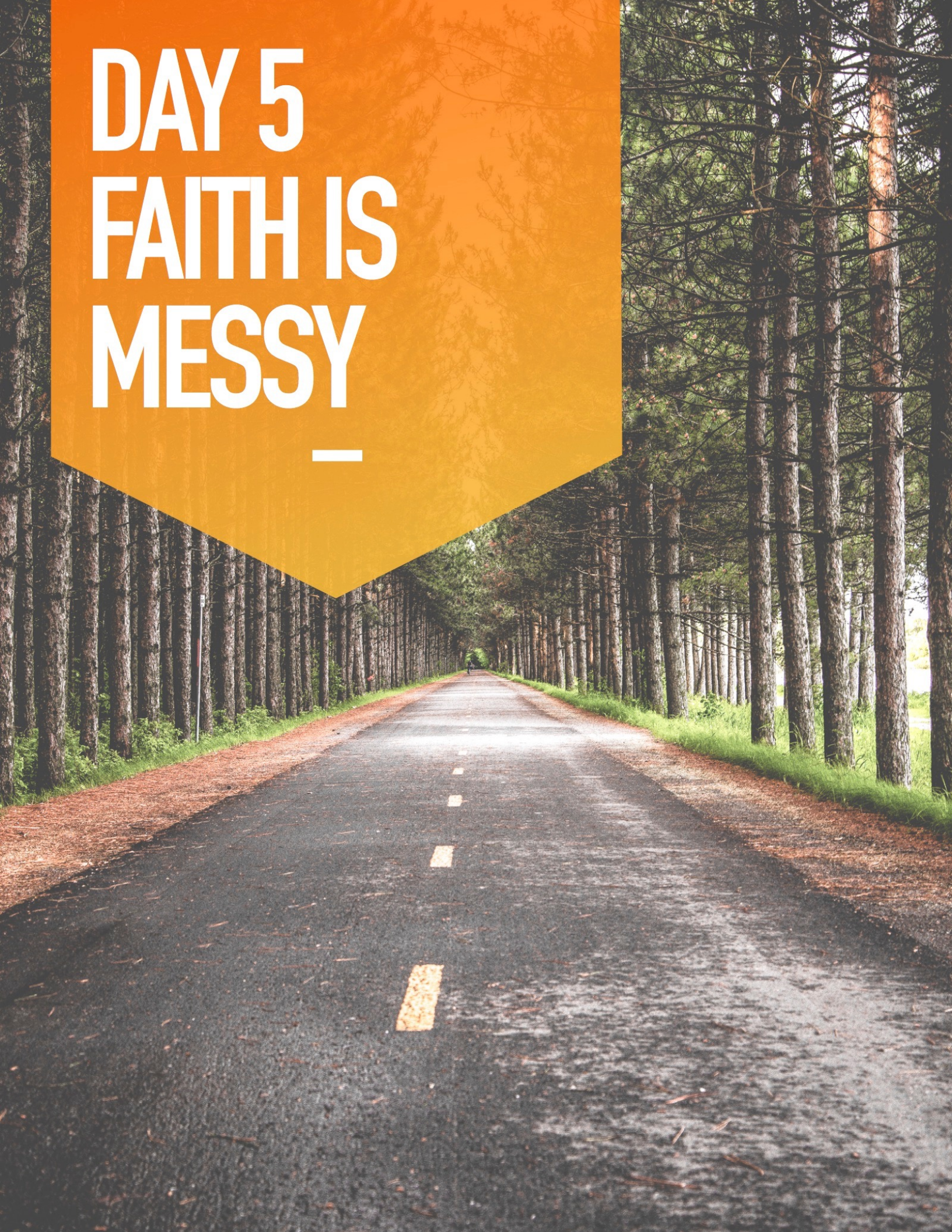
appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Baptism is God's assurance that you are good with him. If you were baptized as a baby and later walked away from faith, you can have confidence that you're still good. How? Because even when you were unfaithful, God was faithful in pursuing you. If you have never been baptized, talk to a pastor at your church and they will be able to get you baptized, so you too can experience that assurance that only God can give.

Read this story, Acts 16:25-34.

What must I do to be saved? What is that assurance that God will connect me to himself? Paul's answer is simple - believe. To give the jailer that assurance of God's promise, Paul baptized him and his entire family.

DAY 5 FAITH IS MESSY

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FAITH IS MESSY



Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

-2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV)

Thought: The life of faith is something you grow into, and the church is a community given by God to help you grow.

When the you read through the New Testament, you find out that when God forgives you, he gives you a new life.

In the Gospel of John chapter 3, Jesus describes it as being born again.

That is a great way to think about this new life of faith. It is just that new. Just like a newborn doesn't come out as a full grown man, so you aren't expected to be this perfect person of faith. Faith is something you grow into, and that can be a messy process.

Just like it is a messy process to grow up physically, it is a messy process to grow up spiritually. Paul often describes it as a wrestling match between the "flesh" (the sinful things we desire and do) and the "spirit" (the life

we live because of grace and the Holy Spirit.) Even Paul, the author of most of the books in the New Testament, experienced that tension. In a letter he wrote to the church in Rome, Paul said, "I do not understand my own actions. For the I not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." (Rom 3:15)

What Paul was describing is the reality that we are simultaneously a saint and a sinner.

What does that mean? It means no one is expecting you to be a perfect person. You will still wrestle with sin and the desire to sin. However, you will find new strength from the Holy Spirit to wrestle with those desires. As you learn to live in this newfound faith, you will grow. You will grow to look more and more like Christ. Until the day that Jesus comes back, this process will never be complete. There will always be areas in your life in which

you can still grow; there will always be areas in your life where you want to look more like Christ.

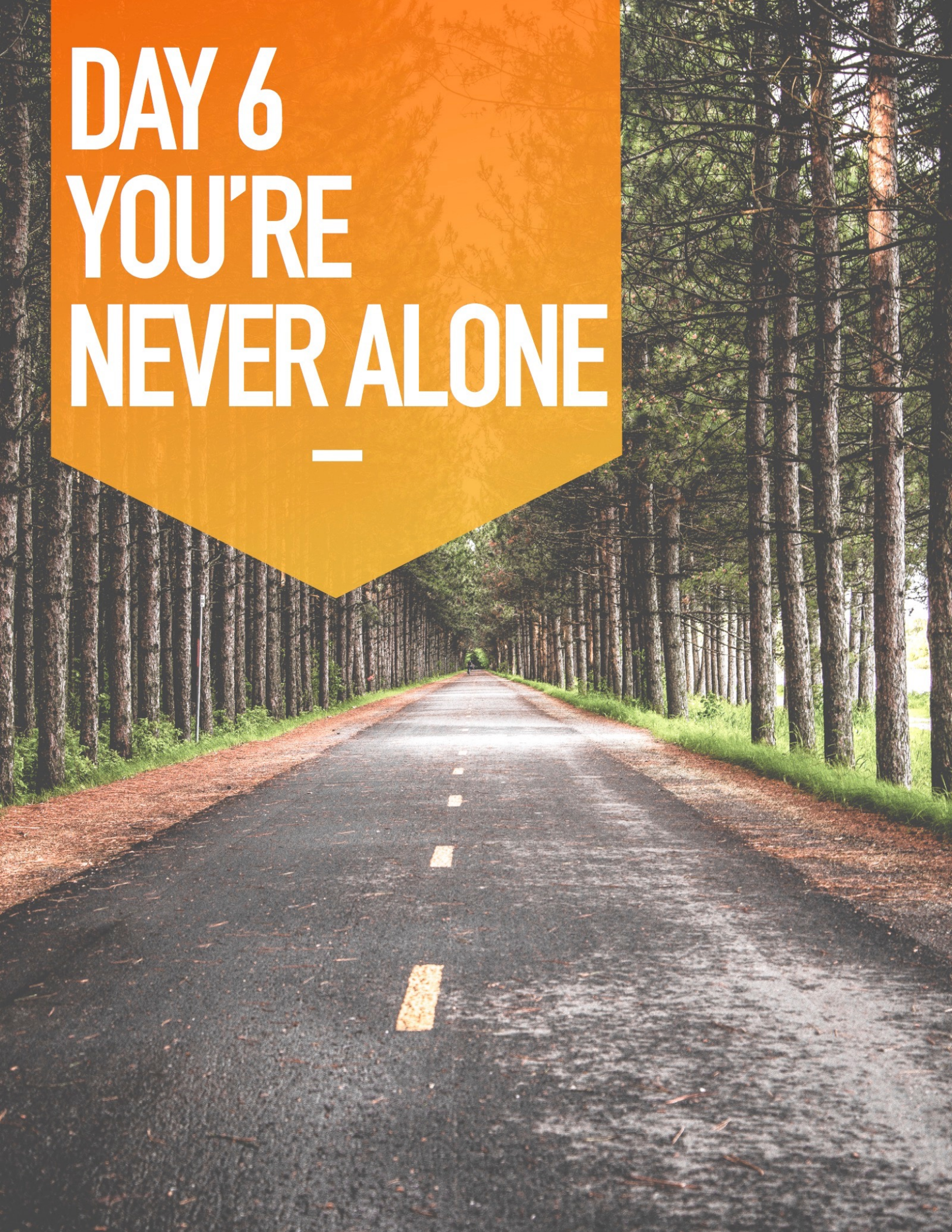
If this sounds frustrating, don't give up hope! Remember, you have this new life of faith not because you were perfect, but because you were perfectly loved by Jesus. The same grace that brought you into the faith will sustain you in the life of faith.

Story: Acts 2:42-47

In this story, we see a powerful picture of how we can grow in our faith. This is a picture of the church before there were church buildings or denominations. There was simply a group of people gathered together because they wanted to grow in their newfound faith. These verses remind us why the local church is so important and how it can help us grow in faith.

DAY 6 YOU'RE NEVER ALONE

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YOU'RE NEVER ALONE



But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

- John 14:26 (ESV)

Thought: God puts his Holy Spirit to guide us in living out the life of faith.

Sometimes our picture of God is like a clock maker who sets things in motion and then steps to the background. It's easy to get this impression when it comes to grace. It's easy to think God gives you grace and then he looks at you and says, "Ok, don't screw it up again!" But nothing could be further from the truth!

In Acts chapter 1, we see Jesus after the resurrection getting ready to leave his disciples and go into heaven. However, before he leaves,

he tells them to wait for the Holy Spirit. Why? The Holy Spirit is not only the one who will empower the disciples, but he is also the one who will guide them. In the Gospel of John, we see Jesus talk about the Holy Spirit as the helper. He is the one who will teach us, talk to God for us, and guide us in the life of faith.

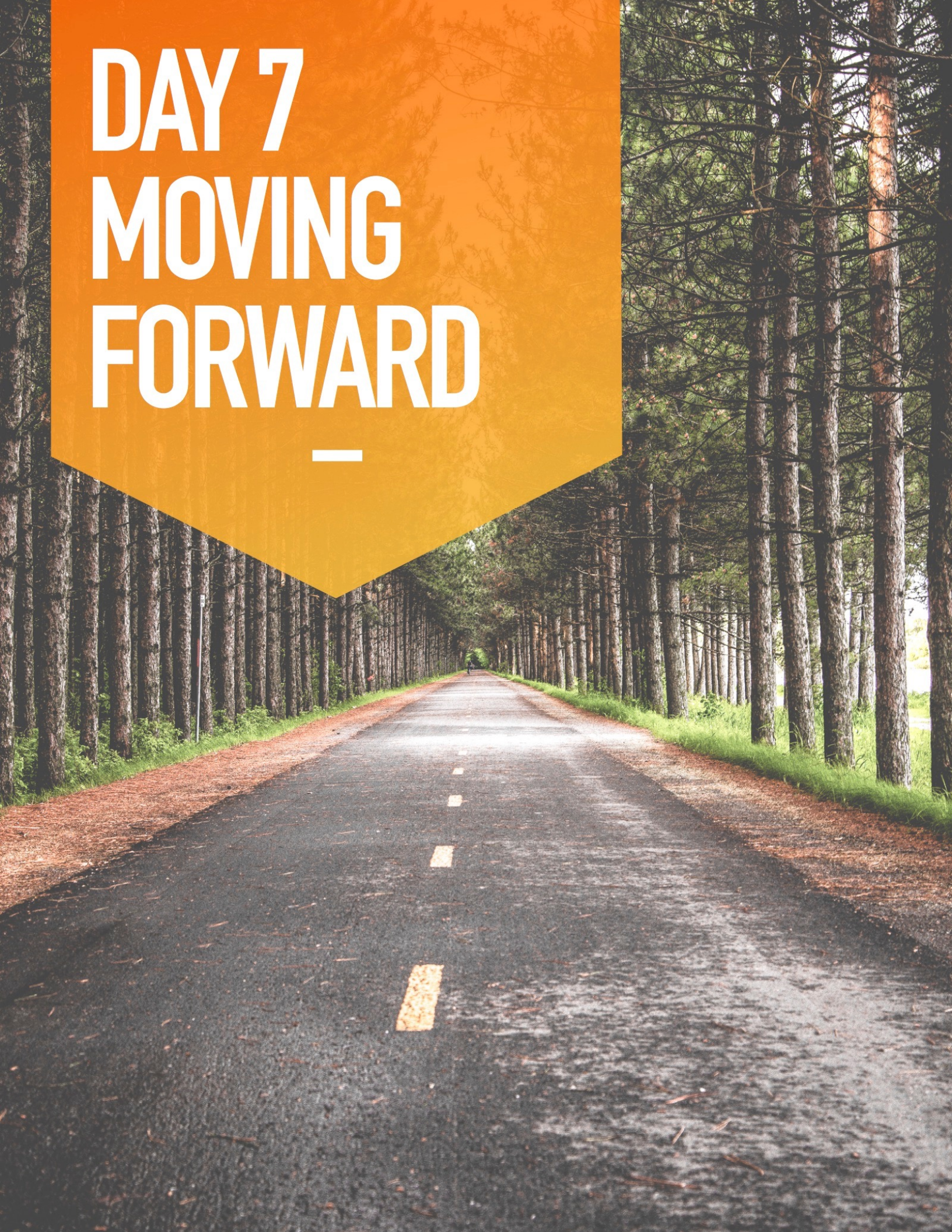
God will never leave you alone on this journey of faith. He will guide you every step of the way. That is why he put his own Spirit into your life. When it comes to the life of faith you are never alone!

Story: John 16:4-15

As you read through this story, realize that these are some of the last things Jesus tells his disciples before he goes to the cross. He wants them to know they will never be left alone; by extension, he wants you to know you will never be left to live the life of faith on your own. He will guide you.

DAY 7 MOVING FORWARD

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MOVING FORWARD



All Scripture is breathed out by God and 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 (ESV)

Thought: Where do you go from here? How do you continue to grow in this new life of faith?

The life of faith is just that, a life time. So where do you go from here? How do you continue to grow in the grace that God has given you? The answer is to continue listening to his voice.

I once heard a pastor say, "People often say 'I wish God would speak to me.' I say, 'Are you listening to the things he has already said?'"

When we open the Bible, we are doing just that -- listening to God speak into our lives. The Bible is the one book that reads you. When you open it up, it encourages you, con-

victs you, and guides you. It is more than a book. It is the very word of God. Sure he used ordinary men to write it down. He used a variety of languages and cultures and took a few centuries to bring it all together, but it is still all guided by his hand and placed into yours. It gives you a picture of who God is, who you are, and how grace will continually transform your life.

If you are looking for a good place to start, you can find some great reading plans online through things like youversion.com, the free YouVersion Bible app, or you could simply pick up one of the Gospels and start reading a chapter a day.

If you want to continue growing in your faith then get connected to a local church, spend time talking to God in prayer, and spend some regular time in his word (the Bible). Just fifteen minutes a day will help you continue to grow in this amazing gift of grace God has given you!

Story: Matthew 4:1-11 - The Temptation of Jesus.

Jesus leans on the word of God to strengthen him in the midst of his temptation. See how the time you spend in the Bible can be a source of strength when you need it the most.

WHAT'S NEXT



WHAT'S NEXT



I am so glad you have taken this seven day journey with us, but I want you to know that there is so much more to the life of faith than you can find in this short book.

The life of faith is just that - a journey. Every journey continues the same way it began, with a single step. You have seen what God has done over seven days, now think about what he can do over a lifetime! So what's next?

Have you been baptized? If not, feel free to contact one of the pastors at the church. They can talk you through baptism, answer any questions you may have, and even baptize you.

Do you want to dive a little deeper into understanding the life of faith? Talk to the pastors on staff about opportunities to learn the basics of the faith, and dive deeper into the Bible.

Don't forget one of the best ways to grow is to get connected with a local church. The church that gave you this book has a passion for seeing you connect with Jesus and grow in this new life of grace. The staff at that church wants to equip you with everything you need to grow in your new life of faith. Find out how you can get plugged into their church community, and you will find a great place to continue the journey of faith.

This may seem a little overwhelming. If it does, just keep this in mind: the journey of faith is taken one step at a time. Trust that God will guide each step you take, and simply take the next best step for you.

Pastor Matt Peeples.