

Use this devotion guide each night — on your own, with a friend, or with your family. Follow the five FAITH5 steps: **Share, Read, Talk, Pray, and Bless.**

PS — Adopt a “grandparent” type, some teens, and a family with young children into your world every week at church. Add them to your thoughts and prayers every night. You will be richer for it!

DEVOTION ONE

Into the Wilderness

1 SHARE

Your highs & lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

“And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.”

— Mark 1:12

3 TALK

Most people today live their lives bombarded by noise. From the first frantic moments when the radio alarm goes off in the morning to those exhausted moments before drifting off to sleep with their headset on, there is little room for silence. Music plays in your head from dawn to dark. TVs blare. Smart phones beep and ring. Advertising jumps out at you from billboards. Noise. You run from a house of noise to the car where a radio is blasting. You step from the car to a crowded workplace. Noise. Coworkers are talking. The cafe where you buy your latte is buzzing. Noise. You walk from space to noisy space. In every hallway, elevator, and room, you face the same assault on your senses—the same deafening Muzak. Noise. In such a world, where is there a moment for the still, small voice of God to break through? Where is there the opportunity to be alone with your beating heart? Where is there a chance to know the silence that centers? Is it planned regularly on your schedule? Or do you simply run from place to place at an ever-increasing pace, avoiding the quiet, healing medicine that your soul so desperately needs?

Jesus escaped into the wilderness before he began his amazing work. Immediately after his baptism, our Lord stepped into the silence of the wilderness. From the sacred space of that lonely place, he was tested, tempted, and tempered. He took the time to meet with the silence. Then he was ready for the world.

How can you know your calling if you never know the silence? How can you find who you are if you live as a stranger to the still? Maybe it is time for you to slow down, turn it all off, and step into the wilderness.

Learn to know the silence and you may begin to know yourself.

Questions:

1. Where is your favorite silent space? How often do you get there? Write about it.

2. What can you do to schedule some silence into the noise of your world?
3. What is God's voice saying to you in the Bible reading? In the quotation?

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for the sound of silence.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for the discovery that comes with silence. Bring him your highs.

Ask:

Ask the Spirit to help you schedule silence. Bring your lows to God.

5 BLESS

Bless one another with the sign of the cross and say:

"May you follow the path of Jesus."

"You have to leave the city of your comfort and go into the wilderness of your intuition. What you'll discover will be wonderful—you'll discover yourself."

— Alan Alda

DEVOTION TWO

Forty Days

1 SHARE

Your highs & lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

"He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him."

— Mark 1:13

3 TALK

Have you ever been camping in the wilderness? When you hear the word wilderness, what do you see? Do you picture a rocky desert with cactus, scorpions, and burning sands? Do you imagine rugged mountains, gnarled pine trees clinging to rocky hillsides, and howling winds? Is your vision of a wilderness more urban? Do you see graffiti on crack houses, boarded-up tenement apartments, and ragged homeless people sleeping in cardboard shacks? Is wilderness a place to you, or is it more a state of mind? There is a wilderness of place filled with danger and isolation, but there is also a wilderness of the soul and mind. One can threaten your physical body, but the other is far more dangerous. It can threaten your eternity.

When Jesus went into the wilderness, he faced both physical and spiritual dangers. Hunger, thirst, and wild animals were bad enough, but Satan's temptations were even worse. Through it all, he held on to his call from God, and when Satan left him, God sent angels to minister to him.

Where do you turn when you are weary? Where do you run when temptations come, Satan entices, and the wild beasts of the world are nipping at your heels? You have a friend who has faced it all before and won. In his name and in his power, you don't have to face all this alone.

His name is Jesus. He's ready and waiting to face the wilderness with you.

Questions:

1. Write about a time when you felt like you were in the "wilderness" recently.
2. Who are some of your angels? Who are messengers from God who help you when you face the wilderness?
3. What is God's voice saying to you in the Bible reading? In the quotation?

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for promising to go with you through the wilderness of life.

Thank:

Thank Jesus specifically for the “angels” you mentioned in #2 above. Bring your highs to him.

Ask:

Ask the Spirit to help you be an “angel” (messenger) of God for someone in the wilderness tomorrow. Bring your lows to God and close in Jesus’ name.

5 BLESS

Bless one another with the sign of the cross and say:

“May you follow the path of Jesus.”

“Alone, all alone. Nobody, but nobody can make it out here alone.”

— Maya Angelou

DEVOTION THREE

God's Spell

1 SHARE

Your highs & lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

"Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God..."

— Mark 1:14

3 TALK

The word Gospel comes from the Old English "gōdspel"—literally "good news" (gōd meaning good, spel meaning tidings or story). It's often affectionately (if not quite accurately) explained as "God's Spell," and in a way the name still fits: God's good news really does work like magic in a life. The Christian Gospel is not a set of words, liturgies, or incantations. God's special magic that sets the world free is none other than Jesus himself. Jesus didn't come simply to deliver a message about freedom from sin, death, and the power of the devil. Jesus came to deliver that freedom. He didn't come to proclaim a message from God. His life, death, and resurrection were the message.

This "magic spell" of God does not come primarily in a book, although The Book reveals him. It does not come by going through the motions of a set of rituals, although the rituals of the church may bring you closer to him. The "magic" isn't a spell that comes through the repetition of special prayers, hymns, or chants, although prayers and liturgies can honor and reveal him.

Marshall McLuhan once said, "The medium is the message." It could not be more true than with Jesus. Jesus didn't come to talk about God's love. Jesus brought God's love in flesh to a world enslaved by sin and death. It is not following the ritual or practices of this teacher that sets you free. It is taking the message to heart—taking Christ's presence within—that changes and transforms everything.

The gospel is not the story of Jesus. The gospel is Jesus.

Questions:

1. Write about a time when you felt a need to be freed from a problem. Did you find the freedom? How was Christ a part of it?
2. What does the last sentence in the devotional thought above mean to you?
3. What is God's voice saying to you in the Bible reading? In the quotation?

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for the magic that sets the world free.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for being God's magic in flesh. Bring your family highs to Him.

Ask:

Ask the Holy Spirit to bring Christ from your head to your heart. Ask for power in sharing Jesus with your friends. Bring your family lows to God in prayer.

5 BLESS

Bless one another with the sign of the cross and say:

"May you follow the path of Jesus."

"The medium is the message."

— Marshall McLuhan

DEVOTION FOUR

The Kingdom Is Near

1 SHARE

Your highs & lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near..."

— Mark 1:15

3 TALK

When Jesus came into the world, most people weren't looking for what they found in him. Here are some thoughts on what they expected, what they got, and what he brought:

They were looking for the kingdom of God to appear. What they got was a mystical carpenter.

They were looking for the anointed Messiah. What they got was a crown of thorns.

They were looking for a powerful king. What they got was a suffering servant.

They were looking for a mighty liberator to crush the Romans. What they got was a teacher who told them to put away their swords.

They were looking for the glory of Jerusalem to be restored. What they got was an empty tomb.

They were looking for the kingdom of God to appear. It did, but they didn't see it because they were looking with eyes. And he brought it only to hearts.

Questions:

1. What do most people look for in a dating relationship? What are the qualities you would wish to find?
2. How was Jesus less than what the people were expecting? How was he more?
3. What is God's voice saying to you in the Bible reading? In the quotation?

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise* / *Thank* / *Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for sending a surprise in Jesus.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for being more than an earthly ruler. Bring your highs to him.

Ask:

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you see Christ's entrances to the heart, through the heart. Bring your lows to God in prayer. Mark your heart with the sign of the cross and close in Jesus' name.

5 BLESS

Bless one another with the sign of the cross and say:

"May you follow the path of Jesus."

"We need never shout across the spaces to an absent God. God is nearer than our own soul, closer than our most secret thoughts."

— A. W. Tozer

DEVOTION FIVE

Repent and Believe

1 SHARE

Your highs & lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

"...repent, and believe in the good news."

— Mark 1:15b

3 TALK

"I'm sorry," said Ginny as she fingered the ski-lift tickets and prepared to lie to her parents. "I'm going to be overbooked with work over Easter and I can't make it home."

"I'm so sorry," said Warren as he stood in the doorway of his soon-to-be ex-girlfriend's apartment. "It wasn't really a 'date.' My coworker and I just went out for dinner and a movie...and a drive in the moonlight."

"I'm really sorry," said the car thief standing before the judge. "I'll never do it again." He wasn't really sorry about stealing the car. He was mostly sorry that he had stopped for gas instead of continuing on out of town.

What does it mean to repent? Literally, the Greek word for repentance, *metanoia*, means to change your mind (*meta*=change, *noia*=mind). True repentance has very little to do with the words "I'm sorry." It has much more to do with the actions that follow the words.

When Jesus began his ministry, he tied repentance and faith together in the same breath. People might repent with their lips, but they can only believe with their hearts. If a life isn't changed by repentance, is the repentance real? If a life isn't transformed by the faith one claims, is the faith real?

Words and actions: they must go together. That's what integrity is all about.

Questions:

1. How can you tell when someone is sorry for something he or she has done?
2. Write about a time when you were truly sorry for hurting someone. How did your words and actions show your sorrow? Relate this to faith and repentance.
3. What is God's voice saying to you in the Bible reading? In the quotation?

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for offering forgiveness in Christ.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for dying to give you life. Bring your highs to him.

Ask:

Ask the Holy Spirit to bring you to true repentance. Bring your lows to God in prayer. Bless yourself with the sign of the cross and close in Jesus' name.

5 BLESS

Bless one another with the sign of the cross and say:

"May you follow the path of Jesus."

"True repentance has a double aspect. It looks upon things past with a weeping eye, and upon the future with a watchful eye."

— Unknown

DEVOTION SIX

Hearing the Hard Truth

1 SHARE

Your highs & lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

"Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all these things openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him."

— Mark 8:31-32

3 TALK

Peter had a hearing problem. He only heard what he wanted to hear.

The disciples had just come from the village of Caesarea Philippi where Peter proclaimed to all that Jesus was the Messiah—God's holy, chosen Savior. This was a high and powerful moment for the brash fisherman from Galilee. Although Jesus had ordered them all to remain silent about this little secret, he didn't say it wasn't all true. Think of the joy the disciples must have felt! Their friend, teacher, and master was not simply a famous rabbi and healer. He was the one whom the prophets of old had foretold! This was God's chosen one, the Savior of Israel. Surely, Jesus would soon take the throne, throw the occupying Romans out of the country, and usher in a kingdom that would rival David and Solomon. This was His time, His moment! They, his friends, would certainly be elevated to key roles in the coming government. After all, they were his friends.

At this very moment, with visions of revolution and power in their minds, Jesus immediately crushed their delusions with talk about suffering and death. This was not on their political agenda. You can hardly blame Peter for not wanting to hear such talk coming from the lips of his new king. If Jesus' words were true, everything the disciples had hoped for, worked for, and left their families for would end in suffering, shame, and death. The cross would be his throne.

One can hardly blame him for telling Jesus off. Wouldn't you?

God's Word and will are sometimes very hard to hear. Do you hear it today?

Questions:

1. Write about a time when someone didn't want to hear something you had to say.
2. Write about a time when you didn't want to hear a hard truth. What happened?
3. What is God's voice saying to you in the Bible reading? In the quotation?

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for the marvelous, difficult, amazing plan that brought Jesus to die.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for going to the cross to free you from sin. Bring your highs to him.

Ask:

Ask the Holy Spirit for ears to hear the hard truth. Bring your lows to God.

5 BLESS

Bless one another with the sign of the cross and say:

"May you follow the path of Jesus."

"I don't want to know the truth. I've already made up my mind!"

— Unknown

DEVOTION SEVEN

Get Behind Me, Satan!

1 SHARE

Your highs & lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

"But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'"

— Mark 8:33

3 TALK

Do you ever get mixed messages from your friends, dates, or coworkers? Peter must have felt that way in today's text. One minute Jesus was praising him, the next minute he was calling him Satan. The disciples had been walking through Caesarea Philippi, one of the most beautiful and luxurious areas of Palestine. This ancient city sat high on a terrace overlooking the fertile Jordan River valley and was filled with impressive buildings, temples, and statues to pagan gods. Jesus asked, "Who do people say I am?" (Mark 8:27) when bold, bumbling Peter blurted out, "You are the Messiah!" With these words, Peter said what they all were thinking and hoping. The "Messiah" (in Greek, Christ) was the Hebrew word for God's anointed king. If Jesus was the Messiah, then they would all soon be part of God's mighty acts in restoring Israel to greatness. Jesus would usher in an everlasting kingdom, and they would help him rule.

When Jesus started talking about suffering and death, Peter blurted out again. This time he tried to tell his Lord to dispense with the negative language. It wasn't on his agenda. He wanted life, power, and riches out of his association with this amazing rabbi. He wanted Jesus on his own terms—not on God's terms. Now it was Jesus' turn to set the agenda straight. Anything or anyone who tried to get in the way of God's plans was Satan—a word meaning "adversary" or "the one opposed to God." Anyone attempting to turn God's plan into a personal power trip or financial gain was setting his sights too low. The disciples had earthly power on their minds. Jesus had eternal life and salvation for the world on his. They wanted something small and now for themselves. Jesus wanted nothing less than forever.

Questions:

1. Write about the last time someone scolded you. What were the circumstances?
2. What is the difference between "human things" and "divine things"?
3. What is God's voice saying to you in the Bible reading? In the quotation?

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for creating people with the capacity to comprehend the divine.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for the ability to look beyond the “here and now” and the power to focus on things that last.
Bring your highs to him.

Ask:

Ask the Spirit to help order your priorities. Bring your lows to God.

5 BLESS

Bless one another with the sign of the cross and say:

“May you follow the path of Jesus.”

“Aim at heaven and you get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither.”

— C. S. Lewis

DEVOTION EIGHT

Gaining and Losing the World

1 SHARE

Your highs & lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

"He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.'"

— Mark 8:34-35

3 TALK

When the Marines tell you they want a few good men/women, they don't promise a rose garden. They say it'll be the toughest job you'll ever love. They make no illusions about how tough the training will be, but they do promise college tuition, skills training, a decent wage, and benefits.

Imagine how difficult their recruiting efforts would be if their slogan was, "Join the Marines. Face humiliating and tortuous training, lose everything dear to you, watch your buddies fall one by one around you, then die an excruciating death." When Jesus used words like denial and cross, that was exactly the message he was giving his followers. The cross symbolized naked humiliation, excruciating suffering, and death. Why would anyone stay with him on a road like that?

There is a haunting line in William Percy's hymn, "They Cast Their Nets": "The peace of God, it is no peace, But strife closed in the sod. Yet, let us pray for but one thing: The marv'lous peace of God. The marv'lous peace of God."

Why would you follow Jesus to death? Because only Jesus can take you through death. Why would you accept such a radical call to discipleship? Because the grave is not the end. If you believe in forever, life is a blip on the screen, a drop in an infinite ocean, a grain of sand in an endless desert. If you believe in forever, death is not the end. Death is a door. Jesus holds the key.

No. Jesus is the key. Knowing him, following him, is all that matters.

Questions:

1. Think about death and the pain of death. Which frightens you the most?
2. How is the experience of death like the pain of childbirth?
3. What is God's voice saying to you in the Bible reading? In the quotation?

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for the promise of eternity.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for facing the cross for you. Bring your highs to him.

Ask:

Ask the Spirit to help you follow Christ's radical call. Bring your lows to God.

5 BLESS

Bless one another with the sign of the cross and say:

"May you follow the path of Jesus."

"When our Lord Jesus bids us to come and follow Him, He bids us to come and die."

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer

DEVOTION NINE

Forfeiting Life

1 SHARE

Your highs & lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

"For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?"

— Mark 8:36-37

3 TALK

The Lusitania was sinking. A German torpedo had struck the luxury liner, and the unthinkable was happening fast: in less than twenty minutes, she would be gone. People ran frantically from deck to deck to grab their valuables and find a lifeboat. Crew members shouted over the chaos: "Women and children to the lifeboats!"

In the panic, two women ran into their cabins to rescue what they could of their valuables. One fumbled to open her cabin safe. She pulled out box after box of jewelry, filled her pockets with diamonds, and wound heavy golden chains about her neck. The other woman started doing the same, then paused. A bowl of fruit sat atop her bureau. She dropped the jewels to the floor and filled her pockets with oranges before dashing out. That night one woman entered the near-freezing waters and sunk to the bottom under the weight of her precious jewels. The other swam to a distant boat with food that would keep her alive.

Are you storing up the right stuff?

Questions:

1. If your house caught on fire, and you only had time to grab three things as you ran out, what would you take? Why?
2. If someone was to look at your home, lifestyle, and calendar, would that person say you were storing up the right stuff? If not, what changes can you begin to make in your home? Your lifestyle? Your schedule? Write about it in your journal.
3. What is God's voice saying to you in the Bible reading? In the quotation?

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for the gift of eternal life.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for helping you keep your priorities straight. Bring your highs to him in thanks.

Ask:

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you organize your home, your lifestyle, and your schedule to reflect godly priorities. Bring your lows to God in prayer and close in Jesus' name. Mark yourself with the sign of the cross.

5 BLESS

Bless one another with the sign of the cross and say:

"May you follow the path of Jesus."

"You can't have it all. Where would you put it?"

— Anonymous

DEVOTION TEN

Shame and Acknowledgment

1 SHARE

Your highs & lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

“Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

— Mark 8:38

3 TALK

Can you remember how your parents used to embarrass you in front of your friends? Were you ever ashamed of how they dressed, spoke, or acted? Here’s a parable about shame and love. See if you can see yourself and God in it:

“Drop me off a block from school,” said the teen.

“I can take you to the door,” objected her father.

“No, that’s all right. Just drop me here.”

The father pulled over to the curb. “It’s cold. I can take you closer.”

“Just let me out!” The girl didn’t want her friends to see the old car her father was driving. He had lost his job, and they had to downsize. She was ashamed of their car. She didn’t want her friends to see her father either. Besides, he might do something like kiss her or hug her in front of them. Talk about embarrassing!

“I love you,” said the father as she stepped from the car.

“I know,” said the teen. “Just don’t say stuff like that in front of my friends.”

The father blew his daughter a kiss as she rolled her eyes. Then the man who had cared for her since she was a baby—who had provided her with clothing to keep her warm, food to help her grow, braces for her crooked teeth, and a decent place to live—drove silently away.

Hurt.

Questions:

1. Write about a time when your parent embarrassed you. Did that parent know how you felt? Did that event have any long-term effects on your relationship?
2. Compare and contrast the story above to your relationship with God.
3. What is God’s voice saying to you in the Bible reading? In the quotation?

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for giving, even when you don't deserve it.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for continuing to love you, even when you don't acknowledge him before others. Bring your highs to him.

Ask:

Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the courage to witness to the love of Christ among your family, friends, and coworkers. Bring your lows to God.

5 BLESS

Bless one another with the sign of the cross and say:

"May you follow the path of Jesus."

"The Gospel is not presented to mankind as an argument about religious principles. Nor is it offered as a philosophy of life. Christianity is a witness to certain facts—to events that have happened, to hopes that have been fulfilled, to realities that have been experienced, to a Person who has lived and died and been raised from the dead to reign for ever."

— Massey H. Shepherd, Jr.