

Learn how to walk in humility  
before God and others

part of the



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# Overcoming Pride

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## Index of abbreviations

All scripture references are from the King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

AMP Amplified Bible • NIV New International Version • NAS New American Standard

NKJ New King James Version • NCV New Century Version • TM The Message • TLB The Living Bible

NRS New Revised Standard Version • PHPS Phillips N.T. in Modern English

• GWT God's Word Translation • TEV Today's English Version • NEB New English Bible

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# Welcome

## to Overcoming Pride

‘Pride has been the stumbling block of angels, kings and countless others’

**E**ach and every heart is familiar with pride. We might be proud of where we come from. We are proud of our children. We take pride in celebrating the achievements of those we love. But pride has a dark side too. It can affect our actions and attitudes in a negative way, poisoning our relationships with God and with others.

None of us is immune to these effects – and if pride is presenting you with challenges at the moment, then you are in very good company. The Bible is quick to offer us the reassurance that pride is both a universal and historical issue. It has been the stumbling block of angels (e.g. Isaiah 14:11–15), kings (1 Kings 1:5) and countless others, from the earliest days of creation (Genesis 3) through to today.

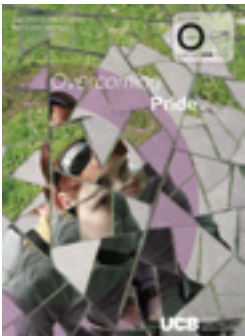
In the Bible, pride is a problem – and you might be surprised by just how negative the scriptures are about it. But when we realise that pride is rooted in our sinful struggle for independence from God and a desire to see ourselves glorified rather than Him, it is not so shocking to learn that He feels strongly about it (for instance, read Proverbs 8:13).

Coming face to face with the effects of pride in ourselves – whether inflated views of our own importance or stubborn attitudes – will not be a nice process but it’s not something that any of us can afford to avoid. Overcoming pride is far more than simply being moved towards modesty. It is a journey towards humility, which is at the core of our salvation and key to a great life.

When we seek humility, God promises that He will hear us (e.g. Psalm 55:19), forgive us (2Chronicles 7:14) and lead us in His ways (Psalms 25:9). In humility, we identify with and become like Jesus, who gave up heaven’s riches in order to identify and become like us. It is, therefore, the start of a holy journey into the heart of the Gospel.

**The *Overcoming* Series is designed to help people like you find God’s help in dealing with the challenges that face us all.**

Contained in these little booklets are big truths from God’s Word, guidance on how to pray, and practical suggestions for change. Turn over to begin reading a selection of articles and testimonies written by people who understand what you’re going through and long to help you overcome. Then, starting on page 16, there are 28 readings from Bob Gass, author of *The Word For Today*, to help you practice new thought patterns and habits day by day for a month. As the Bible says, ‘He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world’ (1 John 4:4). With the help of our great God, you can overcome any challenge you face.



Discover the other titles in the *Overcoming* Series on page 35

# Pride -

## Where do I start?

Humility is not so much the opposite of pride, but the antidote to it

**P**ride – is it a vice or a virtue? The world is not sure. Recent university research concluded that pride *'is quite undeserving of its negative reputation [and has] important implications for leadership'* and called it *'the fuel that drives individuals to greatness'*. Others are less positive, reminding us that pride famously holds a place among the seven deadly sins.

Then there is humility. *'Low in rank, importance, status or quality'*, the dictionary says – hardly an attractive mix. Yet in 2012, Time magazine described humility as *'a quiet, under-appreciated strength'*. Reporting on research that suggested strong links between humility and helping others, the article went on to highlight studies that found a humble disposition was linked to charitable giving, generous behaviour and compassion.

Thankfully, the Bible is refreshingly clear, offering us the right perspective on pride and a true understanding of humility.

We can trace the roots of pride right back to satan himself (Isaiah 14:11–15). Once an angel, his desire was that the glory belonging to God alone should be his, but for this he was punished severely and thrown down from the heavenly heights into the fiery depths. Still pulsing with pride, creation had barely begun before satan tempted us also towards equality with God (Genesis 3), and the result had eternal consequences. Sin was born into a perfect world. Because of this, pride is often referred to as the root, or essence, of all other sin. In his book *Humility: True Greatness*, C.J. Mahaney defines it in this way: *'Pride is when sinful human*

**'True humility is a return to a relationship of unceasing, absolute, universal dependence on God'**

*beings aspire to the status and position of God and refuse to acknowledge their dependence on him.'*

So humility is not so much the opposite of pride, but the antidote to it. Humility acknowledges *'the truth about ourselves, that as creatures we depend on our Creator's power and as sinners, on our Saviour's grace'* (Mahaney). Yet without grasping the seriousness of pride and recognising our sin, we may never truly desire it. True humility is a return to a relationship of unceasing, absolute, universal dependence on God and our rightful position before Him in all His glory. Humility is at the very heart of our salvation.

Knowing where we are headed is important at the start on any journey and clarity on why we first set out can really sustain us when the going gets tough. If *'Pride is our greatest enemy and humility our greatest friend'* (Andrew Murray) then travelling away from one and towards the other is our journey's purpose. Pride will walk with us all gladly – but how many of us are ready to make the walk home to humility?

*(Sources: Psychological Science (journal), 2009; psychologytoday.com, Time magazine 27 April 2012; The Journal of Positive Psychology, 2012: Humility: True Greatness. By C.J. Mahaney, Humility by Andrew Murray)*

# Step by step

Your guide to overcoming pride with God's help

CJ Mahaney writes, 'The real issue here is not if pride exists in your heart; it's where pride exists'

## 1. Lift the Lid on Pride

*'...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' Romans 3:23 NIV*

**W**e don't need to 'try' with pride – it's a product of our default human setting, 'sin'.

In the Garden of Eden when satan tempted us into sin, he used the 'shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made', the serpent (Genesis 3:1 NLT). It is no surprise then, that pride can be deceptive (Obadiah 1:3 NIV). Easily cultivated through a variety of everyday situations, it can take root while we are unaware, and disguise itself as we seek to justify our feelings. Unless we are acutely aware of pride within us, how we will begin to address it? This is why

overcoming pride leads us into the heart of the gospel: it begins by recognising our sin.

CJ Mahaney writes, 'The real issue here is not if pride exists in your heart; it's where pride exists and how pride is being expressed in your life.' So if you're not sure where your pride is hidden, or if it has affected you at all, be cautious of thinking 'more highly of yourself than you ought' (Romans 12:3 NIV). Charles Spurgeon once said that the 'true throne of pride is the heart.' If you are not sure where pride could be hiding in your life, try checking there first.

**TRY...**



God is well able to reveal hidden areas of sin in our lives. Pray, asking Him to 'lift the lid' on pride in your life.



## 2. A Serious Situation

*‘I hate pride and arrogance’ Proverbs 8:13 NIV*

**If we are able to recognise pride in our lives, then we need also to understand the seriousness of our condition.** John Stott reminds us that pride ‘is the essence of all sin ... it is the stubborn refusal to let God be God, with the corresponding ambition to take his place.’

Our second step on the journey towards humility is to allow biblical truths about pride to affect our heart. The Bible says, ‘The Lord detests the proud; they will surely be punished’ (Proverbs 16:5 NLT). When it comes to pride, God’s honesty with us is very sobering. Yet it is by


grace that he chooses not to hide his feelings from us, and by His mercy that He reaches out to us in our sinful state (Romans 5:8 NIV).

Understanding God’s position on pride is important: He cannot tolerate it and He did not create you to harbour it. But there is good news: rescue, redemption and restoration are available to all. The seriousness of pride motivates us towards humility and the conviction of the Holy Spirit moves us towards a place of repentance.

Set some time aside this week to soak in some of the key Bible verses concerning pride and humility. (For useful references see the ‘More Help’ section on page 15.)



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### 3. The Cross of Christ

*'For the LORD takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation' Psalm 149:4 ESV*

**Nothing in history or the universe cuts us down to size like the cross' – John Stott.**

God loves us too much to leave us the way we are. Overcoming pride was never something that we were going to be able to do alone. The cross was the only way that sin could be put to death and now our nail-pierced pride has no power over us. When we stand at the foot of the cross, suddenly we find someone who puts our foolish pride into perspective. True humility

is personified in Jesus, who '...did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross' (Philippians 2:5–8).

Jesus '...came to bring humility back to earth, to make us partakers of it, and by it to save us' (Andrew Murray). When we unpack our gift of salvation, we are truly humbled and through the redemption of the cross, we are freed to grow in humility.

**TRY...**



It's impossible to walk in humility without contemplating the cross of Christ. Spend some time confessing your pride and receive God's forgiveness.

### 4. Lessons in Humility

*'Do not let the grace that you received from God be for nothing' 2 Corinthians 6:1*

**If humility is indeed our greatest friend then we would be wise to grow in our relationship with it!** Once we have recognised the presence of pride in our lives, accepted the significance of our sin and laid it before the wondrous cross of Christ, we still have a road to travel. As we continue our gospel journey, we remember that the Bible didn't draw to an abrupt end on the day that Jesus rose from the dead. We were given a commission (Matthew 28:18–20), a chance to live again (1 Peter 1:3) and an opportunity to be continually renewed by the power of God at work in us (Philippians 1:6).

Here are a few practical suggestions for the journey:

- Glorify God: Worship God by walking in His ways, spending time with Him and committing to learn more about who He is
- Look to Jesus: Stay close to the cross. Look to the gospels for Jesus' words and practical examples of humility in practice
- Love your neighbour: Servanthood is the fruit of a humble heart. Remember that 'Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less' (C.S. Lewis)
- Practice self-examination: Continually review your attitudes and actions. Remember that God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble (1 Peter 5:5)

**TRY...**

**GO!**

Translating the grace that you have received into purposed, practical actions which give glory to God on a daily basis.



## 5. Pride in Perspective

**P**ride will have no place in the eternal kingdom of God. However, the realities of living in a fallen world mean that the journey from pride to humility is not a once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage. In fact, quite the opposite – it should be a well-trodden path, consistently and diligently walked as we press our advantage against ‘our greatest enemy’.

But with such precious time given to us on this earth, let us not allow pride to hold us back. Sometimes pride

can manifest itself in us by producing crippling patterns of thinking and behaviour. It hardens our hearts to God (Hebrews 3:13). It deafens our ears to his voice (Romans 11:7-8) and it stunts our personal and spiritual growth. Remember that pride brings disgrace, but humility wisdom (Proverbs 11:2). Be encouraged to seek support from others if pride is particularly affecting you or others around you.

Humility requires vulnerability. Commit to keeping pride in check by teaming up with a trusted friend with whom you can regularly share matters of the heart.



**TRY...**

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# TENT PEG or FLAG POLE?

## THEY SAY THAT PRIDE COMES BEFORE A FALL.

In my experience as a man who follows Jesus, God makes you take a fall as soon as pride begins to hit you. Let me explain...

When I was in banking sales, I won the award for being top salesman in London three times running for my bank. When I planted a church on a tough estate, it grew. When I was 30, I became senior pastor of a large church that also grew. When I spoke at places, people became Christians. When we got into podcasting sermons, they went all over the world. Whatever I seemed to do worked. Sure, I had some bumps along the way and there were always pressure points, but I was going down a dangerous path and had started to believe my own propaganda. God had to do some heart surgery. And it was radical.

When I was 33, I moved jobs to start to work in the area of reaching men with the message of Jesus. It was then that the bubble burst. I went to work for a man rather than be senior leader for the first time in years. Suddenly I was the bag carrier and

was moving in circles that made me feel like a beginner all over again. My 'office' was a desk in the kitchen. For the first time ever in my life I was living and working outside of London and Essex – my accent stood out and people let me know. I was also overweight and unfit. People let me know. Men's ministry wasn't exactly national flavour of the month. People let me know.

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*'GOD HAD TO DO SOME HEART SURGERY. AND IT WAS RADICAL'*

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The speaking invites dried up and no one wanted to listen to what I had to say. I would drive for hours to a meeting to find only eight men and a ferret called Geoff had turned up. Sobering to say the least. I was also removed from being able to make executive decisions and use the strategic gifts I thought I had. In other words, to me at the time, I was in a ministry desert. Truth be known, I nearly quit several times in that period.



## Carl Beech on pride and being humbled by God

A reprieve came when a national magazine decided to do a two-month double-page spread on what I was doing. That was a real boost to my ego... until the complaint letters came in the following month to the magazine. One person even said that I was 'ignorant and lived my life under a flower pot.' That was a wake-up call.

What it did was this: It made me look at myself more closely. Where was my identity? Was it in success or in the fact the God loved me no matter what? Was I serving Jesus for my own ends or for him? Did I really understand Romans 8:15 – a verse which I think is the key to inner security for blokes?

'For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"' (ESV)

The end game was this: I came to the conclusion that anything good people see in me was only because of the One who was working in me to make me the man I knew I ought to be. It was

Him they were seeing and not me. I also came to the conclusion that it didn't matter if I was the big speaker or not. All of that meant nothing to God. Of that I was, and am, totally sure. We often say it but now I knew it.

Recently, I was tentatively approached for several possible big jobs in other much bigger ministries. Around that time, someone who had no idea what was going on sent me a picture of two tents. One was small and had loads of guy ropes and tent pegs. The other one had a huge flag pole coming out of it. Underneath they had written, 'I would rather be a tent peg in the house of the Lord, than a flag pole anywhere else.' It was a startlingly clear picture of just what was going on. I had a choice to make and decided to stay as a 'tent peg'. I am God's son – that's all that matters.

***Carl Beech is General Director of Christian Vision for Men ([www.cvm.org.uk](http://www.cvm.org.uk)). You can follow him on Twitter at @carlfbeech***

# THE SECRET - of - HUMILITY

Our pride often gets in the way of  
personal change, says Tim Chester.  
But there is a way through



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# 'THE KEY TO CHANGE IS CONTINUALLY RETURNING TO THE CROSS'

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One of the main ways in which pride wrecks the process of change is when we hide our sin from others. 'He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy' (Proverbs 28:13). We want our good reputation. So we hide, we pretend, we don't seek help. It meshes with proud self-reliance. We want to avoid exposure so we tell ourselves we can manage on our own. But here's what's really happening: we love our reputation more than we hate our sin. We'd like to stop sinning, but not if that costs us people's approval. And that means true repentance isn't taking place. 'It is one thing to make a resolution; it is something completely different to repent, diligently seek counsel, and in concert with others, develop a plan that is concrete and Christ-centred' (Ed Welch). Think about it: we're prepared to choose sin, reject God, abandon freedom and even risk hell rather than have people think badly of us.

True repentance lets nothing get in the way of change, not even reputation. Are you confessing your sin to a trusted Christian? Are you going to them for accountability? Have you told those, such as your spouse, who are affected by your sin? It's not always appropriate to tell a wide circle of people. But you should freely and willingly confess to those to whom you're accountable. You've not done this yet? You're reluctant? Then your reputation still matters more to you than your holiness. Ongoing guilt makes your opinion the one that matters most; shame makes other people's opinions what matter most. Repentance is making God central and accepting his declaration that you're righteous in Christ.

The key to change is continually returning to the cross. A changing life is a cross-centred life. At the cross we see the source of our sanctification (Ephesians 5:25; Colossians 1:22; Titus 2:14). We find hope, for we see the power of sin broken and the old nature put to death. We see ourselves united with Christ and bought by his blood. We see the glorious grace of God, dying for his enemies, the righteous for the unrighteous. We see our hope, our life, our resources, our joy. At the cross we find the grace, power and delight in God we need to overcome sin. If we don't come to the cross again and again, we'll feel distant from God, disconnected from his power and indifferent to his glory – and that is a recipe for sin.

A cross-centred life means an inevitable and resolute rejection of all self-confidence and self-righteousness. The life of Jesus shows us humility, but his cross humbles us. At the cross we see the full extent of our sin; when we get the chance, we kill our Creator. The cross leaves no scope for human boasting. Instead our only 'boast' is Christ Jesus, 'our righteousness, holiness and redemption' (1 Corinthians 1:30–31). There is only one thing I know of that crushes me to the ground and humiliates me to the dust, and that is to look at the Son of God, and especially contemplate the cross... Nothing else can do it. When I see that I am a sinner... that nothing but the Son of God on the cross can save me, I'm humbled to the dust... Nothing but the cross can give us this spirit of humility. The secret of humility, and therefore of change, is never to stray far from the cross. It should be often in our thoughts, on our lips, in our songs, determining our actions, shaping our attitudes, captivating our affections.

**These extracts are taken from *You Can Change* by Tim Chester, published by IVP. You can purchase *You Can Change* from UCB2GO at [www.ucb2go.co.uk](http://www.ucb2go.co.uk)**



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\*Standard call charges apply, although calls from mobiles may cost you more. Check with your supplier for details.)



# More help with Pride

## Advice and Guidance

Overcoming pride is something best done together with a friend or pastor who you can trust. You may also find contacting these organisations helpful.

### Useful Contacts

#### **ACC, Association of Christian Counsellors**

ACC represent Christians who provide counselling and pastoral care.

Tel. 0845 124 9569

Email: [office@acc-uk.org](mailto:office@acc-uk.org)

Web: [www.acc-uk.org](http://www.acc-uk.org)

#### **Relate – The Relationship People**

Relate offers advice, relationship counselling, therapy, workshops, mediation, consultations and support face-to-face, by phone and through this website.

Tel. 0300 100 1234

Web: [www.relate.org.uk](http://www.relate.org.uk)

### Key Scriptures

If you are looking for quick Bible references to guide and support you in overcoming pride, then here are some helpful suggestions to get you started.

#### **Pride**

Start with: **1 John 2:12–16**

Where does pride come from?

Explore: **Proverbs 26:12; Galatians 6:3; Corinthians 10:12**

What wisdom on pride can we take from these verses?

Consider: **Romans 12:16**

How should turning away from pride affect your daily actions?

#### **Humility**

Start with: **John 3:30–31**

Why should we be humbled?

Explore: **Luke 14:11; 1 Peter 5:6; Proverbs 22:4**

What are God's promises to those who are humble?

Consider: **Philippians 2:5-8**

How can we practice humility with others?

### Further Reading

*Humility*, by Andrew Murray (Wilder Publications). A great read on pride and humility, filled with ideas for practical application.

*Humility: True Greatness* by C.J. Mahaney (Multnomah). A short but in-depth look at why and how to apply humility to our lives.

*The Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren (Zondervan). A personal 40-day spiritual journey that will help you understand why you are alive and God's amazing plan for you.

*You Can Change* by Tim Chester (IVP). A rich biblical guide to overcoming sinful behaviour and negative habits, including those related to pride.

# Your 28 Days of Change

God's spirit is in you and...

**'He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world'**

It takes time to change long-standing thought patterns, habits and behaviour. We need to keep coming before God in our brokenness and asking for His help.

The rest of this Overcoming booklet is designed to help bring you before God for the next 28 days – to learn from His wisdom in His Word and to access His healing power through prayer.

Make a decision to set aside the time each day to read and respond in prayer. Don't worry if you miss a day or two, just pick up wherever you left off.

Keep a notebook and pen nearby to jot down anything that occurs to you while you read, or quotes that inspire you to think differently. Trust that God will speak to you personally about your healing over the coming weeks.

Remember, Jesus is on your side, willing you to succeed. Right now, He is praying to the Father on your behalf.

God's Spirit is in you, and **'He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world' (1 John 4:4).**



The daily readings are written by Bob and Debby Gass, authors of *The UCB Word For Today*, and originally appeared there first. Over a million people around the world read Bob and Debby's warm, encouraging words each day.

You can receive a quarterly copy of *The UCB Word For Today* free of charge – see the back page for more details.

# DAY 1 Help, I'm a perfectionist!

'It's in Christ that we find out who we are'  
Ephesians 1:11 TM

**WHAT KIND OF PERFECTIONIST ARE YOU?** The performance perfectionist, who always goes the extra mile but never believes he's getting anywhere? The appearance perfectionist, who worries constantly about what others think instead of thinking for herself? The interpersonal perfectionist, who searches for the perfect mate but always seems to wind up alone? The moral perfectionist who can't forgive himself or others no matter how minor the transgression?

The truth is, your performance at any task will be below average half of the time and above average the other half, contradicting the myth that doing anything less than your best makes you a failure. God doesn't see you as a failure; He sees you as a learner! It's better to fail trying something than to excel doing nothing. A flawed diamond is better than a perfect brick.

## Prayer Point

Help me, Lord, to be comfortable in the skin I'm in. Show me, Lord, how You love me. Even when my low self-esteem drives me to think bad things about myself, let me see things from Your perspective. In my determination to do things 'just right' help me not to develop a critical spirit of other people around me, my family or friends. Let my words be positive and not negative, in Jesus' Name. Amen.

# DAY 2 A fast from criticism – try it!

'Take control of what I say, O Lord'  
Psalm 141:3 NLT

**IN 'A CLOSER WALK'**, Catherine Marshall writes, 'One morning last week, God gave me an assignment for one day. I was to go on a 'fast' from criticism. I was not to criticise anybody or anything. For the first half of the day I simply felt a void, almost as if I'd been wiped out as a person. This was especially true at lunch. I listened to the others and kept silent. In our talkative family, nobody seemed to notice. Bemused, I noted that the federal government, the judicial system and the institutional church could apparently get along just fine without my penetrating observations.

But still I didn't see what this 'fast from criticism' was accomplishing, until mid-afternoon. 'In the afternoon, God gave me a new vision for my life.

The key to being free from the stronghold of perfectionism and low self-esteem is to learn the lesson and forget the details. If you're a perfectionist, you need to find out what God says about you in His Word and refuse to believe anything different. The messages you received and the perceptions you formed about yourself in childhood were wrong then and they're wrong now.

They're wrong because a) God says so b) now you have more experience, knowledge, choice and personal power c) 'It's in Christ that we find out who we are' (Ephesians 1:11 TM). Throw out the old tapes! They simply don't apply any more. Learn to forgive yourself, accept yourself, love yourself and believe in yourself, because God does!

And it had His unmistakable hallmark on it: joy! Ideas began to come to me in a way I hadn't experienced in years. Now it was apparent what the Lord wanted me to see. My critical nature had not solved a single one of the multitudinous things I had found fault with. What it had done was to stifle my own creativity.'

Listen: 'Words kill, words give life... you choose' (Proverbs 18:21 TM). Negative words create an atmosphere in which positive people can't live and creative solutions can't be found. Only in a climate of faith and acceptance can risks be taken, progress be made and dreams be fulfilled. That's why you need to pray today, 'Take control of what I say, O Lord.' (Psalm 141:3)

## DAY 3 The 'I-knew-you-when' crew!

'Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honour.' **Matthew 13:57**

**REALISE THAT** some of the people who knew you 'way back when' don't know you now. They've pigeon-holed you and they won't be happy when you move out of that pigeonhole.

Listen: 'Coming to His hometown, He began teaching... and they were amazed... "Isn't this the carpenter's son?"...they took offence at Him... He did not do many miracles there, because of their lack of faith' (Matthew 13:54-58 NIV). So what did Jesus do? He left! What else could He do? If you allow them, the 'I-knew-you-when' crew will keep you stuck at a stage in your life that's past and gone. You've got to move beyond the good old days! If you allow people to keep taking you down memory lane, you'll eventually set up house, stay longer than you should

and miss your destiny. Don't stay where you're tolerated; go where you're appreciated!

Before David slew Goliath, he had to stand up to his oldest brother, Eliab, one of Saul's generals. David's boldness magnified his brother's cowardice. Had David given in, he'd never have slain the giant and gone on to become king. It's a gift to have people in your life who know where you've been, and can relate to where you're going. But if you have to choose between 'then' and 'now', sacrifice 'then', for it can't be rewritten, only replayed over and over again. Stop rehearsing your beginnings and write the rest of your story! The future is yours, grab it while you can!

### Prayer Point

Lord, I press on toward the mark of the high calling of God in my life. I put You first, Lord, thanking You for all the experiences in life You have brought me through. Help me to continue to change for the rest of my life, so I can be an example of someone who served well, through the decades of a changing world. Amen.

## DAY 4 Change is an uphill climb

'I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus' **Philippians 3:14 NKJV**

**NEAR THE TOP** of Mount Everest is a memorial which reads: 'He died climbing: What a way to be remembered! In an old Peanuts cartoon, Charlie Brown says to Linus: 'What would you do if you felt that no one liked you?' Linus replies, 'I'd see what I could do to improve.' To which Charlie Brown replies, 'I hate that answer!'

There are a number of reasons why many of us, like Charlie Brown, hate that answer and want to freeze life where it's at.

- 1) When it took everything we had to get to where we are now, 'Let's go' is not what we especially want to hear.
- 2) We're creatures of habit. We form our habits, then our habits form us.

3) Change makes us feel insecure. We fear that maybe we don't have what it takes. Solomon writes, 'The way of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, which shines ever brighter until the full light of day' (Proverbs 4:18 NLT). In 'Teaching To Change Lives', Howard Hendrix asks every potential leader these searching questions: 'How have you changed lately? In the last week, let's say? Or the last month? Can you be very specific? Or must your answer always be incredibly vague? You say you're growing. But – how? "Well," you say, "In all kinds of ways." Great; name one! You see, effective teaching comes only through a changed person. When you stop changing, you stop leading.' Today, ask God to show you the areas in which you need to change.

# DAY 5 What would Jesus do?

'Christ... is your example... follow in His steps.'  
1 Peter 2:21 NLT

**DO YOU COMPLAIN** when your friends let you down? Do you keep score about gift-giving, initiating phone calls or picking up the tab? Are there times when you feel that you give more than you get? Jesus experienced these things and more! His closest friends let Him down. They were unreliable and immature. They learned slowly and always the hard way. One even betrayed Him. Yet He forgave them and loved them anyway.

Listen: '...having loved His own... He loved them to the end' (John 13:1 NKJV). Jesus loved His friends but not because they were worthy of love. His love made them worthy!

In 'Knowing God', J. I. Packer writes, 'There is tremendous relief in knowing that God's love for

me is based at every point on prior knowledge of the worst in me. No discovery can disillusion Him in the way I'm so often disillusioned about myself or quench His determination to bless me. There is great cause for humility in the thought that He sees all the twisted things about me that others don't see. Indeed He sees more corruption in me than I see in myself. Yet He wants me as His friend and desires to be my friend and has given His Son to die for me in order for me to realise this purpose.'

So the next time a friend lets you down, remember God's grace. Use His Son as your role model and ask yourself, 'What would Jesus do?'

## Prayer Point

Jesus, You are such an example to me, Your reactions to the challenges of Your own life on earth are amazing. Help me to be a Jesus mirror to people so that when they look at me they actually see the character of You inside. Help me live with Jesus' integrity, that the decisions I make will always be the best for the people around and the best decision for Your Kingdom. Amen.

# DAY 6 Integrity never disappoints

'Declare me innocent, O Lord; for I have acted with integrity...'  
Psalm 26:1 NLT

**ALL OF US** know people who are not the same on the inside as they are on the outside. Indeed, many who work harder on their image than on their integrity don't understand when they suddenly 'fall.' Even friends who thought they knew them are surprised.

In ancient China, the people wanted security against the barbaric hordes from the north, so they built The Great Wall. It was so high nobody could climb over it and so thick nobody could break it down, so they settled back to enjoy their security. During the first 100 years of the wall's existence, China was invaded three times. Not once did the enemy break down the wall or climb over it. Each time they bribed the gatekeeper and marched right through without a problem. The Chinese were so busy relying on their wall of stone

that they neglected to teach integrity to their children. Your answers to the following questions will determine if you are into image-building or integrity-building.

- 1) Are you the same no matter whom you're with?
- 2) Do you make decisions that are best for others, when another choice would benefit you more?
- 3) Are you quick to recognise others for their efforts and contributions to your success? Life is like a vice; at times it'll squeeze you. In those moments, whatever is inside will come out. Image promises much and produces little but integrity never disappoints. So commit yourself today to be a person of integrity.

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# DAY 7 More on integrity

'May integrity... protect me'  
Psalm 25:21 NIV

**A NEWSPAPER CARTOON** depicts two executives sitting in jail. One turns to the other and says, 'And all along I thought our level of corruption fell well within community standards.' In a survey of 400 managers, 55 per cent said they did not trust their top management. We're living in the age of Enron!

Will Rogers said, 'People's minds are changed through observation, not argument. People do what people see.' It's said that 89 per cent of what we learn comes through visual stimulation, the remainder through audible stimulation. So it makes sense that the more people see your consistency, the greater their respect and loyalty will be. What they hear, they understand; what they see, they believe and follow!

That's why David prayed, 'Guard my life... let me not be put to shame... May integrity... protect me' (Psalm

25:20-21 NIV). When integrity is the referee, your lips and your heart will be in agreement. Your beliefs will be mirrored by your conduct. There'll be no discrepancy between what you appear to be and what your family knows you are, whether in good times or bad.

John Maxwell says, 'Integrity determines beforehand what you'll be, regardless of the circumstances, persons involved or places of testing. Integrity is not only the referee between two desires; it's the 'decision maker' between being happy and being fragmented. It frees you to be a whole person no matter what comes your way. Socrates said, 'The key to greatness is to be in reality what we appear to be.' He's right!

## Prayer Point

Lord, let my integrity grow. I pray today that you would reveal anything in my life that I need to change for the sake of promoting integrity. Whether it's my temper or mistruth, let Integrity reign in me. Even if I'm set in my ways, Lord, let the winds of change come, to blow away the old bad habits of the past, so that today would be a new day full of integrity with you.

# DAY 8 You're never too old to change!

'Fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out' Romans 12:1 TM

**CHUCK SWINDOLL SAYS**, 'You're over the hill when: a) the stewardess offers you coffee, tea or Milk of Magnesia b) you sink your teeth into a juicy steak and they stay there c) there's more hair stuck in the drain than on your head d) everything you once had, you still have; except now it's all four inches lower.' And let's add, when you're no longer willing to change. You see, when you're through with changing, you're through!

Alfred Nobel was a Swedish chemist who made his fortune by inventing dynamite and other explosives used for weapons. When his brother died, a newspaper accidentally printed Alfred's obituary instead. It described him as a man who'd become rich by enabling people to kill

each other in unprecedented numbers. Deeply shaken, he resolved to use his fortune to award accomplishments that benefited humanity, hence The Nobel Prize. Nobel had the rare opportunity to re-evaluate his life towards the end and still live long enough to do something about it.

Comedian Jerry Lewis joked that his best wedding gift was a film of the entire marriage ceremony. He said that when things got really bad at home, he'd go into a room, close the door, run the film backwards and walk out a free man! Now I doubt if you'll be able to do that, or even read your obituary in the newspaper. You can, however, make a choice to change, and when that change is successful, you'll look back and call it growth.

# DAY 9 Don't forget the Lord

'When you have eaten and are satisfied... Do not forget the Lord' **Deuteronomy 8:10-11**

**CAN YOU IMAGINE** how Ruth felt coming out of famine and suddenly having grain dropped right in front of her? She didn't deserve it, earn it or even understand it. When you're not used to being blessed, it's heady stuff! That's why God says, 'remember the Lord your God; for it is He who gives you power to [succeed]' (Deuteronomy 8:18 Amp). He's the One who enables you to do what others find difficult or impossible.

They're taking classes to do what you do naturally. Why? Because God's blessed you with ability! And they may actually resent you for it. That's because they don't understand where you came from to get to where you are. They don't know that when you were discouraged and hopeless, God told you to

look ahead because 'the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory which will be revealed in us' (Romans 8:18 NIV). God had something in mind for you, greater than anything you could imagine, and He's fulfilling it, isn't He?

But be careful! This is where many of us make a mistake. We praise God in the hard times but as soon as we get on our feet, we become self-sufficient and snooty. Listen again to what God told His people 'When you have eaten and are satisfied... Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God' (Deuteronomy 8:10-11 NIV). Remember today that God's the source of everything you've got or ever will have!

## Prayer Point

Father, forgive me for thinking I control the destiny of my life, that I can do it all, that I can provide for myself and family. Lord, I recognise today that You are the creator and sustainer of my life; my source is You, not wealth or power, but You. Help me always remember what You did on the cross, that I might always know my life exists within the sacrifice You made for me. Thank You Lord. Amen.

# DAY 10 Need a nail?

'May I never boast except in the cross'  
**Galatians 6:14 NIV**

**THE YOUTH PASTOR** was concerned that the beaches of Florida, the site of their upcoming evangelism trip, would distract his kids from their purpose, so he made a big wooden cross. Just before they climbed on to the bus he said to them, 'Our reason for going is to lift up Christ, so we're going to take this cross with us everywhere we go.' Feeling awkward and insecure, the kids dragged the big cross on to the bus. It banged against the seats all the way there. It went with them into restaurants. It stayed with them overnight. It stood in the sand as they shared their faith with thousands of other kids who'd come for spring break.

At first, it embarrassed them. Then gradually it became a point of identification; a constant reminder of who

they belonged to and why they'd come. The night before they went home, the youth pastor handed each kid two nails and said, 'If you're willing to commit your entire life to Christ, I want you to hammer one nail into the cross, and keep the other one with you as a reminder of this commitment.'

Fifteen years later a successful stockbroker called the youth leader and said, 'I still have that nail. Whenever the pressure is on, or I'm tempted to go astray, I just reach into my pocket and feel it, and immediately I'm reminded that the core of my life is – commitment to Christ.' Do you think that maybe you need a nail too?

# DAY 11 How are your manners?

'Be courteous.'

1 Peter 3:8 NKJ

**COMMON COURTESY** is becoming less common every day. And that's too bad, because God says, 'be courteous... that you might inherit a blessing' (1 Peter 3:8-9 NKJ). We wonder about pleasing God. Preachers have made it complicated; a series of long, drawn-out, deeply painful acts designed to appease a peeved deity who takes delight in making us squirm. But Micah simplifies it, 'What does the Lord require of you... to love kindness' (Micah 6:8 NAS). Could language be clearer? Here are ten 'not-so-common' courtesies you might want to work on:

- 1) Go out of your way to speak to people: 'Pleasant words are... healing' (Proverbs 16:24 NIV 1984).
- 2) Try to remember their names; it shows that you value them.
- 3) Smile; it increases your face value.
- 4) Be friendly and helpful. If you do, people will reciprocate (Proverbs 18:24).

5) Show genuine interest. You can like almost anybody if you try.

6) Be generous with your praise and cautious with your criticism.

7) Be slow to judge. There are three sides to every story: your side, their side and the right side.

8) Seek to be of service; 'serve one another in love' (Galatians 5:13 NLT).

9) Learn to trust people; it builds lasting relationships.

10) Finally, add a sense of humour, a good dose of patience and a dash of humility. Courtesy a) says a lot about the parents who raised you and the family you belong to. Jesus said, 'Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven.' (Matthew 5:16 NIV) b) determines the level of your blessing!

## Prayer Point

Sometimes, Lord, everything in me wants to scream at people, which I know is not from You. Help me, Lord, to become the opposite to my sinful nature, to build up, encourage, speak well of, and show interest. Let me be the person You made me to be and when I have choices to make in life that sometimes force a reaction, help me to make the right choice with the right attitude for Your glory. Amen.

# DAY 12 Getting it right

'I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God' Acts 20:27 NKJ

**BELIEVE IT OR NOT**, 150 years ago some of our best preachers, including founders of great denominations, used the Bible to defend slavery. There's a lesson there for us. The danger lies in deciding what we want, then using the Bible to justify it, instead of reading the whole counsel of God on a matter and bringing our thinking and lifestyle into agreement with it.

David prayed, 'O Lord... Make Your way straight before me,' because he didn't dare trust his own way (See Psalm 5:8 NIV). God's voice isn't all that difficult to hear. In fact, to miss it, you almost have to be closing your eyes and stopping your ears. He shouts through our pain, whispers to us while we're relaxing on holiday, occasionally speaks to us in a song and warns us through the 66 books of His written Word.

Count on it; God's Word will never lead you astray. Never! In addition to His own unfailing wisdom, God gives us wise counsellors, friends, acquaintances, parents, teachers and mentors who've earned our love and respect through long years. If you're wise, you'll filter what you believe to be the will of God through their thoughts and perspectives. Does your conviction about the direction you're heading in deepen daily? Or are you seeing lots of red flags and caution signs? Before you undertake a major life-change, be sure it's God's voice you're hearing and God's Word you're following. In other words, make sure you get it right!

# DAY 13

## Learn to be more flexible

'I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some' **1 Corinthians 9:22 NIV**

**YOUR PRINCIPLES** should be set in concrete but not your methods. Never stop asking, 'Is there a better way?' Knowledge in most fields is doubling every five years, so any programme that old should be brought in for an examination, an overhaul and possibly the last rites! As great as Henry Ford was, he had poor people-skills. He believed the Model T ended the need for any other car. When people started saying to him, 'We'd like a different colour,' he answered, 'You can have any colour you want – as long as it's black!' And that's when his business began to decline. If what you're doing isn't working, you can:

- 1) Look for somebody or something to blame.
- 2) Rationalise, so that you can live with it more easily.

3) Find comfort in the fact that others are in the same boat.

4) Be willing to change. In the film *Five Easy Pieces*, Jack Nicholson goes into a restaurant and asks for a side order of toast. When he's told it's not on the menu, he comes up with a creative solution. He orders chicken salad on toast, then instructs the waitress, 'No mayonnaise, just butter and hold the chicken salad.'

If you're too rigid, you'll break (or go broke). Paul's great success can be summed up in one verse: 'I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some' (1 Corinthians 9:22 NIV). Learn to be more flexible!

### Prayer Point

Father, when I can't get my own way, remind me who You are. There are many things in life that irritate me, Lord, and I never try and make them better. Help me to serve solutions to things that drive me and everyone around me crazy. Help 'the church of me' come back to the original principles on which it was founded, so that I can make the world a better place, one conversation or act of kindness at a time.

# DAY 14

## The church's all-time biggest blunders

'I will build My church'  
**Matthew 16:18 NIV**

It's never too late to learn from our blunders. Here are seven:

- 1) We've made unbelief a doctrine. While third-world nations believe God for New Testament results, we teach our seminary students that God doesn't do miracles anymore.
- 2) We've tolerated division. Who needs the devil when we're so adept at hating one another in the name of denominational loyalty?
- 3) We've cultivated a religious spirit. We've taught that Christianity is about avoiding things like smoking and drinking. As a result we've lost our joy because intimacy with God cannot be achieved through performance.
- 4) We've encouraged 'superstars'. Consequently, some of our preachers have stopped modelling servanthood and have forgotten that Jesus washed feet and rode on a donkey.

5) We've equated money with success. We've found a way to 'theologise' greed, instead of using our God-given prosperity to feed the poor and reach the world with the Gospel.

6) We've stayed in the pews and become irrelevant. We freak out when somebody uses rap or rock music to reach the younger generation. Instead of engaging the culture, we're hiding from it.

7) We've taught people to be escape artists. Instead of 'occupying 'til He comes', we'd rather be astronauts and fly away. We read rapture novels when we should be praying for those living on the verge of martyrdom. Why can't we have their kind of faith? We can, if we're willing to pay the price and commit ourselves fully to God!

# DAY 15 You can't do it by yourself

## 'You... became my partners' Philippians 4:15 TLB

**AT MIDNIGHT ON NOVEMBER 20, 1988**, a 19-year-old woman who'd fallen asleep behind the wheel plunged her car through a crash barrier. It dangled 60 feet in the air. Some motorists stopped, grabbed ropes, tied them to the back of the woman's car and hung on till emergency units arrived.

A ladder was extended from below to help stabilise the car while firemen chained the vehicle to two trucks. Every time her car moved she screamed. It took over two hours for passers-by, the police, tow-truck drivers and firemen – about 25 people in all – to pull her to safety.

'It was kinda funny,' Los Angeles Fire Captain, Ross Marshall recalled later. 'She kept shouting, "I'll do it myself!" Are you like that? Trying to do it all on your

own? On his office wall, Alex Haley, the author of *Roots*, has a picture of a turtle sitting on top of a six-foot fence post. The caption reads, 'You can be sure he had help getting up there!' Haley says, 'Anytime I feel too proud to ask for help, I look at that picture.' Somebody within your reach knows something you need to know; something you'll never learn on your own. They're your mentor. Get close to them. Drop your bucket into their well and begin to draw water.

Paul recognised his limitations, so he connected his life to others. Listen: 'you Philippians became my partners in giving and receiving' (Philippians 4:15 TLB). Some of us know how to give but not receive. Others know how to receive but not give. Winners know how to do both!

### Prayer Point

Father, persuade me that I need to rely on others and can't always do things alone. Help me to recognise the great gifts you have placed in the lives of people around me, that I would promote their ability and not just focus on what I can do or get out of something. Help me remain humble, Lord, not proud of my ability but ready to serve someone with what You have placed within me. Amen.

# DAY 16 Stay humble

## 'Be completely humble and gentle' Ephesians 4:2 NIV

**THE CALL OF GOD** is a high calling; yet the higher your calling, the lower you must become in your own eyes. Jesus said of John, 'There is not a greater prophet' (Luke 7:28 NKJ). Yet, John said of Jesus, 'He must increase, but I must decrease' (John 3:30 NKJ). When the Lord called him, Ezekiel fell prostrate on the ground and God had to say to him, 'Stand up on your feet and I will speak to you' (Ezekiel 2:1 NIV). When John came face to face with Christ on the Isle of Patmos, he wrote, 'I fell at His feet as though dead' (Revelation 1:17 NIV).

The more gifted you are, the more humble you must be and the more you must acknowledge that the power that works in you is not human

ability but God's ability. None of us knows exactly what the 'thorn' in Paul's life was, but we know why he had it. Listen: 'So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh' (2 Corinthians 12:7 NLT).

Thorns come in many forms; God customises them to our personality and designs them according to our need. It could be a problem child, a turbulent marriage or a life-long affliction. It's what deflates you when others try to exalt you; it's what enables you to receive a compliment without becoming arrogant. In a sense, it's not a thorn, it's a thermostat that regulates your attitude, keeps you on your knees and reminds you that God is your source and God alone!



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# DAY 17 Are you becoming critical?

'Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk. Be gentle with one another' **Ephesians 4:31 TM**

**CRITICISM IS** one of the ultimate manifestations of pride because it assumes superiority! The Bible says that God is at work in each of us (Philippians 2:13 NIV). That means when you criticise someone, you're saying, 'God, Your workmanship doesn't meet with my approval'. What arrogance! We all struggle and fall far short, so on what basis do you point out the faults of another?

Paul writes, 'Criticism of others is a well-known way of escaping detection in your own crimes' (Romans 2:1 TM). Is that why you criticise others? When you criticise somebody's child, who gets upset? The parents! And it's the same with God. When you judge His people, you're judging Him. When

you tear down His leaders, you're saying, 'God, You don't know what You're doing by using such people!' Look out: criticism kept over two million people out of the Promised Land. Imagine, many died just 11 miles from it! They spent their lives wandering in dry places. Is that why you've been going through a dry spell lately? They went around the same mountain (problem) over and over again (read Deuteronomy 2:3). Is that why you've been going in circles? Jesus said, 'I have told you this so that my joy may be in you' (John 15:11 NIV). There's a direct relationship between the joy you have and the words you speak. Maybe that's something you need to look at today.

## Prayer Point

Lord, I am noticing that the older I get the grumpier I am, the more critical I become, and the less tolerant my outlook on life is. Forgive me, Lord. Remind me, Lord, of the younger days when life 'was' great and help me change my focus to see life IS great today. Father, nothing should be beyond me, in helping people, doing the jobs no-one wants to do, so help me serve with a good heart to brighten everyone's day in Jesus' Name. Amen.

# DAY 18 Willing to serve

'He... took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist...' **John 13:4**

**THE SECRET OF** great ministry lies in what we're willing to lay aside in order to respond to God's call; like laying aside the comforts of home to go where His name has never been heard or giving sacrificially to support those who go in your place. Or how about taking the 'flak' that comes from being the only light shining in your family or in a workplace where spiritual darkness abounds? Not once did Jesus say it would be easy or cheap! Listen to Paul, 'All the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life. Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand, everything I once thought had going for me is insignificant... I've dumped it all in the dustbin... I gave up all that inferior

stuff so that I could know [be intimate with] Christ' (Philippians 3:9-11 TM).

There are evangelists, pastors and workers who never wrote a book, sold a tape, drew a crowd or gained national fame, but they paid the price! Like Noah, whose 'congregation' never exceeded eight souls, they still ministered faithfully. They wanted to do more. They hoped they'd go further. But they laid it all aside to serve the few. They said, 'If I'm not called to help everybody, then, God, please let me help somebody.' Today, you must answer the question, 'What am I willing to lay aside in order to serve?'

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# DAY 19

## Take off those old clothes!

'Put off... your old self... put on the new self'  
Ephesians 4:22-24 NIV

**THERE ARE SOME 'OLD CLOTHES'** you've got to take off when you commit your life to Christ: old thinking patterns, old attitudes and old behaviour. You may not even want to admit that you're still wearing them but the truth is that you can't put on the new self until you first take off the old one.

Furthermore, you can't hang your old clothes in a wardrobe for a rainy day or toss them on the floor to be tripped over; you've got to get rid of them! Listen: 'Put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour... Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal

no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need' (Ephesians 4:25-28 NIV).

You ask, 'Is such a lifestyle possible?' Yes! Because God's Spirit lives within you, you don't have to a) tell lies to advance your position; b) steal to be prosperous; c) be dishonest to achieve your goals; d) use anger as a control mechanism; e) engage in corrupt communication. When you choose to live this way, you are literally 'taking off the old self and putting on the new one.' Commit yourself to living that way starting today.

### Prayer Point

Thank You Lord that You provide the ability for our lives to change, that in You we can exercise grace when we don't want to, experience joy when we feel we can't. Lord, we can truly live a life given over to You, we just need to open our hearts to the depth of Your love for us. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit today, Lord, so that I can walk upright, understand Your will and give more time to You. Amen.

# DAY 20

## The formula

'Be very careful, then, how you live'  
Ephesians 5:15 NIV

**IN EPHESIANS CHAPTER 5**, Paul gives us the formula for a happy, fulfilling life. Let's look at it today.

- 1) 'Walk circumspectly' (v.15 NKJ). The word circumspect means 'to be disciplined in your thoughts, speech, actions and motives.' Your wandering stage is over. It's time to enter the Promised Land, drive out the enemy and take what belongs to you.
- 2) 'Redeeming the time' (v.16 NKJ). No more wasting your life on worthless diversions. Get serious! Begin each day by praying, 'Father, thank You for this day. Some were alive yesterday, who didn't live to see this one. I accept it as a gift from You and commit myself to maximizing every moment, for Your glory.'
- 3) 'Understanding what the Lord's will is' (v.17 NIV). The word 'understanding' here means 'to make sense

of.' Often people say to us, 'Hey, what's happening?' That's because most of the time they don't know. But we do, for our steps are guarded, guided and governed by the Lord (Psalm 37:23).

4) 'Be filled with the Spirit' (v.18 NIV). You ask, 'How?' Listen: 'Speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord' (Ephesians 5:19 NIV). You can be Spirit-filled wherever you are. When it's not appropriate to sing, 'make melody in your heart!' When there's no one around to talk to, 'speak to yourself' in psalms! That's the formula for a happy fulfilling life!

DAY

21

## A new measuring rod

'But among you, those who are the greatest should take the lowest rank and the leader should be like the servant'  
**Luke 22:26 NLT**

**IN THIS DEVOTIONAL**, we speak often about goal-setting, perseverance, motivation and destiny. And we should, for without a goal, a strategy and a committed heart, you'll never fulfil your life's purpose. But in your quest for success and your striving for recognition, Jesus gives you a new measuring rod.

Listen: 'Who is more important, the one who sits at the table or the one who serves? ...But... I am among you as one who serves.' (Luke 22:27 NLT). In Jesus' day, the washing of feet was a task reserved not just for servants but for the lowest of them. Every circle has its 'pecking order' and the circle of household workers was no exception. The servant at the bottom was expected to

be the one on his knees, with the towel and the basin. What a sight; the One here with the towel and the basin is Jesus! Think: the hands that shaped the stars now wash away filth. The fingers that formed the mountains now dry the feet of crude Galilean fishermen.

Hours before His death, His concern is singular: to let His disciples know that in His Kingdom, the way up is down, the way to the top is not through intelligence or manipulation but through humility and service to others. Living this way is not natural, it's supernatural; you can do it only as you surrender daily to the indwelling power of His Spirit.

### Prayer Point

Create in me a new heart, Lord, and renew a right spirit within me. Lord, I want to live each day guided by your Holy Spirit, to do whatever You want me to do. No more offering to serve and then choosing what not to do; Lord, I'm in this for life, whatever it takes. If Jesus could die on a cross to deal with my sin, the least I can do is offer my life back in service to Him. Thank You for this great opportunity.

DAY

22

## Call it grace!

'The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness'  
**Exodus 34:6 NIV**

**GOD LOVES YOU** just as you are, but He loves you too much to let you stay that way! Do you think God's love for you would be stronger if your faith was stronger? No. You're confusing God's love with human love. Human love increases with performance and decreases with mistakes. But not God's love; He loves you just as you are right now. Do you have trouble accepting that? Listen to how God introduces himself: 'The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness' (Exodus 34:6 NKJ). Awesome!

In spite of his terrible failures, David could say, 'I will sing of the LORD's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations.' (Psalm 89:1 NIV). And if you need more

to convince you, Paul writes, 'But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.' (Romans 5:8 NIV).

Get rid of your do-it-yourself righteousness. Salvation is not 'Do! Do! Do!' It's 'Done! Done! Done!' It's a finished work. You can add nothing to it. You stand before Him in His Name and in His righteousness, not yours.

Perhaps you're saying, 'It sounds too easy.' Wrong! There was nothing easy about it! The cross was heavy, the blood was real and the price was staggering. It would have bankrupted you and me, so He paid it for us. Call it simple, call it a gift, but don't call it easy. Call it what it is; call it grace!



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NOT ALONE'  
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# DAY 23 The Prayer of Jabez

'Oh, that You would... keep me from harm'  
1 Chronicles 4:10 NIV

**BE CAREFUL!** Success can dull your sense of dependence and make you presumptuous. It can give you a wrong (and dangerous) view of your own strength. That's why Jabez prayed, 'Lord, when I'm successful, keep me from harm.' One-quarter of the Lord's Prayer is asking for protection. David and Solomon didn't get into trouble until they became kings.

Wise up! Someone has said, 'Danger is not being on the edge of the precipice, it's being unwatchful there.' Too many of us 'blow it' because we think we're immune to the pitfalls that claim others. You're no match for the devil! He approached Adam and Eve at the peak of their performance

and crushed them with one conversation. Stay out of places you shouldn't be in! Watch for things that feed your carnal nature! Refuse to walk with those who are not going God's way!

Bruce Wilkinson tells of a Roman gladiator in big trouble. Somehow he's dropped his sword and the enraged lion, seeing its opportunity, is in mid-lunge, jaws wide open. In horror the gladiator tries to flee. The caption reads, 'Sometimes you can't afford to come in second!' The best strategy for defeating a roaring lion is to stay out of the arena. That's why Jabez's final request in prayer was, 'Lord, keep me from harm.' You need to pray that prayer today too!

## Prayer Point

Lord, never let me be so confident in my ability that I forget there is an enemy out there. Keep my heart close to Yours, Lord, and keep me, as Jabez prayed, away from harm. Lord, may any success I have would be credited by people to my relationship with You. When I meet people, Lord, help me find out what makes them tick, so that before I write them off, I could share this prayer of Jabez with them too.

# DAY 24 Before you pass judgement

'God's people should be bighearted and courteous'  
Titus 3:2 TM

**DID YOU HEAR** about the two taxidermists who stopped to look at an owl which was on display in a window? Immediately the criticism started. Its eyes weren't natural; its wings weren't in proportion to its head; its feathers weren't properly arranged. Just as they started to walk away the owl turned its head and winked at them!

Before you pass judgement, ask yourself these questions: Have I waited long enough to get all the facts? What do I not know yet? Am I relying strictly on what I've heard? Am I eager to believe the best or think the worst? If mistakes have been made, do I feel that gives me the upper hand? If so, what am I

going to do about it? What would Jesus do? Will my actions add to the problem or to the solution? If the situation was reversed and I was on the other end, what would I need? Am I magnifying something which, in a month or two, will make little or no difference but could hurt my future relationship with this person?

Listen carefully to this verse: 'Don't pick on people, jump on their failures, criticise their faults – unless, of course, you want the same treatment. Don't condemn those who are down; that hardness can boomerang. Be easy on people; you'll find life a lot easier.' (Luke 6:37 TM). Now, there are words to live by!

## DO YOU NEED PRAYER?

Call UCB Prayerline on 0845 456 7729 (UK) or 1890 940 300 (ROI) or visit [UCB.CO.UK](http://UCB.CO.UK)

# DAY 25 He can make it up to you

'My father and mother walked out and left me, but God took me in' Psalm 27:10 TM

**HAS DEATH OR DIVORCE** robbed you of a parent? Are you still grieving for lost hugs and birthdays without bicycles? The loss of these things can cause you to struggle all your life to find your identity. When you grow up listening to endless arguments but never seeing affection, it's easy to think that's normal, then later you find yourself asking, 'How should I act as a parent? And why do I still feel like a lost child?' David said, 'My father and mother walked out and left me, but God took me in' (Psalm 27:10 TM). How wonderful! God can hold you and heal your pain. When you're hurting, He can put you on His couch and be your 'Wonderful Counsellor' (Isaiah 9:6 NIV).

When you feel like an orphan, He can be to you an 'Everlasting Father' who doesn't abandon His kids, no matter what. With Him you're always safe and protected because that's what loving fathers do. You're His child, which means if something's important to you, it's important to Him too! What's more, He can send people into your life who'll be to you, the father, the mother, the brother, or the sister you never had. Listen, 'God sets the lonely in families' (Psalm 68:6 NIV). Don't be so focused on your losses that you fail to see Him at work, or recognise those He sends into your life to make it better.

## Prayer Point

Lord, I no longer want to be a victim but a victor in You. If You can make the sun rise today, You can bring good things into my life and build a sense of peace within me. Help me overcome all the things of my past that told me I couldn't have a good life. Lord, also teach me Your ways, help me spend more time learning of You, that my joy in life would be built on You in Jesus' Name. Amen.

# DAY 26 Have a set time

'Every morning, I tell You what I need, and I wait for Your answer' Psalm 5:3 NCV

**DR. MIKE MURDOCK SAYS**, 'What you do daily, determines what you become permanently.' He's right! 'But is it really necessary to spend time with God early in the morning?' you ask. Any moment spent with God can change you, but don't you think it's wise to plan your trip before you take it? Why enter the day without a sense of His direction and peace? Is any voice more important than His? Or more reliable?

If you're struggling to rise early and pray, start doing these three things:

1) Set an achievable goal. Don't focus on getting up an hour earlier, try 15 minutes! You can always add to it. When you set impossible goals, you create the inevitability of failure instead of memories of success.

2) Learn how to enter His presence. Listen: 'Come before His presence with singing' (Psalm 100:2 NKJ). God loves music. He responds to worship and singing. Music can actually lift your spirit and dispel your fear. When King Saul was depressed, we read that 'David would play the harp... and the tormenting spirit would go away' (1 Samuel 16:23 NLT). Try it!

3) Educate those around you, concerning your new prayer time. Few things are more impacting than watching a person with a consistent prayer life. Without saying a word, you'll challenge those who don't pray and thrill those who do. They may even want to join with you. So remember, what you do daily determines what you become permanently!



# DAY 27 Where's the bread?

'The Bread of the Presence'  
Numbers 4:7 NLT

**BREAD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT** symbolised God's presence. That's why Numbers 4:7 refers to 'the Bread of the Presence'. When famine drove Naomi and her family out of Bethlehem (House of Bread), they left for the same reason people leave churches today – no bread!

Tommy Tenney writes: 'Why do so many people flock to clubs and bars looking for crumbs? Because they tried the church and found only old recipes and cold ovens; there was no presence of God in the pantry. For some churches, it's a pride thing; through tradition, they try to preserve the image of where God's been, at the expense of where He is now! They talk about what He used to do; but what about now? It's time we set aside our personal agendas and man-made games; it's time to say, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30 NKJ).

## Prayer Point

Lord, let me be the answer to people's need. Let me be wise, Lord, that the words I speak and the actions I take could draw people to Christ. Let me be bold, Lord, that I could speak to the issues in my own life to bring change for the good, that others might see I rely on You. Father, I pray that I might become an example of what living in God's Kingdom truly is. Amen.

# DAY 28 Speaking God's language

'Say to this mountain, "May you be lifted up..."'  
Mark 11:23 NLT

**IF YOU'VE BEEN** praying till you're blue in the face, the answer may be right under your nose; your mouth! Stop talking about your mountain and start talking to it! Listen: 'Whoever says to this mountain, "Be... thrown into the sea!" and does not doubt... it will be done' (Mark 11:23 Amp).

How do you talk to a mountain?

1) By using God's Word. When satan tempted Him in the wilderness, Jesus responded three times, "It is written," and satan couldn't stand up to Him. The enemy doesn't respect what you say but he trembles every time God speaks because His Word is power-packed. Satan hopes you never discover that!

2) By being persistent. Ever wonder how you can hammer a rock 99 times and nothing happens, yet on the hundredth blow it shatters? That's because all

'When people experience the presence of God, it overrides human theologies and changes hearts. Why? Because someone with an experience is never at the mercy of someone with an argument. On the other hand, when people experience only a hint of God mixed with other things, it immunises them against the real thing.

'The problem isn't that God's not in the church, it's that sometimes there's not enough of Him to make the needed difference! Ezekiel said, 'I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the Temple' (Ezekiel 47:1 NIV). If living water is to reach this generation, it must first flow down through the church aisles and out through us!

the previous blows weakened it. Keep speaking God's Word in faith over your situation and 'it will be done.'

3) By forgiving. One pastor asked his congregation, 'How many of you are willing to forgive your enemies?' Everybody was, except one old guy. 'Why won't you forgive your enemies?' the pastor asked. 'Because I have none. I've outlived them all!'

Jesus said, 'Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive' (Mark 11:25 Amp). Before you can speak to a mountain of trouble, and get results, you must first speak forgiveness to others. God's promises depend on your obedience.

Listen: 'If you will listen diligently... watchful to do all His commandments... these blessings shall come' (Deuteronomy 28:1-2 AMP). That's how you talk to a mountain!



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