

Walking Like a Free (wo)Man

A 30 Day Devotional

By Jenn Travis

Day 1

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. --Hebrews 10:23-25

It won't always feel like God is near. You won't always "feel" like praying or believing. And the enemy will also plant lies to tempt you to quit looking to Jesus. You'll continuously struggle with the desire to be independent. It's part of our sin nature. But there is reward to those who keep trusting and looking towards Jesus despite it all.

Faith isn't a hall pass to skip the hard times. Jesus promised that we would face "many troubles". Faith is best practiced when we have obstacles, yet we put our trust in Jesus anyway. When there seems to be no possible way out, faith in Jesus presses onward as hope- not to get your own way but that God's will and way will be enough.

Without relationship, faith is impossible. Without surrender, faith is just a word.

Hope is a side effect of faith.

Faith gives hope to those with none. It ushers us into front row seats, where we watch God work. It changes our inward focus to an outward one, where we are encouraged by the One who made us all. God rewards the smallest seed of faith by opening our spiritual eyes. He wants us encouraged and He wants to show us His goodness. No one can stand in His presence and remain hopeless.

Be honest. Do you find yourself in a state of hopelessness or are you waiting in faith? In either state, look to His Word for His promises for a fresh dose of hope. Pray continuously. And be ready to have your spiritual sight improved.

May God bless you as you begin this new journey.

Day 2

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.
--Philippians 2:12-13

Have you ever read a Bible verse and been offended by it? Areas of offense are red flags, signals for us to take notice. They tell us where we are not choosing to believe God. These are strongholds that keep us from living in the freedom Christ died to give us. They stem from believing things that do not align with God's word.

Lies have one source - satan. But he loves to mask them as your own thoughts. He likes it even more when you have an ego the size of Texas and believe "your thoughts" more than you do God. Our belief system determines how fruitful we'll become.

Essentially, when we have beliefs contrary to scripture, we're proving that don't really believe God. It doesn't matter what we claim to believe if our life doesn't line up with it. If we don't deal with these things, they will quench our fire for Jesus and hinder our relationship with Him.

Scripture calls us to examine ourselves (2 Corinthians 13:5), be alert and sober-minded (1Peter 5:8) and to have our minds renewed (Romans 12:2).

Proverbs 3:5-6 says: Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight.

We must make time for God by actively seeking and listening. If we don't spend time with Him, we won't think or act like Him. Without God, we become prideful and we set ourselves up as idols. Therefore, when He reveals a place that doesn't align with Him, it is crucial to surrender it to Him. Clinging to it will only further cripple us.

Day 3

I'll set up my residence in your neighborhood; I won't avoid or shun you; I'll stroll through your streets. I'll be your God; you'll be my people. I am God, your personal God who rescued you from Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians. I ripped off the harness of your slavery so that you can move about freely. --Leviticus 26:11-13

When we are saved, we are set free from sin and bondage. Bondage is oppression - anything that stands in the way of following Jesus. If we follow Him, we will be obedient and produce good fruit. If we do not, our lives will be the proof.

We generally don't start off walking like we're free. Just like a man who spends many years in prison, we must re-learn how to live, think and walk like a free man.

For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. -- 2 Peter 2:19

If we try to do it alone, we will just collect more chains. The only way to walk like you're free is to study and mimic Jesus. Pay attention to areas where you don't, won't or can't.

Imagine being in Peter's shoes when he walked the beach with Jesus after the resurrection. Jesus keeps asking you--Do you love me? Do you REALLY love me? If so, Show me.

This is where you search deep - ask yourself what is keeping you from loving Him and passing that love on to others. Previous traumas, heartbreak, bitterness, anger, petty things that irritate or trigger you, selfishness, defensiveness of sin, shame, fear and jealousy are a few examples of things that go unexamined in our hearts. They leave us stuck, spiritually limping, isolated, and glued to our problems.

Do you have mindsets that are hindering you?

Galatians 5:1 says, For freedom in Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.

Day 4

And do not grieve God's Holy Spirit. You were sealed by Him for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice. And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ. --Ephesians 4:30-32

Sin keeps us at odds with God. But Jesus wants our hearts clean so we can commune with Him. Scripture tells us to "avoid grieving the Spirit" because this causes separation. We grieve the Spirit when we refuse to let go of "all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander, along with all malice."

If we pay attention to the things God calls "sin", we can see the importance of how we treat one another. If we serve God, we will love others. You cannot love someone whose heart you aren't careful with.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. -Psalm 51:10

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. -Mat 5:8

God is calling us to a heart change, not just morality. We can have sin in our hearts, which dirty us up long before we act. Without God, we can't even keep our hearts clean.

We can be led astray if we don't follow God like we ride the tail end of other cars in traffic. Freedom in Christ comes from staying so close to Him that we don't get hung-up on our preferences, other people's actions, the past, hard circumstances, and stuff that won't matter when we're all in heaven. Our focus is on presenting a pure heart to God by checking our minds daily.

See also: Jer 29:19; Matt 22:37; Jer. 17:10; Ezekiel 26:36; Psalm 19:14

Day 5

They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption, since people are enslaved to whatever defeats them.--
2 Peter 2:19

Bondage can be any pattern of living or thinking that goes against God's commands for us. It keeps us from following Jesus to the fullest extent. And according to this scripture, if you live in defeat, you are a slave to the enemy because God causes His followers to be victorious.

2 Peter 2:20-22 says, “For if, having escaped the world’s impurity through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in these things and defeated, the last state is worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy command delivered to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb: A dog returns to its own vomit, and ‘A washed sow returns to wallowing in the mud.’”

He is describing a person who came to the knowledge of Christ but continues to live in bondage. This person lives in defeat to the bondage instead of in the victory of Christ because he doesn't deal with the ungodliness in himself. He doesn't truly repent and ask for God's power to overcome it.

Make no mistake- God wants us to live in His victory. But we can only have one master. No one else can make you free but Jesus. When you come to know Christ, you have to give up any idea of who you were before Him and let Him rewrite your story.

What part of your old man is He calling you to give up? Trust Him to make you into the person he created you to be. It's going to be good!

Day 6

Samuel replied, “Don’t be afraid. Even though you have committed all this evil, don’t turn away from following the Lord. Instead, worship the Lord with all your heart. Don’t turn away to follow worthless things that can’t profit or rescue you; they are worthless. The Lord will not abandon his people, because of his great name and because he has determined to make you his own people. 1 Samuel 12:20

This verse is a picture of the second chances God gave the Israelites in the Old Testament. Even today, He provides a path forward, a do-over. That path always starts with repentance.

We will stumble and fall. We’re human, it’s inevitable. God isn’t shocked when we do and He doesn’t stop loving us or fighting on our behalf. God calls us to faith, not perfection. He knows much we need His help to do everything He requires of us.

In this picture of repentance, He assures us that we have nothing to fear, for He is with us. He wants us to worship only Him and to stop looking for other things to fill us. He promises that He will not abandon us, not because of who we are but who He is. His desire is that we walk in the freedom He died to give us.

During a very hard season, God gave me this vision. I was in the boxing ring and laying face-down on the mat. The enemy was counting loudly with the clear goal of counting me out. But God got right down beside me and yelled even louder, “Get up, Get up!” He was cheering me on, making sure I heard Him over the enemy. Though the enemy wanted me out, God was fighting for me to get back up and try again!

When you fall, get right back up! The longer you lay there in self-pity and shame, the more the lies take root. These mindsets will cripple us if we listen to them. They are lies from the enemy. We have a choice of whose voice we listen to!

Day 7

Rebuke your neighbor directly, and you will not incur guilt because of him. --Leviticus 19:17

Sometimes we don't confront others because we don't want to hurt another person. But when we withhold the truth, scripture says that we share in the guilt because we didn't do our duty to our fellow humans.

What is our role in the life of others? According to scripture, our job towards others is to: to look out for one another's blind spots, fight for one another against the common enemy by praying and speaking truth, correct one another lovingly, forgive one another, restore one another with grace, and to suffer with and celebrate for one another.

There is a way to confront, but not everyone will welcome it. God didn't call us to avoid those who hate correction. He does give us some guidelines though.

We are commanded to approach a person with love, gentleness, and respect. That means we must drop the need to be right. Seek to be heard and to understand instead. If we approach a person while we're angry, we're prone to losing self-control..

When we assume anything, especially motives, we will be met with defensiveness. Anytime love and respect are lost, so is gentleness. And when we're speaking harshly, the other's walls will go up. People don't hear well when emotions run high.

We are called to disarm the enemy in the lives of others. But we must check ourselves for hypocrisy and our heart's - attitude before we speak. Consider how you would want to be spoken to if the roles were reversed. The Bible tells us that confrontation must be done in love.

If we see something and remain quiet, scripture says that we aren't being loving. We like to make the excuse that we're minding our own business, but God says we ARE one another's business. We are called to offer correction, but we aren't called to change one another. That's God's job.

Day 8

Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation! --Habakkuk 3:17-18

Being joyful is a choice. It requires intention. We can either choose to focus on what we don't have or the blessings we've already been given. It's so easy to fall into the mindset of happiness, where we stay miserable until we get our way. Let's be honest, we all have good and bad things in our lives, but we're all given freedom of choice and a responsibility to take charge of our own minds.

God created us with neuroplasticity, an ability to reorganize and change. When He saves us, we enter a lifetime process of rewiring (sanctification). We get to take on an active role in changing how we think and see the world. He purposefully made our brains to adapt.

Science shows that for everything we choose to think about, we shape our emotions. For every emotion we feel, our body produces a chemical that either helps or hurts our physical health. Anger spikes inflammation with a marker called Interlukin 6, joy releases healing molecules such as nitric acid that opens our blood vessels, gratitude lowers stress hormones like cortisol. I love it when science proves that God has been right all along!

Your nervous system rewrites what you rehearse. God built our brains to heal through repetition of truth. Everything you think feeds emotions that build your character over time. Be careful what you expose yourself to. Focus on the Lord above all things and He will use your disciplines to make you more like Him.

His Holy Spirit helps us continually. He created us to be able to change. Are you purposefully exposing your mind to things that make you more like Him?

Day 9

He rescues me because He delights in me. --2 Samuel 22:30

The word “delight” brought up some doubt in me and God said, “pay attention to this.” I know God loves me, but in all honesty, I have struggled to believe that He actually delights in me. Thankfully, He wants to change my mind about that, but I wonder if you need it too.

A former pastor once said, “No relationship thrives while in a tone of disapproval.” THIS is why we must take His love to heart and learn what He says about us. He wants us to feel safe with Him, to trust Him and to seek Him. To know we’re safe enough draw near, we need to know that He really does delight in us - just as we are.

He accepts us and encourages us. His Spirit motivates us to grow without beating us up. He is so incredibly gracious and gentle with our hearts, yet all He asks is that we believe Him. Believing God requires us to make a choice- to believe no matter how we feel.

His Word says it more than once.

He brought me out into a broad place; he rescued me, because He delighted in me. -Psalm 18:10

But the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His steadfast love. -Psalm 147:11

For the Lord takes pleasure in His people; He adorns the humble with salvation. -Psalm 149:4

You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight Is In Her, and your land is Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. --Isaiah 62:4

Day 10

Take heed unto thyself. --1 Tim 4:16

Epecho is a Greek word that means to grab ahold of something very tightly.

Paul wrote this to Timothy who was overwhelmed by the problems in the large church he was pastoring. Paul reminded him—Don’t get so busy that you neglect your own relationship with God. You have spiritual needs too!

We can work ourselves in the ground to try to please God, neglecting everything inside of us. But He wants us to present our heart as an offering- a clean one. If we get too busy to notice what is happening inside of us and to deal with it before God, we are missing the true nature of our calling.

He doesn’t ask us to sacrifice our hearts for the sake of work, but to give our hearts to Him and let Him fill and equip us for the work.

A mentor once reminded me, “We are human beings, not human doers.” We are called first to BE, then to DO from the abundance He fills us up with.

If we go about life trying to serve God, but never letting Him change, heal or fill us, we will only make a bigger mess of the world. We are only useful to the kingdom’s work when we first let God do in us what we want Him to do in others.

The sacrifice He wants from us is our hearts. This is a call to let Him heal and restore you.

I encourage you, give it to God. He will do great things with it.

Day 11

This child marks both the failure and the recovery of many in Israel, a figure misunderstood and contradicted the pain of a sword thrust through you – but the rejection will force honesty, as God reveals who they really are. -- Luke 2: 33-35

Simeon spoke this prophesy to the parents of Jesus as he marveled at this infant Savior. He was an old man, hoping to see a sign of deliverance for Israel before his death.

Scripture notes, “he lived in prayerful expectancy of help for Israel.”

He met the infant Jesus and his family at the temple where Mary and Joseph went to make a sacrifice for their newborn male as the law commanded.

His prophesy pointed out three things.

1. The Messiah was expected to come into the world differently and have a different agenda. We know that, for this reason, Jesus was rejected, misunderstood and contradicted. God's ways are higher than ours, but we often miss Him while looking for Him to do things our way.
2. Jesus exposes our hearts. As a result, people who follow Him will get honest with themselves about their own hearts and soften to the pain of others. Sin will always be exposed.
3. With exposure comes forgiveness and grace. What point is there in exposing others sins if there is no possibility of redemption? But we must accept His forgiveness in our hearts so we can live fruitfully.

Jesus didn't come to condemn but to expose the truth about us so that we will realize our need for Him. He came to change our hearts because the law could only expose our condition. He isn't surprised by our humanity.

Day 12

I am the God of Abraham your father; don't fear a thing because I'm with you. I'll bless you and make your children flourish because of Abraham my servant. --Genesis 26:25-26

In Genesis 26, Isaac knew to pick his battles with the Philistines. He had dug up two wells previously dug by his father's servants. Later, the people of the land polluted and vandalized them. He was asked to move so he conceded both of those wells due to conflict. It took three tries before he successfully dug up one of Abraham's wells without someone else trying to claim what was his. This third place is where he settled and where God came to him, assuring him that He would look out for him and his descendants.

But what if Isaac had acted like we do today? What if he lost his temper and started a war? What if he tried to make the Philistines pay for what they had done?

Would God have fought a battle that Isaac was unwilling to let go of? This story could have ended very differently - He could have been killed. He could have picked the wrong battle and ended up somewhere God didn't want Him to stay.

I wonder how many times we bring stress into our own lives by fighting for things we weren't meant to have. We have trouble picking battles, and yet we wonder where God is during them.

We live in a society where we never have to face a person when we're seeking restitution or revenge. But our character flaws still have consequences on our relationships and our reputation. Having war in our hearts impacts entire nations. Seeking peace does too.

We need wisdom to know what is worth fighting for so that we don't become caught up in unnecessary conflict. Our descendants will either reap the benefits or the consequences of today's mindsets.

Day 13

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt so you would no longer be their slaves. I broke the yoke of slavery from your neck so you can walk with your heads held high. --Lev. 26:13

A yoke is a type of neck brace that was used to control animals and slaves. Egyptians put it on the Israelites. It caused them to walk with their heads hung down, a posture of shame.

We still have yokes today, but the ones used on humans tend to be less visible. For most of the world, traditional slavery has been abolished, therefore we are often unaware of less obvious that oppress us.

Spiritual oppression begins in our minds and spirits and are far more dangerous. It begins with the planting of a thought that we assume is our own and, before we know it, every idea we have adopted about life goes against God's word.

Our enemy uses trauma, accomplishments, and relationships, to plant seeds in our mind of hate, shame, division, bitterness, selfishness, greed, vengeance, victimhood, and destructive dependencies. He knows what's happened to you; he has been studying you since birth. Believe me, he will use it all to weaken you into sinful behaviors. Once you're there, he keeps you stuck with prideful thoughts and defensiveness.

To help them combat oppression, God reminded the Israelites who they were and what He had done for them. He told them to pass these things down through generations so they would know their history and identity.

When He saved you, He gave you freedom over sin and oppression. Your spiritual yoke has been removed, but you have to stop putting It back on. Start walking with your head held high and focus on the one who set you free. Let Him rewire you to think according to your identity.

He loves you and wants you to walk in freedom!

Day 14

For I have often told you, and now say again with tears, that many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction; their god is their stomach; their glory is their shame, and they are focused on earthly things. --Philippians 3:18-19

God's word is very clear that the way we live is either for or against Christ. When we become believers of Christ, our old ways don't end. We must consciously and intentionally surrender them to Jesus, letting His ways become our new patterns. Scripture reminds us that we cannot have two masters. Whatever ungodly things we hold onto will keep us from taking ahold of the things of God.

Philippians tells us the things that make us enemies of the cross of Christ. Earthly hungers will destroy us if we live by them. Those who belong to Him actively choose His ways over worldly pleasures that bring temporary happiness. Instead, we focus will be on heavenly things that last.

Those who refuse surrender are crippled by shame. Shame stems from lies about your identity. When you forget who you are, you become anxious, defensive, angry, perfectionistic and offended. You start looking at everyone else for flaws instead of yourself. Thoughts of self-defeat, fear of failure, and a fragile self-image become status quo.

Shame is never something God puts on us. He convicts us but never shames us. But in order for us to take hold of God's ways, we must believe what He says about us. He says we are loved, wanted, forgiven, redeemed, have purpose, and have been set free. Faith requires that we believe Him over EVERYTHING and EVERYONE else. Otherwise, faith is just something we wish we had.

Shame comes from our enemy and is meant to hold us cower and hide. It must be fought with humility, honesty and vulnerability.

Day 15

What is the source of wars and fights among you? Don't they come from your passions that wage within you? You desire and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and wage war. --James 4: 1-2

It's so easy for us to get hurt or offended isn't it? We are quick to assume the hearts of others. We're often prideful enough to think we know what their problem is and how to fix it. We see our assumptions as "instinct" and our hang-ups as someone else's problem. But what if these things reveal the dangerous state of our hearts?

God uses our issues with one another to reveal our own heart issues. But we subconsciously choose to remain blind until we become tired of the thinking that makes us sick. We can't change anyone else, nor did God task us with it. When we're hyper focused on others, we miss the things in ourselves that need to be addressed. The enemy loves it when you're too busy nitpicking others that you cannot see yourself. And he loves the division that it causes.

Scripture says "Love covers a multitude of sins". We get to choose to avoid offense. When we don't proactively choose to be unoffended, we fall prey to it. In order to avoid offense, we must be aware of and responsible for our triggers. Healthy relationships happen when both sides take responsibility for what's in them. They refuse to be drug around by the emotions of others. That doesn't mean you get to stop caring about others, but that you self-regulate.

God uses other people to expose what is already in us. We can grow or choose to blame everyone else for how we feel. If we're busy finding fault with people, we will miss the good in them. And that hinders us from fulfilling the command to encourage and to love one another.

Every argument begins with someone who was quick to assume or be offended. This, friends, is counter-intuitive to having a peaceful life.

Day 16

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. --
Hebrews 4:7

Hebrews reminds us that not all the Jews entered into God's promise of rest. Those who didn't were hindered by unbelief. Our hearts reveal distrust of God in small ways we often overlook.

The word "Harden" means to stiffen or to make callous. When something is hardened, it cannot move or change. Stiffness of heart is a chosen posture. The proud think they don't need to bend or that they have the truth already in them.

The more you stiffen your heart, the more spiritually blind and deaf you become. Hard-heartedness goes against our very callings as believers. If we do not guard against it, we will transform into rebellious people. Rebellion is caused by unbelief or distrust.

God loves a tender heart. Have you ever wondered why? He wants two-way communication with us. If you cannot hear Him, your relationship with Him will be one-sided. We cannot be obedient without communion with Him. We need to hear God because our lives depend on Him. We cannot be like Him if we won't let Him in.

We can't choose to be hard-hearted towards people and tender-hearted towards God. ANY hardness of heart will impact our relationship with God. When you stop caring about others, you are in dangerous territory - contrary to what the world says.

Hardening your heart is usually an act of numbing or shutting down to protect yourself. But you won't need to do that if you trust God to protect you. You will trust Him if you believe what He said.

Day 17

But they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. --Isaiah 40:31

Do you see something or someone who is broken and rush right in to impose changes you think are necessary? Do you feel the need to fix everything? Do you find yourself in a constant “hustle”?

I have struggled with being a fixer for years. I used to sign up for more than I could do. My eyes are bigger than my calendar and my level of energy. I’m better than I was but I still find myself overwhelmed from taking on things that God doesn’t want me focused-on.

The Lord recently showed me that the promise of rest and renewed strength is found when we wait on, trust in, and surrender to Him. Waiting expectantly for Him is where scripture says true courage is found.

Psalms 27:14 says, “Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!”

We do more harm than good with the phrase “God helps those who help themselves.” We tell people to trust God but then we expect them to fix all the problems in life with their own “hustle”.

We brag about how we’ve built lifestyles of accomplishments and material things - as if we can obtain success on our own. None of it matches up with the Word of God though. Our high-functioning, stress addicted, over-achieving lifestyles are killing us. And we’re causing damage we cannot see because we have become so hyper-focused on doing, chasing, and hustling. More, more, more...

Friend, We must stop chasing money and stuff while calling it “blessed.” He calls us to rest, to let Him fuel our life with true goodness, and to chase things that matter to Him. We won’t experience God or His best blessings if we don’t slow down and let Him show us what we were made for.

Day 18

**Mortals make elaborate plans, but God has the last word. --
Proverbs 16:1**

We're big on planning, aren't we? We make plans for each day, for vacation, for our money, and for everything we want in life. But then, we become angry when our plans are hindered. There is nothing wrong with planning. The problem lies where we do not consult God.

Proverbs 16:3 says, "Put God in charge of your work, then what you've planned will take place."

When we put God in charge, our visions and desires will change to match His. He will be the master of our life. If we maintain our own desires and ask God to make it happen, we're really not putting Him in charge; We're making him our genie.

Proverbs 16 also reminds us, "We plan the way we want to live, but only God makes us able to live it."

To put God in charge is to surrender to His ways. We make space for Him to come in and shape our days, because, in truth, the days are His! Our plans aren't too important for His "interruptions".

He wants us to teach us things and to bless us beyond "stuff". He does it by slowing us down so we can hear and see. Being in a hurry makes us prone to be rude to others, seeing them as "in the way". It reveals a heart determined to accomplish its own way, not God's. We miss so many important things when we get tunnel vision.

Are you feeling rushed or anxious? Remember - if you put God in charge and lay everything else aside, He will reign in your life, and your life will bear the fruit of it. Make room for His presence and He will ease your burdens.

Day 19

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. --Genesis 1:31

It's easy to let the world define us. We can get sucked into lies without realizing it and then we define ourselves by those lies. But, as believers, we are tasked with believing God's every word. If we don't know who we are in God's eyes, we won't live according to His calling.

I know from personal experience how life can wear us out and, as a result, we numb ourselves to what's going on inside. But that's where the danger lies. The enemy loves to wedge himself in where we aren't paying attention and whisper things that go against God's word. The worst part - he disguises those things as our own thoughts. His first choice in lies is to talk you out of your God-given identity.

Satan wants to render you useless in the kingdom. He does it by causing you to doubt God.

The enemy doesn't need to kill off your loved ones to devastate you. All he has to do is whisper lies to ensure you are never a threat to evil.

When God created mankind, He was happy with His work. He called it "very good." And even though sin has ruled mankind since then, He still loves us and wants to protect us. He wants to be part of our lives because He delights in us. He sent Jesus to set us free from the things that oppress us because He cares. He promises us victory if we follow Him through life.

We're created in His image (*Gen. 1:27*), beloved and chosen (*1 John 3:1, Ephes 1:4*), His masterpiece (*Ephes 2:10*), children of God (*John 1:12*), redeemed and forgiven (*Ephes 1:7, 1 Peter 1:18-19*), a new creation in Christ (*2 Cor 5:17*), a temple of the Holy Spirit (*1 Cor 6:19*), more than conquerors (*Romans 8:1, 37*), co-heirs with Christ (*Romans 8:17*).

Do you believe you are these things?

Day 20

When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?” --John 5:6

When Jesus saw the crippled man at the pool of Bethesda, he noticed that this man had been lying by the pool, waiting for someone to help him. This man had been disabled for 38 years. He lay there, hoping for healing but resolved to stay crippled.

Jesus asked, “Do you want to get well? “Sir,” the disabled man answered. “I have no one to put me in the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I’m coming, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

“Get up”, Jesus told him, “Pick up your mat and walk.” Instantly, the man got well, picked up his mat, and started to walk.

We get it in our heads that we have no choice in our brokenness and then we center our life around that “handicap”. We claim our “old man” as our identity. We say we want help but allow the slightest resistance to excuse us from getting up. We settle for a place next to the pool, but we never make much effort to get in the water.

Can you relate? Do you find yourself hoping for healing in some area of life but resolve to keep living the way you are?

When God calls us to healing, He also calls us to some responsibility. When Jesus asks you, “Do you want to get well?”, he wants to know if you’re willing to commit to His ways and believe Him for the rest. Are you willing to remain hopeful when things don’t happen on your time?

Day 21

In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. --Judges 21:25

As humans, we tend to automatically believe what pops in our head or things that make us feel better. Most of our traditions and cultures are filled with man's biases that get passed down from generation to generation. We're expected to follow tradition over what God commanded.

Anytime we do what we think is best, we make a mess. Our minds don't work like God's and we cannot know what is truly "right" without consulting Him. That's why scripture tells us to "take every thought captive" because, if we aren't careful, we can build entire belief systems around thinking that does not agree with God (AKA lies).

Truth is learned when we intentionally seek God and expose our minds to His word. We have His Holy Spirit to help us discern what we ought to do. But we have to intentionally quiet the noise around us to hear from God. We must make room and wait for Him if we really want to do things His way.

The Bible says that those who expose themselves God's word, seek His ways, and allow their minds to be renewed are like a tree who has been made to work for its water, digging deep underground for a strong foundation. But people who do what is right in their own eyes are like a tree that has taken the easy path and its roots are shallow. When the storms come along, the tree with shallow roots is destroyed.

Human logic helps us to some extent, but it is quite limited when compared to God. God's truth will save our souls- logic cannot do that! We need His truth to endure the storms that are sure to come.

Day 22

Joseph went after and his brothers and found them near Dothan. But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. --Gen. 37:17-18

Offense starts with a seemingly small moment where uncaptured thoughts take root- the presence of jealousy, anger or vengeance. It happens when we aren't tuned-in to what's going on inside of us. Offense grows and pulls our focus from right to wrong. It's a trap meant to steer us from God and to cause division and strife.

"It will be just a hint of distortion. The smallest amount. But a slight and seemingly insignificant amount of skewed thought will take root. And grow beyond what we can even imagine." Lysa TerKeurst

All twelve tribes, the whole nation of Israel, were enslaved because offense was allowed to take root. It all started with Joseph's brothers being jealous of him. We can argue that they had reason to, but God never gave us exemptions for what He commanded us to do. Our feelings don't make us evil. It's what we do with them that determines our character.

Many of you know the story, that God made Joseph successful despite what his brothers did to him. He placed Joseph in a position of favor to the Pharaoh and then commanded Joseph to begin storing food. During the famine, Joseph's brothers came to Egypt for help and Joseph ended up making provision for them.

Sometimes we don't live long enough to see the fruit of our sin, and it impacts future generations instead. In this case, Jacob's tribes settled in Egypt during the famine, and the generations that followed became Egypt's slaves.

Offense might seem like a small thing, but it negatively changes your heart. It sets you on a path where you do harm towards others. It hardens your heart from hearing God.

Day 23

Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive. —Colossians 3:13

Forgiveness isn't a request, it's a command. I dare to say unforgiveness is the most common form of destruction in our relationships. I have watched it tear apart families, divide spouses, oppress the unforgiver, and cripple the unforgiven. I have witnessed people literally lose their sanity over a grudge.

When you harbor unforgiveness, you open the door for the enemy to step into every aspect of your life. Your disobedience to God highlights your distrust of Him to take care of you. There is no uninterrupted peace and joy where there is no trust for God.

“And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.” Mark 11:25

Notice how scripture doesn't mention your feelings. Forgiveness isn't a feeling; it's a choice. You must choose it until your feelings catch up, and even if they never do. Forgiving someone is a decision not to pass judgment against the offender. Unless you see your own need for forgiveness, you'll feel entitled to that grudge.

It takes faith in God to forgive those who hurt you. Justice belongs to God, and we are required to live that out. When you forgive someone, you commit to seeing them as a person separate from their mistakes.

Forgiveness is a gift to the receiver and to the forgiver because it speeds us into the freedom Christ has for us. We can't walk like a free person if we're unwilling to trust and obey God.

Day 24

Don't fear those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. —Matthew 10:28

We will either pass our fear of man or our fear of God down to our kids. Since the fear of God is key to freedom, fearing mankind is the most passed-down form of oppression.

We say we don't care about what people think, but we really do. We care about how we present ourselves to them, whether we have the things they do, what they say about us, whether they will invite us to their parties, and who likes us. And then, we teach our kids to bow to social "rules" just to impress other people.

God called each of the prophets to step outside their comfort zones. Ezekiel shaved his head and cooked with dung. Hosea was called to marry a prostitute and father children that were not his own. Isaiah walked naked for 3 years. Jeremiah wore a yoke. Imagine how the people mocked them.

David once danced in the streets wearing just his underwear while worshipping God. His own wife despised him for it. Yet, many people won't raise their hands to God for fear of what other people think.

God didn't call us to impress people, but to love them. We cannot properly love anyone if we don't love God more. Anything that keeps us from serving, praising and obeying God is idolatry. God will not settle for second place.

Day 25

The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate. –Proverbs 8:13

Many people believe that the fear of God means to feel terror and fear His judgment. That perspective doesn't lend towards a safe relationship with Him though. The way we view Him shows up in the type of relationship we have with Him. Healthy relationships are formed with trust.

Fearing God means to have a sense of reverence and humility, a deep respect for God's power and authority. A biblical fear of God is motivated by a desire to please and honor Him—not from obligation.

When we have a healthy fear of God, we desire to obey, serve, and honor God. We spend time with Him and we become more like Him. The more time we spend with Him, the more we adopt his way of thinking.

God loves us and He wants us to love Him. You cannot love God AND sin. He doesn't force himself or His ways on us, but He does warn us - going the other way will destroy your life and your relationship with God.

How do you view God? Do you see him as that parent who had high expectations but no love? Or do you know His love carries more weight than any failure ever? He isn't a God of performance - He wants your heart. He wants to change your mind, starting with how you see Him.

Day 26

As a dog returns to his vomit, so a fool returns to his foolishness.
--Proverbs 26:11

Habits are hard to break. Mindset changing is even harder. When we finally see negative patterns in ourselves, we often react by blaming someone else. We want change but we don't want to be the one to change.

What hinders us is how we see ourselves versus how we really behave. The more fragile an ego, the more hopeless a person feels when it's time to change. But we signed up for change when we decided to follow Jesus. Throughout our walk with God, He calls out things that we need to surrender, and we must make a choice of which matters more - our patterns or Him.

If we hold onto things that He calls us to let go of, we make a sub-conscious choice to serve ourselves, not Jesus. We basically choose to live in service to ourselves. Anything we serve other than God is idolatry. Idolatry, like any other sin, hinders our walk with God. It is chosen oppression.

We will always need change while in these human bodies. There is no point at which we can stop changing and learning. Not even when we're old. The call to humility is to help us stay moldable. But pride can be sneaky. It shows up quietly, in what feels like good self-esteem and in the ways we compare ourselves to others. It whispers lies that make us complacent in our journey with Jesus.

Change requires humility and faith. You'll never see those things that bind you unless God puts His finger on them. And you cannot change them on your own- but you can choose to surrender them to Him.

The question therein lies, what do you love more - your habits or Jesus?

Day 27

Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior, and
my God. --Psalms 42:11

Hope and faith are deeply intertwined. You cannot have one without the other. True faith in God will always leave you hope-filled. Trusting God is not a suggestion, it's a command for those who truly want to serve God, not just partake in His blessings.

When you feel hopeless, pray. When you worry, talk to God about it. When you are struggling, run to God before you talk to anyone else about it. This was an absolute game-changer for my walk with God. He wants to be the One you run to in all circumstances.

People can only listen and offer advice. But God cares about you more than any human could. And He will leave you with peace as a result of your trust. Your relationship with Him will sustain you.

There is nothing too big or small for God. Let everything in life drive you to Him, who will restore your strength and give you hope - over and over. Remember that all troubles for the believer are temporary. We can have victory in the here and now by staying close to Jesus no matter what season we're in.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-7 says:*For every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak...*

Day 28

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; in all your ways know Him, and He will make your paths straight. Don't be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil. This will be healing for your body and strengthening for your bones. –Proverbs 3:5-8

If our feelings control our actions, it is because we have abdicated our responsibility to exercise discipline and self-control. God never told us to ignore our feelings. We are called instead to be led by the Holy Spirit while having our eyes open to what's going on in our own hearts.

God feels things too. We were created in His image, so we inherit that from Him. Emotions, therefore, are not a bad thing. Through them, we experience joy and humor, have fun and enjoy those we love. People who suppress their emotions don't just shut out the bad; They numb their feelings of good experiences too.

Our feelings are meant to show us what's going on in our hearts. Instead, we tend to deflect and treat them like a telescope into the heart of others. We think that what we feel is somehow intuition into someone else's heart - but that's not biblical.

A fool gives vent to his anger, but a wise person holds it in check. -Proverbs 29:11

We can use our feelings properly and deal with our own hearts before God, or we can misuse them and make a mess of our relationships. Ignoring them also leads to sin. Whatever we don't deal with leads us into sin. We're told in scripture to “Watch yourselves.”

But thank God that, although you used to be slaves of sin, you obeyed from the heart that pattern of teaching to which you were handed over, and having been set free from sin, you became enslaved to righteousness. --Romans 6:17-18

Day 29

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God. —Matthew 5:9

Peacemaking is often mistaken for peacekeeping. Peacekeeping is going along with sins of man for a false sense of peace. It is rug-sweeping. You'll see this a lot in families where the family keeps quiet to sins of someone. They mean well but their silence enables sin just to "keep the peace". This creates lifelong people-pleasers.

We were not called to be peacekeepers. A wise person knows that where there is sin and pain, there is no peace anyway. Instead of pretending for the sake of another's ego, we do the harder, most loving thing by confronting the behavior. It takes courage to address sin and things that hurt the relationship. It takes none at all to turn a blind eye and bury your head in the sand.

Proverbs 27:17 says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."

Matthew 18:15 says, "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen, you have won them over."

In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus tells us to prioritize reconciliation over worship. *"So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First, be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."*

It's a hard thing to do! We were not called to change a person's heart but be humble and gently attempt to restore him or her. God tells us throughout His word that relationships are important. We honor Him when we do right by one another. Godly love is the best way we can serve each other.

Day 30

Each one should carry their own load. –Galatians 6:5

Contrary to growing popularity, the mindset of throwing people away is not God's will for us. Hear me out.

God is the creator of boundaries. He established order with his law and He gives us personal responsibility. He put us in charge of our minds, reminds us to use godly speech, provides relationship guidelines and calls us to honor Him, and one another. He also outlines the blueprint for marriage.

Proverbs 4:23 says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”

We must be careful what and who we expose ourselves to because every bit of it is either being used to bring us closer to Him or to take us further away. EVERYTHING matters - not just people, but also movies, books, music, news, and what we do with our time and money. We ought to take seriously everything we subject ourselves to.

But that doesn't mean it's okay to write people out of our lives so quickly. If you know God, you know how important it is to Him that we be careful with the hearts of people.

Sometimes we need distance. And some of the time that distance needs to be permanent. But if God has changed us, we should have the same hope for others. Therefore, we cannot make decisions using logic if we want to follow the Holy Spirit.

My former pastor once advised me to handle a hard relationship like this: set some space, protect the good in your heart, don't try to manipulate the other to change, and don't make this a permanent decision. He told me to leave room for change “as the Holy Spirit moves”.

God cares about us and those who hurt us. But He also cares when we hurt others. Our relationships should always honor Him. We should never manipulate people and call it God's work.

Dear Friend,

Thank you for reading along. God loves a heart that seeks to draw near to Him. Don't let your seeking stop here. You've come this far! Make it a daily habit to seek Him and fruit is sure to come!

I am rooting for you. Most importantly, the Lord is cheering you on.

Love,

Jenn