

Day 1

The Big Idea

Learning to trust God gives us unshakeable faith.

“Do not be anxious then, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘With what shall we clothe ourselves?’ For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek’ for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.”

Matthew. 6:31-33 (NASB)

George Mueller (German born evangelist in England, 1805 – 1898), was a man of faith who trusted God to provide. And He did. In Bible school, Mueller prayed and God supplied money. In his desire to be a missionary, Mueller prayed and God got Mueller out of serving in Germany’s military. When in charge of 300 English orphans with no food, Mueller prayed and God supplied milk and bread. His life is riddled with examples of God’s provision. Mueller, never surprised at God’s faithfulness, knew God would provide.

Unshakeable faith. We need to rely on God and develop unshakeable faith. Instead of letting doubts penetrate our minds and hearts, think about the verses above and remember how God has provided for you in the past. Know He will in the future. That’s His nature. Love, provision, mercy and grace. Let it be yours.

Day 2

The Big Idea

God gives us wealth that is permanent.

“Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.” Colossians 3:2 (NASB)

Many today suffer from altered vision that corrective glasses won’t help. We look at the natural, our circumstances, and the “stuff” of life that weighs us down. Our eyes are so focused on the world around us and its problems that we are blinded to the bigger picture—the heavenly kingdom of God.

Recent events in my life have torn at me, with physical setback after physical setback. I looked only at how much everything was going to cost and began to worry about finances. Would we have enough? How much would it cost? Until I read this verse and it chided me in my faith. Really? Was I going to be mired down in this natural world and allow the cares of this world to defeat me? Or was I going to lift up my eyes, my thoughts, and my faith to my Father?

Instead of being cocooned by this world’s cares, I choose to look up and set my mind on things above. How about you? Where is your mind set today?

Day 3

The Big Idea

Be a person who is focused on God's interests, not your own.

"But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

Matthew 16:23 (NASB)

Ever think something is "of God" only to find out it was really "of you?" Even while telling others, you had a nagging feeling this wasn't right. It really wasn't God, it was your desire. Your want. The way you wanted things to turn out.

That happens to all of us, some of us more than others. Is it because we're selfish? Blind? Oblivious to God? Maybe, but maybe it's because we're focused on our picture instead of God's picture. On our interests instead of God's.

It's easy to do, looking to our own interests instead of putting God first. But it's a way of life we need to develop. The first question we ask when faced with an opportunity, crossroad, or decision isn't what's best for me. It should be what does God want me to do? What are His interests in this situation?

Think about God first, keep His interests foremost and those decisions may be easier to make than you think.

Day 4

The Big Idea

Who are you serving? God or money and things?

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." Matthew 6:24 (NASB)

Dave Ramsey wrote a book, *The Legacy Journey*, which is a guideline for how to deal with life and money. Money isn't bad in itself, and there's nothing wrong with having money. However, when money has you, there's a big problem.

Ramsey doesn't belittle people for driving a nice car or living in a nice house when their heart is right. When they aren't serving money but God. When what a person gives to the kingdom work is generous not stingy. When God is being served first and foremost, His word on giving is being obeyed, and when people are sensitive to give when God instructs. Then God knows these people aren't serving money and things but they're serving Him.

Even if we don't have a lot of money, we can still serve money and things rather than God. Check yourself today. Whom do you serve?

Day 5

The Big Idea

Sometimes we make “promises” to God to do good if He gives us more money, when the only good that seems to happen is to us.

“For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang.” 1 Timothy 6:10 (NASB)

Lottery tickets. Pull tabs. Scratch and win cards. All forms of hopeful dreams. Who hasn't had the urge to pray and ask God to give them a winner, promising to do good with the windfall? And who hasn't heard of the destruction that those types of winnings often lead to in people's lives?

Some people are so enamored with the dollar it's all they think or talk about. Sometimes those thoughts lead to evil –to theft, to overworking, to consumption by the thought of things.

Money isn't evil. It's how we treat money that can be evil. Are we so wrapped up in the thought of amassing wealth that we are drifting away from God? Do we become so focused on the greenback that we forget about the people in our lives or in His greater vision that God wants us to reach?

Don't try to justify a love of money with promises to do “good.” Check your heart, seeing if money has you or if you have money. It makes a difference to God.

Day 6

The Big Idea

Our plans aren't always God's plans; but wherever we are, we can focus on people rather than things.

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life, shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it. For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?’” Matthew 16:24-26 (NASB)

These verses consumed me in college fueling my life course. I would deny myself, go into the mission field, and follow hard after Christ –always. Some think I fulfilled that plan in moving to North Dakota. Maybe being transplanted here wasn't in my plan, but it was in God's.

Sometimes we chart our course, thinking this is what it means to deny ourselves and take up our cross. But is that what God means by denying ourselves?

Even though I've taken youth groups on mission trips, the life I'm living is nowhere near what I thought it would be. Still, I'm working in a mission field every day I step into my workplace. I can deny myself and follow after God daily. I have the opportunity to let things and monetary gain separate me from God.

It's not the life I imagined, but this is where God wants me. It's up to me to take up my cross, to live out this life as God wants me to, focusing on people rather than things.

Day 7

The Big Idea

Successful giving creates a waterfall.

“In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

Acts 20:35

Adam Grant writes in his book, *Give and Take*, about three different types of people. We are all a giver, a taker, or a matcher.

Grant uses his studies to show that givers tend to be on the bottom of the success ladder. This makes sense since they are putting others above themselves which allows the takers and matchers to advance.

So does that mean Jesus's encouragement to us doesn't apply to our modern professional and social life? Interestingly, as Grant continues his study, he found that the most successful people were also givers, leaving the takers and matchers floating in the middle. Most importantly, when givers succeed, in comparison to takers or matchers, their success is like a waterfall and blesses everyone.

Think about how you can create value in your life by giving rather than taking. Chances are you will find personal success and also bring joy as your giving waterfall helps others succeed along with you.

Day 8

The Big Idea

Our harvest will only be large if we plant large.

“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.”

2 Corinthians 9:6

When I was little my mom and I planted a vegetable garden. We went to the store and bought many different kinds of seeds. I talked her into getting a watermelon even though she was convinced it would never grow in North Dakota.

My mom is a clever woman. She could have just picked a couple vegetables that she knew would grow and plant as much as we needed. Instead, we got a wide variety and planted rows and rows of each plant. At the end of summer, we had piles of tomatoes, carrots, beans, peas and even a small melon.

It's quite obvious what happened: we got out of our garden exactly what we put into it. Jesus promises us the exact same concept. He will bring out of us, whatever we put in. Investing in God's Kingdom has a guaranteed return.

How much are you willing to plant in your garden?

Day 9

The Big Idea

Check your own heart, not by comparing to someone else.

“Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” 2 Corinthians 9:7

When Jesus was born, he had two groups of visitors: the shepherds and the Magi. The shepherds came straight from the field with only their own possessions. On the other hand, the Magi brought three very expensive gifts.

Would we say the Magi were better because they brought gifts and the shepherds didn't? No, each group brought what they had to offer. The shepherds had nothing, they were lying in a field and brought what they did have.

In the same way, we should decide in our own hearts what we choose to give based on what we have. We can't decide this by comparing what others give, but only our own hearts can determine the value for which we are responsible. Neither group felt like they had to give anything. They gave Jesus their gifts and time and most importantly, they shared the Good News because they knew he was the Savior and King.

Prayerfully consider what you will decide to give, in your own heart.

Day 10

The Big Idea

Financial investments create personal interest.

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Matthew 6:21

How often do we choose a selfish desire instead of investing in God's Kingdom? I know we're spending our money on important things like retirement, housing, and tuition, right? And other important things like daily coffee, Netflix subscriptions, and handmade burlap pillowcases we can pretend we made ourselves.

Usually we are trying to cut back on spending so we can increase our saving and investing because both of those offer interest. It's wonderful to make money off your own money just by putting it in a certain place!

In the same way, when we invest in God's Kingdom, we gain interest. This time, I'm not talking about the financial interest that builds off the principle, but the interest and passion that grows in our hearts and minds as we care about the cause we are supporting. It's easy to find our hearts just by looking at our bank accounts.

What investments does your heart make?

Day 11

The Big Idea Find intention when you give.

“A woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table. When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. “Why this waste?” they asked. “This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.” Aware of this, Jesus said to them, “Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me.” Matthew 26:7-10

If I'm being honest, I think I would actually react to this situation the exact same way the disciples reacted. When I see people buying expensive things, I can't help but wonder how their money would impact people living in poverty. I don't like seeing things go to waste and I try my hardest to give to people in need when the opportunity arises.

The thing that the disciples and I are failing to notice is the woman's intention. She wasn't doing this to show off her expensive perfume or flaunt her riches in front of Jesus. She wasn't using her perfume for selfish gain. Her intention was to take a very expensive possession, perhaps the only thing of value she owned, and anoint Jesus, her Savior.

In doing this, she shows the disciples, and all of us who read the gospel, the worth of Jesus in her life. She gave up a valuable object in her life and Jesus extended favor to her.

Day 12

The Big Idea Give to the Kingdom of God and you will inherit proportionally to your giving.

“Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.” Luke 6:38

I'm sure we've all heard of the golden rule, which Jesus describes for us in the book of Matthew. Even kids who didn't grow up going to church know they should treat others how they want to be treated.

This verse in Luke is simply an extension of that concept. Give and it will be given to you. Whatever comes out of us is what we can expect to receive in return.

It's the same concept across the board: for our actions, our time, our respect, our talents, and our money. Although, I am certain that at the end our of lives, Jesus isn't going to rain down dollar bills on us in the equal amount which we gave to the church. But, I am certain that it is nearly impossible for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God (Matthew 19:24, Mark 10:25).

In other words, we must resist selfishness and give as our heart leads and our reward will await us in Heaven.

Day 13

The Big Idea A grieving heart.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Philippians 2: 3-4 (NIV)

In Luke 16, Jesus tells a story about a rich man and a beggar covered in sores named Lazarus. The beggar sits outside the rich man’s gate begging yet the rich man gives nothing to him. When each died, the beggar went to heaven and the rich man to hell. Seeing into heaven, the rich man begs for compassion. Abraham is firm, “Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.” (Luke 16: 25)

The rich man lacked faith in Jesus and indulged in luxuries, ignoring the poor. Lazarus suffered but kept faith in Christ. Which do you relate to? Does your heart go out to those like the beggar? Do you hurt every time you see someone in need? Or do you walk by like the rich man?

Let’s dig deep and see how we can put others needs before our own. Let’s ask The Holy Spirit how we can see others better than ourselves.

Day 14

The Big Idea An open hand gives freely.

“Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to.” Duet. 15:10 (NIV)

Moses commands us in the following verse, “...be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in **your land**.” In “our land” today, we tend to get busy and sidetracked in our own world and forget about “our land.” We tend to forget about others around us because it’s easier, or because we don’t have time. But when we look at Moses’ command, he doesn’t say we get to use excuses. He doesn’t say that when we see someone in need we get to ignore it because of how much time it will take, or because we didn’t budget for it. He simply tells us that we need to give freely and with an openhand. Not only when it is convenient or when we have excess.

What is your position on giving? Do you hold onto what you have with a fist or an open hand? What is one thing we can change today that helps someone in need? What does giving with an open hand look like for you?

Day 15

The Big Idea It's a heart matter.

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Matthew 6:19-21 (NIV)

In today's world we are surrounded by the desire to gain “stuff” – possessions and money. It is easy to get wrapped up in this desire because society sees it as the norm. We like our “stuff” because we earned it. We enjoy it. We deserve it. It's comfortable.

The Bible does not say that owning possessions is bad, but, it does outline, as in Matthew, that we should not put our hearts into those possessions. We should be focusing on God's plan and not our own. We should be building treasures in heaven rather than “stuff” here on earth.

When we collect stuff, where is our heart? Do we desire that “stuff” more than we desire God? If God asked us to give up all of our “stuff” and follow Him, as He does in Luke 18:22, would we do it? Or would we mourn our possessions more than we would mourn our distance from God?

Ask God to open your heart and show you where your treasures are.

Day 16

The Big Idea Grateful priorities.

“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ....” Philippians 3:7-8 (NIV)

Sometimes I wonder, if my circumstances were different, would my outlook of God change, too? Would I be grateful if I had less? As I look around my life, what do I see? Do I see a fruitful life that Christ would appreciate if He were standing next to me? Or do I see a withering tree producing no fruit? Then I realize, Christ IS next to me. He is ALWAYS with me. By staying focused on His presence and allowing Him into my heart, my priorities change and ultimately produces fruit.

As you look around your life, think about your priorities and what you are grateful for. Where is Christ in your life? Are binoculars necessary to see Christ from where you stand? Or is He so close you can hear Him whisper?

Day 17

The Big Idea Turning the tables.

“Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.” Luke 6:30-31 (NIV)

Webster’s defines generous as, “Showing others kindness; concern for others.” When someone attempts to take from you, what is the natural reaction? Society says that we fight back and hold onto what is ours. Society says, what you own is yours. As Christians we don’t belong to society, though. We belong to God and all we have belongs to God. So if someone takes from us, who are they really taking from? God gives us things to steward, of course. But, ultimately what does God desire?

Today’s challenge is this: ask God what giving with a grateful heart looks like to you. Does it mean helping a co-worker who is stealing your time by giving you their projects? Does it mean giving to someone trying to take money from you? Maybe showing someone compassion and generosity when most wouldn’t is just what God had planned to open their heart to Him.

Day 18

The Big Idea A true loss.

“Jesus answered, ‘If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’ When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.”

Matthew 19:21-22 (NIV)

Losing all we have is a scary thought, even if it’s a voluntary surrender. When Jesus called his disciples, He asked them to leave everything and follow Him. You could call this being “voluntold.” However, there are accounts in The Bible where Jesus tells people what it takes to follow Him and they leave Him.

Jesus never made following Him seem easy or comfortable to the world’s standards, but He promised He would always be with us. He promised that no matter what we go through, whether it’s easy or hard, He will help us through if we allow Him. He wants to surround us with His love and grace. He wants us to choose Him. He wants us to take our eyes off of our belongings so we can fix our eyes on Him.

What do you consider a bigger loss, losing sight of God because of possessions or losing possessions? If God called you to give everything you had, would you?

Day 19

The Big Idea Preparing to offer our best to God.

“A prophecy: The word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi. “I have loved you,” says the Lord.” Malachi 1:1-2 (NASB)

“He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years. Malachi 3:3-4 (NASB)

The book of Malachi was written around 450 BC, after the Israelites had returned from years of slavery as Babylonian exiles. They were again worshipping God in the temple at Jerusalem, they were prospering again, and presenting offerings through the Levitical priests.

Malachi is quoted most for its famous verses on tithing and how that practice impacts our finances. But God’s first words through Malachi extol his love for us and much of the rest of the four chapters deal with having the right heart in giving and offering to God.

Let’s take a few moments today to repent in our attitude toward God. Let’s understand His love for us then take a moment to confess any shortcomings. Let’s purify, cleanse, and focus our hearts on Him.

Day 20

The Big Idea God doesn’t change and moves on repentant hearts.

“For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed. From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you,” says the Lord of hosts. “But you say, ‘How shall we return?’” Malachi 3:6-7(NASB)

God believes in relationships as seen in the parables Jesus used. Remember the prodigal son and his exultant father? Or the dad who wouldn’t give a snake to his son who asked for a fish? God wants the same relationship with us--one where He gives us good things and rejoices in our return to Him.

As God’s children, we will mess up, be selfish, and stonewall giving of our wealth to God. The good news is that if we repent and return to Him, He will accept us as we would our own repentant child or grandchild. Most often a parent’s love never changes; no matter how old those parents and their sons or daughters get, the parents will always treat them as their beloved children. God is the same toward us; His love and mercy never change.

So return to God. He is waiting with open arms. In what ways do we need to return? Don’t let your heart become hard. Cry out to God. He’s waiting. Always.

Day 21

The Big Idea

As believers, we can't afford not to give.

"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you!

Malachi 3:8-9 (NASB)

In Days 22 and 23 of this devotional we discussed repentance before God and developing a clean heart. Malachi tells us that one area we may need to repent of robbing God by not giving properly.

No, God does not need our money, but He does need for *us* not to need it either. We rob God by not giving tithes and offerings. Giving 10% of those first fruits of what we earn financially or materially (tithe) or giving any other amount above that tithe (offering) requires a heart attitude that is open and submitted to God. If we're falling short, God is waiting, not to catch and punish a thief, but to help us turn this area over to Him.

The blessing upon tithers and givers is strikingly real. Honestly, it would be difficult to find a consistent tither who would say they were better off when they were keeping those funds in their bank account.

Remember, it's not about giving, it's about growing.

Day 22

The Big Idea

Answering God's dare: becoming a tither and giver of offerings.

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows." Malachi 3:10 (NASB)

As a graduate student making about \$500 a month, I tithed. A fellow grad student, just starting to work in his field of study decided he, too, would tithe. I loved his zeal but told him I didn't think God would honor his tithe, since he was sending it to the National Audubon Society!

Our tithe should go to the church we attend if from that church we are receiving spiritual provision (teaching from God's word). The scripture clearly teaches that God provides for and protects those who tithe.

Tithing isn't a magic formula to prosperity. However, in all the years I've been tithing, God has never let me down. He has always provided for me. Maybe not in the glitzy ways I think He should, but there's never been total lack in my home.

The promise stands true and God even sort of dares us. Test Him and take the dare. Begin giving like you never have before.

Day 23

The Big Idea Beware of the devourer.

“Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes,” says the Lord of hosts.” Malachi 3:11 (NASB)

During the dirty ‘30s of the early 20th century, the U.S. suffered terrible locust assaults whereby entire fields of crops would be eaten in a day. Even wooden plow handles in the field would be eaten. The Bible calls that situation one of being devoured.

The lesson God is trying to get across to Malachi and his people is that tithing and giving offerings isn’t just about having God’s windows open to bless them, but it’s also about having protection from circumstances that will devour our finances and wealth.

Although there is no guarantee that our finances or material blessings will always be protected, this is still a principle and promise that God followed through with the Israelites. He says in Malachi 3: He will provide and protects those who tithe. He actually invites us to test him in this. So dive in to the giving lifestyle and see for yourself. The water’s warm!

Day 24

The Big Idea What level of blessing brings delight?

“All the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land,” says the Lord of hosts.” Malachi 3:12 (NASB)

There is a difference between being blessed and being blessed *and* delightful. “Gold Rush” is a reality TV show that chronicles three miners working to find gold in today’s Klondike. One is a crusty middle-aged Dutch guy who swears like a sailor, one is a 21-year-old upstart, and one is a rough-around-the-edges Christian. The first two and their crews want to make money to amass more money. The Christian leader and crew are a bit different. Yeah, they want to make money, but it’s more to bless their families, help others, and bring honor to God.

The Nordic cusses people out and often grows impatient. The 21-one-year-old is consumed with beating the Christian in total gold mined and overworks his crew. The Christian is competitive, too, but he doesn’t run his crew into the ground and abuse them with angry four-letter expletives. He treats them with respect. Money is a tool to him and not a vice grip around his heart.

Three men. Three work ethics. One way of honoring God. Which one are you?

Day 25

The Big Idea Trusting the apparatus.

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, “I assure you: It will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven! Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” Matthew 19:23-24 HCSB

I purport to be a capable swimmer and enjoy diving, floating and swimming through water. I also love breathing. It comes naturally to me. Ingrained inside my head, though, is the fact that I cannot breathe in water. It simply isn't possible.

Then I decided to try snorkling. With a mask and snorkle, I was suppose to be able to breathe while in the water. It sounds easy, right?. But putting my masked face into the water and breathing brought about strained and tenuous gasps. Once I was able to relax, I began to trust the apparatus and find joy in snorkling.

This experience reminds me of beginning to surrender every area of my life - thoughts, conversations, time, abilities, actions and finances - to God and letting Him reign in my life. There were starts and stutters, but when I finally let go and let God, He always proved Himself trustworthy.

Where can you begin to trust God in your life? Take a step today.

Day 26

The Big Idea When He calls, He provides.

“Your life should be free from the love of money. Be satisfied with what you have, for He Himself has said, I will never leave you or forsake you. Therefore, we may boldly say: The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”

Hebrews 13:5-6 HCSB

My kids answered God's call on their lives and served as missionaries. Knowing they would be stretched spiritually, physically and emotionally, they were thrilled to step into their calling.

Although I was excited for them, I cautioned them on the financial uncertainties, which weighed on me more than them. How would they cover their needs? Was it right to repeatedly ask our friends and family for monetary support? The questions kept me awake at night.

My kids knew my problem and properly named it: Fear.

I thought I wasn't worried. I had confidence in God. He loves them and is there for them.

I was wrong. I was worried and the worry led to fear. How could I trust God in so many aspects of their lives, but fear that He wouldn't provide for all of their needs? My fear proved fruitless because God did indeed supply the necessary funds.

What are your fears when God asks you to serve Him? Don't let them paralyze you into inaction.

Day 27

The Big Idea Able to do all things.

"I know both how to have a little, and I know how to have a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content — whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me."

Philippians 4:12-13 HCSB

"I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me." Phil. 4:13. I've repeated this verse many times - for many reasons! I taught it to my children to inspire confidence. But there is so much more to it. The verses before and after in the letter to the Philippians speak of Paul's joy and thankfulness that the people cared for him and supported him. It wasn't self-centered "I can do it because I asked God to help me." Paul was explaining that whether he had much or was hungry and in need, he was able to get through the trying times because God strengthened him.

That's a strength and confidence in God's provision; built just like a house is built, piece by piece.

Build your strength and confidence to walk through life with joy, peace and hope. Be diligent to call out to God. Ask Him to grow you piece by piece.

Day 28

The Big Idea Feather Dusters and Tchotchkes.

"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is demanded of you. And the things you have prepared — whose will they be?' "That's how it is with the one who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." Luke 12:20-21 HCSB

Stuff. I have too much of it. Things I "had to have," now are scattered around my home. There's the ostrich feather duster guaranteed to help me swiftly clean, plus beautiful jewelry, pretty little tchotchkes and more clothes than I need.

Of what use are they?

I don't want to hold those things close. I know what's better.

Time spent dusting is useful for praying for those who enter my home. Beauty surrounds me. I only need to look — and not at jewelry and tchotchkes. Listening to music or the Bible, attending a Bible study and joining a small group move me closer to God. Spending quality time with friends and family, caring and serving others are enjoyable and worthwhile endeavors - and mean so much more than all that "stuff."

What's holding you back? Are you ready to have a life rich toward God?

My clutter has got to go. Anyone need a feather duster?

Day 29

The Big Idea What can you give...

“Summoning His disciples, He said to them, “I assure you: This poor widow has put in more than all those giving to the temple treasury. For they all gave out of their surplus, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she possessed — all she had to live on.”

Mark 12:43-44 HCSB

It was a journey she didn't want to take, but she was compelled to fly to a country she had never been in order to bring her son home.

God put me in the seat next to her. She shared about her reason for the trip and I reached out and touched her arm. We ate a meal together. It was the first she had been able to eat in almost a week.

She was empty and hurting inside, but a kind smile, a simple touch on the arm, someone to share the burden, seemed to give her strength.

“Thank you,” she said as we hugged and parted.

What had I done? I listened and cared for her. Our time together impacted each of our lives. Maybe she doesn't know that I think about her and pray for her; or that I look for opportunities to care for strangers and help someone in need because of a few hours with her.

It's not necessary for us to know the results of our actions. We are simply called to give. When we give freely to God, He changes us and makes an impact on others that we may never see.

She gave me one final wave and a smile. She would get through this.

What can you give touch the lives of others?

Day 30

The Big Idea Will you hold back?

The wicked man borrows and does not repay, but the righteous one is gracious and giving. Psalm 37:21 HCSB

As a young family, we were part of a stewardship campaign. Our pledge seemed like it would stretch us beyond our financial capabilities, but we had prayed and felt God's leading in our gift. It was a surprise when a young man handed me a check for \$900 to help us fulfill our pledge. I couldn't imagine. Who does that? He was a visitor to the area and happened to attend our church.

A few years later, the same man gave me a \$100 check. God had prompted this man to give us \$1000 but he had held back ten percent to avoid depleting his own resources. Yet he felt guilty for years and in the end had to obey God.

The first gift left us feeling blessed, but the young visitor was left with guilt. The second gift is profound. His nagging guilt moved him to obedience, forced him to humble himself and confess his sin, and is a reminder to all of us to graciously follow God's will.

Day 31

The Big Idea Contentment in the eternal is the true treasure.

“True godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can’t take anything with us when we leave.”

1 Timothy 6:6-7(NLT)

It can seem as if nothing is safe anymore. Fire destroys, tornadoes demolish, sickness kills, and thieves steal. But there are treasures that are untouchable from the destructive powers of this earth. There are whispers of the kingdom of heaven available to our yearning ears if we would only listen. There is a bounty to be given empty hands if we will only open them to the One who gives unconditionally.

Every good and perfect gift is from our heavenly Father. They’re gifts that cannot be taken from us. Find contentment in the gifts that God freely offers: love that cannot be destroyed or stolen, hope to give us vision beyond our present trials, and faith to see that He is good and true. The contentment found in these things is grounded in a God Who cannot be shaken.

Ask the Lord to show you where your contentment lies. Are you seeking the worldly wealth or eternal treasures?

Day 32

The Big Idea God offers us lasting satisfaction.

“So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content. But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction.” 1 Timothy 6:8-9(NLT)

Our flesh has endless cravings. It’s never satisfied. Many people spend their entire lives chasing temptations that will only harm them, pleasing themselves for a moment but leaving them empty and always wanting for more. Our sinful desires are a result of the fallen world we live in. But this earth is a temporary dwelling. We must remember that we were created for an eternal home.

When we seek God’s heart, rather than our flesh, we are seeking the things of the kingdom of God, which are ever-satisfying and pleasing. When the world leaves us with hopelessness, loneliness, depression, and anxiety, God instead offers hope, peace, and love. We can rest in the Lord’s care for us, trusting that He will fulfill us.

Let’s surrender our lives to Him and find a lasting satisfaction and a boundless love that will never, ever disappoint.

Day 33

The Big Idea The Lord desires our heart.

“What sorrow awaits you teachers of the religious laws and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law— justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things.”

Matthew 23:23 (NLT)

The Lord is not asking for resignation. He desires our hearts. His words, commands, and actions towards us have been birthed from His pure love. When we ignore the heart issues behind His commands and focus on committing deeds simply to ease our conscience or fulfill the law, we are ignoring the gift of His love. It’s love that wants to transform us from the inside out. A love that fulfilled the law for us because we could never do so on our own. When we truly seek to learn the purpose behind His commands, we find more than a set of rules. We find the treasures of His heart. We become more merciful, more faithful, and more just.

Our obedience becomes an act of worship. We will seek it in all areas. Even giving, which seems small, can come as an overflow of our love.

Search your heart today and see where your obedience comes from. Is it resignation or is it worship?

Day 34

The Big Idea We can trust in God’s provision.

“But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. And my God will supply all of your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:18-19

The apostle Paul witnessed, again and again, God’s provision. God truly was Paul’s Provider in all things and in all situations.

When we give generously out of love for God, who has promised to care for us, we see that our needs are met above and beyond what we can imagine. We also see the needs of those around us being met in a glorious manner. The gifts of God are abundant, fulfilling, and satisfying.

If we trust that our Heavenly Father will care for us, we will give freely. It is an act of faith and love because we believe His promises, we believe in His faithfulness, and we believe that He is true to His word. Our God truly is our Provider, and we can give generously to His kingdom because He loves us and cares for us.

Spend some time today asking the Lord to grow your faith, to help you to give generously, and to trust in Him more.

Day 35

The Big Idea

The Holy Spirit is our Guide and Helper.

“So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves.” Galatians 5:16 (NLT)

The cravings of the flesh can be strong. Oftentimes, it might feel as if a battle is being waged within our minds, spirits, and bodies as we wrestle against natural desires and what we know the Lord has for us. If we continue to feed the cravings of our flesh, we will find that we are never content. Those pleasures are fleeting and temporary, leaving us dissatisfied and guiding us to the door of destruction.

But our God is a good God, and He has given us His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is described in scripture as our Guide and Helper. He will guide us towards truth and help us follow the ways of the Lord that are good and right and true. When the Holy Spirit is guiding us, rather than our flesh, we will find lasting pleasure, we will have our desires met, and we will find life abundantly.

Day 36

The Big Idea

Worship is an expression of love.

“And David danced before the Lord with all of his might, and he was wearing a priestly garment . . . And they brought in the ark of the Lord and set it in its place inside the special tent David had prepared for it. And David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord.” 2 Sam. 6:14,17(NLT)

Worship is an outward expression of the love and gratitude we feel in our hearts towards the Lord. In these scriptures, worship manifested in different ways. First, we read about David dancing with all his might. He is thankful and overjoyed at what the Lord has done, and he worships with abandon before the One who has done great things. A few scriptures later, his reverence and fear of the Lord lead him to an act of obedience.

Worship is birthed in the quiet places of our hearts, and matures into an outward expression of what we feel for Him and what He has done for us.

As you go about your day, let your heart be moved to worship the Lord. Whether it be through words or obedience or songs or prayer or dance, take time today to express your love to Him.

Day 37

The Big Idea

God calls us to change our attitudes when it comes to our actions.

“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” Colossians 3:17 (NIV)

It’s so easy for us to do things grudgingly; whether it is doing someone else’s work at our jobs or finishing the household chores that our spouse was supposed to do yesterday. It’s easy to reluctantly carry out the tasks, while bad-mouthing others underneath our breath, but this verse shows how clearly and how strongly God urges us to change our hearts.

Be grateful you have the opportunity to serve others. Let it be an act of worship and let God’s love shine through you as you do it. The verse says that **WHATEVER** we do, we must do it **ALL** in His name. Yep, everything.

Doing every single little thing in our busy lives with a smile on our faces sounds nearly impossible to do, sure, but God holds Christians to higher standards than others. And yet God doesn’t need perfection from us; He needs effort.

What is an area in my life in which I need to be more willing to serve?

Day 38

The Big Idea

Acknowledge God in all that you accomplish.

“Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe His commands, His laws and His decrees that I am giving you this day. You may say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.’ But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms His covenant, which He swore to your forefathers, as it is today.” Deuteronomy 8:11, 17-18 (NIV)

Imagine if you and a friend worked tirelessly on a project for months, years even, until finally, together, you reached the end and finished. You’re proud of your accomplishment, no doubt, and you’re ready to tell the world. But whenever your friend shows it off to anyone, he introduces it by saying, “Look what I made.” How ridiculous is it that you’re given none of the credit!

Anything we accomplish in our lives comes from God. We need to be mindful to say, “Through God, I was capable of this,” We need to give credit where credit is due, or we become the friend who never gave his partner recognition for his contributions to the project.

Anytime we achieve something, we have a choice: am I going to acknowledge God for His part in this feat or not? He doesn’t need a ten-minute speech on how vital He was; He simply wants you to use your accomplishments as a way to bring glory to His Kingdom.

How can you honor God, recognizing His power?

Day 39

The Big Idea

Own your faith and encourage others.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.” Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

When Jeremiah wrote this passage, he was saying the Lord knew the plans He had for the nation of Israel. While God does have great plans for us individually, this verse says that He has plans for *us*.

We’re meant to live together, to build each other up in Christ, and guide each other in our walks with God. Our hope and our future is brighter and all the more prosperous when we have a greater godly foundation. Although we have to own our faith on a personal scale, there’s strength in numbers.

It becomes much easier to stop a powerful force alongside help from others. For example, the flood of 1997 in Grand Forks was devastating to families, homes, and businesses. To rebuild what the community had lost would take years for one person. But by working together we recovered, rebuilt, and revolutionized how we guard ourselves against the Red River. When we give towards God’s vision in the same fashion — together— we can realize all that God has in store for us.

Day 40

The Big Idea

Spending daily time with God is worth its weight in gold.

“Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.” Joshua 1:8 (NIV)

This verse makes one thing pretty clear: God wants us to know His Word. We have the responsibility to not only own a Bible to break out Sunday mornings and head to church, but also to spend time everyday reading and studying it.

Being disciplined in the Word opens up many more doors for us. It becomes easier to be Christ-like in our words and deeds. Being obedient to God’s calling becomes second-nature. Therefore, when He calls us to love, it’s easier to love. When God calls us to give, it’s easier to give. Just like with anybody else, we will become closer to God the more time we spend with Him. When God is the center of our lives, other pieces of the puzzle will fall into place.

There’s a saying that goes “a Bible that’s falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn’t.” To God, a one-year-old Bible full of scribbled notes is more attractive than a five-year-old Bible looking fresh out of the box.

How used is your Bible?