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December

20 Quiet Time Devotions to Encourage & Strengthen Your Faith!

The Kitchen Table

an extension of Inspire Ministries

w/ Wendy Bender



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Scripture Prompts, December, 2025

Day 1
I was absolutely mortified the other day when I saw a picture of me taken at a wedding we attended last week.

It was one of those "*random wedding snapshots*" taken from wedding guests and then uploaded to a shareable wedding website for all to see.

The picture was a fantastic shot of my middle grandson, Finn, who was "*flexing his muscles*" for the camera.

But the woman behind him... *I didn't recognize.*

Until I got a closer look.

And realized... ***it was me!***

The scowl on my face sure wasn't a proper expression of how I was feeling.

And I was humiliated.

"*Is THAT my resting face??*" I'd ask my husband upon seeing the photo just a couple days ago!

Indeed... **"*I MUST WORK ON THAT!*"** I exclaimed.

Ughhhhh!!!

It was the same kind of conversation I was having with friends a couple weeks back when we were discussing facial expressions in the classes I lead on Thursday evenings.

While the participants might not be aware of their countenance, *it is very different for the teacher.* Especially if that teacher is on a zoom call where all of the participants are muted and she cannot hear a thing from the other side.

It can be daunting to say the least.

But the truth really is that we don't know what we don't know.

We can't, on many occasions, be keenly aware of what our facial expression is in any given situation.

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But it got me thinking...

As believers in Jesus Christ... as followers of the King of Kings... ***what does our FACE say of our salvation story??***

The Apostle Paul says this in Galatians 6:17, ESV, "*... I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.*"

He says that he, **"*bears.. the marks of Jesus*"** on his physical body.

And one of those "*marks*" of Jesus, is our ***countenance.***

Our face... it tells a story.

And sometimes Christians... the ones who have the greatest story in the world to tell... are the ones who need to be reminded of this the most!

We should think about this!

Is there outward evidence on our face that tells the story of our heart that proves there's a deep indwelling possession of grace in our lives?

If there is the sweetness of Christ that is illuminating the inward parts of the believer, then there will naturally be a visible manifestation on the facial expressions of that person!

Our face cannot tell a lie!
It will more than likely tell the story of what is happening ***inside the heart.***

Our faces ought to prove that we are people, "*who have been with Jesus.*" (Acts 4:13)

Let's think about this as we go throughout the day today - and beyond!

What does your countenance tell ***of your salvation story?***
What does your countenance tell ***of your love for Jesus?***
What does your countenance tell ***of your devotion to the Lord?***
What does your countenance tell ***of your overwhelming gratitude for His grace and mercy??***

It really... ***really*** matters!

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Day 2
Deuteronomy 23:14.

It says this in the NLT, "*The camp must be holy, for the LORD your God moves around in your camp to protect you and to defeat your enemies. He must not see any shameful thing among you, or He will turn away from you.*"

The ***Camp.***
The ***capital "C" Church.***
His ***people.***

It must be holy.

And the ***people who make up the camp***... **must be holy.**

And it's not just O.T. teaching.

The disciple-turned-apostle, Peter, says it in the N.T.
"*For the Scriptures say, 'You must be holy because I am holy.'"* (1 Peter 1:16, NLT)

He was recalling to his mind the words of the Lord found in ***Leviticus 11:45 and 19:2.***

It's the same thing that the Apostle Paul preaches too.

Romans 12:1, ESV, "*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice,* ***holy*** *and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*"

1 Thess 4:3a, NLT, "*God's will is for you to be* ***holy****...*"

2 Cor 7:1b, NLT, "*... let us work toward complete* ***holiness*** *because we fear God.*"

The call is to holiness.

And it's not just to individual holiness... but to ***community holiness.***

The Word say, "*The* ***camp*** *must be holy.*"

The ***Camp.***
The ***capital "C" Church.***
His ***people.***

This means that I am not only responsible for myself... but I am responsible to you and for you as a member of the body of Christ.

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Believers.

And this is especially most troubling when there is "*sin in the camp.*"

And it's addressed all throughout the N.T., with the emphasis resting on ***the need for holiness, repentance, AND discipline among believers.***

And FOR SURE "*professing*" believers!

Sin is not merely ***a <u>personal</u> failure***, but a ***<u>communal</u> concern*** that ***can affect the entire body of Christ.***

"*Sin in the camp*" does many harmful things including ***disrupting fellowship, hindering spiritual growth, and compromising our witness of the Church to the world we live in.***

Paul says this in 1 Cor 5:6-7, NLT, "*... Don't you realize that this sin is like a little yeast that spreads through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old 'yeast' by* ***removing this wicked person*** *from among you. Then you will be like a fresh batch of dough made without yeast, which is what you really are. Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us.*"

It was a call to ***remove sinful influences from the community.***

Lest EVERYONE be contaminated and infected!

Then Paul gives this in his first letter to the compromising church of Corinth in 1 Cor 5:1-5, NLT, "*... I am told that a man in your church is living in sin with his stepmother. You are so proud of yourselves, but you should be mourning in sorrow and shame. And you should* ***remove this man from your fellowship****. Even though I am not with you in person, I am with you in the Spirit. And as though I were there, I have already passed judgment on this man in the name of the Lord Jesus. You must call a meeting of the church. I will be present with you in spirit, and so will the power of our Lord Jesus.* ***Then you must throw this man out and hand him over to Satan so that his sinful nature will be destroyed and he himself will be saved on the day the Lord returns****.*"

Church discipline.

Do you see it?

Man alive, if the Apostle Paul were in the Church today, ***<u>he wouldn't be welcomed long!</u>***

Do you even SEE what he asked them to do??

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"*... you must throw this man out and hand him over to Satan so that his sinful nature will be destroyed and he himself will be saved on the day the Lord returns.*"

The key phrase in all of this?

"SO THAT."

Hand him over to Satan... why?

"*SO THAT.... his sinful nature will be destroyed.*"
"*SO THAT... he will be saved on the day when the Lord returns.*"

We have to see it that this one... this man among them... ***was not yet saved... EVEN THOUGH he was a part of the church.***

People will OFTEN ask me, "*Can we lose our salvation?*"

The answer really SHOULD be as the great teacher/preacher John MacArthur always said, "*If you COULD... you WOULD.*"

And so would I!

But I always point them directly to 1 John 2:19 that says this, "*These people left our churches, but they never really belonged with us; otherwise they would have stayed with us. When they left, it proved that they did not belong with us.*"

They left the Church.
They left the Camp.

But...

... they never really belonged to it.

OTHERWISE...
... they would have stayed.

So their leaving...
... it proved the didn't belong to it.

And so it is like Jude warns us about.

"*... some ungodly people have wormed their way into your churches...*" (verse 4)

They've ***wormed their way into the Camp.***

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Like Judas did.

You remember he was one of them?
The disciples.

He had been one of the 12, and ***had long been united in position, promise, and purpose with them.***

He was ***intimately conversant with them.***

He had ***walked among true disciples***. *The faithful remnant*.

All the while... never discovered or suspected UNTIL he, himself, revealed himself ***by his vile, sinful, deceitful practices.***

He had been treated well by Jesus.
He had been ***invited into character development with the rest of the disciples.***
He was even ***sent out with the rest of the men to preach the Gospel, and had received the endowment of the gifts of the Spirit!***

AND... ***Jesus didn't reject Judas UNTIL Judas had exposed himself as the traitor he had become.***

Now is the time to pray for wisdom and discernment, my friends.

The night is growing darker.
The window of mercy is closing.

Let's not miss Judas in the camp before it's too late... ***for the camp***.. ***and for him!***

The call for us is to **AWAKEN!**

God... wake us up to the slumbering professors, who are heaping compromise upon the body of true, authentic believers. Open our eyes to see truth and to expose lies... and half-truths, Father! We are responsible for our brothers and sisters as we are of our own selves. Help us to be concerned to the core with how Your name is represented in the earth! Break our hearts with what breaks Your heart! Give us eyes to see, ears to hear, and make us brave enough to defend the faith with all manner of holiness and godliness!!

Amen!??!

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Day 3
If you have been here for a little bit now, you have likely heard me OR seen me use the phrase, **"*Awaken.*"**

And there is GREAT significance and GREAT purpose in this!

If you have **been awakened**, friend, *it was the Spirit of God who awakened you!*

If you have **seen the light in this dark, dark world**, *it was the Spirit of God who awakened you!*

If you have **been made more aware of His goodness and His faithfulness**, *it was the Spirit of God who awakened you!*

If you have **been experiencing higher thoughts of Him in your everyday life**, *it was the Spirit of God who awakened you!*

If you have **become increasingly more aware of the dreadfulness of your sin**, *it was the Spirit of God who awakened you!*

If you have **grown steadily more concerned with your eternal salvation**, *it was the Spirit of God who awakened you!*

If **your heart has been made more compassionate concerning the salvation of those you love who have walked far from God**, *it was the Spirit of God who awakened you!*

If you have **received a greater interest in the truth of the Gospel,** *it was the Spirit of God who awakened you!*

If you have **grown weary of the "*feel good*" message of traditional American-ized Christianity**, *it was the Spirit of God who awakened you!*

If you have **been made aware that in your sinfulness you are helpless without the work of the Lord and the grace of a loving Father**, *it was the Spirit of God who awakened you!*

If you have **decided to wean yourself from the world, and sever all ties to your former way of living that was so tethered to worry and fear and anxiousness**, *it was the Spirit of God who awakened you!*

If you have **become more aware that life is short and very uncertain, and that there is another world that, beyond this one, is our true home, and where you have the**

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precious promise of eternal presence with Jesus, *it was the Spirit of God who awakened you!*

And friend... if you **have had the Spirit of God awaken you from your sleepy state**... ***it IS your duty to IMMEDIATELY thank the Lord for it!!!***

Who's thanking Him today for eyes, ears, and hearts that are now **WIDE AWAKE, FULLY ALERT**, and **STANDING AT ATTENTION** before the Throne-room today?!?!!

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Day 4
Acts 5:15.

Write it out here:

_____

_____

Apostles healing in Jesus name.
Touching with the medicinal abilities from God almighty.

And then Peter... providing healing strength from his shadow?

Wait… his shadow??

I want to propose to you that we have, in us, two forms of influence.

The first is **voluntary influence**: Those ***things we do intentionally, physically, with human effort***. The apostles voluntarily (with free choice, deliberately) healed the sick. They laid hands on them and they were healed.

The second form of influence is **involuntary influence**. And this seems just as important - maybe more so. Our involuntary influence speaks of those ***things we do independent of our own will, unconsciously, automatic, and instinctively.***

Peter had the restorative power of God IN him and ON him.
And that was so evident to those who encountered him, that ***his healing gift was automatically recognized as from the Lord***.

How could it have come from any other means??

Unintentionally and unconsciously, a curative character sprung forth.
It was ***automatic.***

And this is what will, in us, ***supersede our reputation and ultimately our witness of Jesus***.

We tell of His goodness, grace, strength, and restorative power ***by our presence.***

Our **involuntary influence** is ***our actual self and what will naturally flow from the self-work we've attained***.

Voluntary actions don't always speak truth about a person.

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For instance your mouth can speak eloquently even though your heart is evil.

The key is a Christlike disposition.

And we must work to maintain a right spirit within so that the core of who we are embodies the character of Christ!

We must ***do well to take care of our foundation so that what is instinctively generated from us is indisputably genuine.***

We must ***supervise voluntarily*** what God wants to show off **involuntarily.**

Think about this in your own life.

What are some of your ***VOLUNTARY actions***. Those things you still have to work at ***DELIBERATELY doing***, because you know they are right and Christ-centered?

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Now… What are some of your ***INVOLUNTARY actions***. Those things you do by REFLUX now, because you've matured in your faith AND you know they are right and Christ-centered?

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Now.. spend some time ***praying*** for God to close the gap between these!

Day 5
They could have, indeed, been the words of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

They WERE His actions.

Our Christ... ***the Sinner's Stead!***

There was a moment in the worship night at our church this last week where I was **OVERCOME** with emotion!

UNDONE and OVERCOME.

The tears kept coming and coming and coming.

And it's always the case when I think on the ***worthiness of God***, and the *littleness of me*.

Always.

It's overwhelming to think about it.

We did nothing to deserve such ***radical kindness, such profound mercy, such incredible love!***

In Revelation 3, Jesus is speaking to the Church of Laodecia.
The ***lukewarm*** church.

And here's the words of our Savior, "*Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear My voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends. Those who are victorious will sit with Me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat with My Father on His throne.*" (Rev 3:20-21, NLT)

Do you see what He's saying here???

To the *LUKEWARM* church?!?!

It's the most precious promise to an ***overwhelmingly undeserving people!***

A ***promise of shared presence***.
And of all the Churches addressed in Revelation... this promise was given *only to them*.

Here, Jesus stands, not only as the Bestower, but Himself participating in what He bestows.

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His presence to His people!

And not only that... He's telling them that He stands at the door and waits. He's a Gentleman. He waits on us.

And <u>*when we knock*</u>... ***He is gracious and willing and kind.***

Look at how the AMP reads for verse 21.
"He who overcomes [the world through believing that Jesus is the Son of God], I will grant to him [the privilege] to sit beside Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down beside My Father on His throne."

See what He's doing here?
He's sharing the victory with us!!!

Can you EVEN imagine?!?!

Oh God... You amaze us daily!
Every day... blowing our minds with Your glory!

We are not worthy.
We **are not** worthy.
We are not **worthy!**

We love You, King Jesus!

Oh how we love You!!!!

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Day 6
Rest / Catch-up

Day 7
Rest / Catch-up

Day 8
Since day one of leading Bible Studies it has been said of me that I am a ***passionate person.***

Some say ***passionate.***
Others say ***driven*** or ***enthusiastic.***
Others, still, would say ***dramatic, extreme, or "dire."***

I've probably heard it all in over 20 years of ministry work.

But there's a reason for it all.
It IS intentional.
It DOES have purpose.

As I walk through a personal study in the book of Ezekiel, I am once again reminded of the devastation of his calling.

Here is what the Lord said to him.

"I am sending you to the nation of Israel, a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me. They and their ancestors have been rebelling against Me to this very day. They are a stubborn and hard-hearted people. But I am sending you to say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says!' And whether they listen or refuse to listen—for remember, they are rebels—at least they will know they have had a prophet among them." (Ezekiel 2:3-5, NLT)

Then the Lord says this in verse 6, NLT, "*Son of man, do not fear them or their words. Don't be afraid even though their threats surround you like nettles and briers and stinging scorpions. Do not be dismayed by their dark scowls, even though they are rebels.*"

He was told:
- *do not* ***fear their words***
- *don't* ***fear their threats***
- *do not* ***be dismayed by the dark scowls***

And then, if that wasn't enough the Lord says this, "*You must give them My messages whether they listen or not. But they won't listen, for they are completely rebellious!*" (verse 7, NLT)

You must give them the message.
Whether they listen or not.

Oh... and by the way... ***they won't listen.***
I will tell you that up front.

How's that for an encouraging calling?

And here's the thing, ***we ALL want the encouraging calling.***

We ALL do.

You wanna know how I know?
Because I do.

I hear it all the time... "*I want to know what the Lord has called me to do!*"

We think we're asking about ***a career.***
We think we're asking ***for the discharge of work that will yield a bountiful and plentiful harvest.***
But what if the answer He gives is the same answer He gave to Ezekiel?
Or Isaiah?
Or Jeremiah?

What then?

Would the answer STILL be, "*Here I am, Lord, send me!*" (Isaiah 6:8)??

In several chapters over, we read these words in Ezekiel 21, verses 6 and 7, *"Son of man, groan before the people! Groan before them with bitter anguish and a broken heart. When they ask why you are groaning, tell them, 'I groan because of the terrifying news I have heard. When it comes true, the boldest heart will melt with fear; all strength will disappear. Every spirit will faint; strong knees will become as weak as water. And the Sovereign LORD says: It is coming! It's on its way!'"*
The warning wasn't for disaster to be deployed immediately.
The message was, "*It's coming! It's on the way!*"

I think that sounds pretty dire, don't you??
And the prophet ***groaned*** because of the calling.
He ***wept over*** the people in whom His calling positioned him to serve. And warn.

The natural expression of his work was:

- mental distress
- anguish
- sighing
- weeping

Oh, Ezekiel! **I GET IT!**

But it all served a great purpose.

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It was all intentional to:

- ***excite the people's curiosity***

and

- **inform them of the coming evil**

He was called to ***a people who would NOT sigh for themselves.***

And SO MANY of us, as believers, are called to this same purpose.

No... I'd say **we ALL are.**
ALL of us who have said YES to the Lord!
ALL of us who have received the gift of salvation!

And MANY of us will sit around tables soon with family members who are unsaved and do not know the love of the Father!

And I ask you - ***Does you heart ache for their salvation?***

As you see the window closing and time running out, do you feel a **"*dire*"** need to share the Gospel??

And listen... I don't mean just cracking open a Bible and pointing to a few scriptures. Scores of people do this in place of simply ***loving well*** and ***living from the overflow of their personal precious moments with the Lord,*** that SPILLS OUT OVER with care, concern, and genuine affection for those they've been entrusted to love.

WE have an opportunity this holiday season, friends.

And a ***mandate*** to respond to and initiate.
A ***calling*** to answer to.

Look back at Ezekiel, chapter 2.

After the Lord gives this grave assignment to the prophet, He turns to Ezekiel and says this to HIM PERSONALLY... "*Son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not join them in their rebellion. Open your mouth, and eat what I give you."* (2:8, NLT)

Do not join them in their rebellion.
And eat what I am giving you.

You're different.
You're not like them.

Don't join with them.

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Don't contribute to them.

Just do what I say.

Is it ***conversions*** you authentically desire?

Then hear the Word of the Lord clearly.

Don't join them.
Do what the Lord says.

Wherever you go - you are a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. A prophet, of sorts, among the people you love!

YOU carry the testimony of Jesus wherever you go, and whomever you are with!

Will their lives be better as a result of having spent time with you? The one who carries the banner of Christ with them into every environment they enter??

The position you occupy in your home, in your workplace, in that family gather... ***it is NOT an accidental one!***

It has been ordained by a holy and perfect and good, good God!!!

You have been rightly and purposefully placed where you are so that the SALT you carry and the LIGHT you house can preserve and shine for all to see AND experience!

YOU are a messenger of mercy!
You are to herald God's love!
You are to broadcast the urgency of the Gospel!

You have been entrusted to the care of those who don't yet know!

This might mean warning and rebuking, encouraging and uplifting, grieving with some, comforting some, and reminding others.

But one thing it will always mean is ***never letting their looking for the Savior be in vain!!***

What will they see when they look at you?
What will they discover about Jesus by observing your life?

What will they find??

It truly... truly... matters!!

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Day 9
Psalm 22 is an incredible prayer we could all benefit from reading, studying, and praying!

Verse 3 might be my favorite!

Write it out here in the NLT:

_____

_____

The KJV says God, *"inhabits the praises of Israel."*

Enthroned.
To sit down, dwell, remain, settle.

The ever-ascending praises of His people become a Throne for the Divine King!

And the psalmist David was here overwhelmed with grief & terror.
He was begging God for rescue, even asking why he'd apparently been *"abandoned."*

But even David's complaint was a sign of a healthy spiritual life!

Why?

Because it was David's fixation upon presence he was most concerned with!

David didn't ask the question, *"Why is this happening?"*

That question doesn't get answered this side of heaven and keeps us in a state of discontent.

But rather David asks, *"Why have You forsaken me?"*
It's the language of a heart yearning for presence and favor!

The same was with Christ who, in His flesh, longed for another option than cross-bearing. However His great faithfulness to His mission prevailed. And so we see did David's!

David says, *"YET You are holy!"*

He still had ***unwavering confidence in God.***

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Though His prayer seemed to go unheard and surely delayed, He was not laying blame to His God! He maintained zero doubt that there was a sufficient reason why He wasn't answered.

God dwells where praise is proclaimed!

David doesn't cry for help until help is received... ***he encourages himself in the midst of what appears to be the most desperate of measures.***

He encourages himself by:

- ***reciting*** God's goodness
- ***reminding*** him of God's character

and

- ***recalling*** His past rescues of which David had been a witness

Yes he's tired, but he does not fail.
Even when things get worse, when enemies duplicate, and with physical depletion of strength, ***he renews himself with praise.***

Oh that we'd be people of perpetual praise.

May we boldly pray, *"Thy Kingdom come!"*
Because ***His presence is life and He faithfully dwells among those brave praisers!***

Spend some time in PRAISE today!!

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Day 10
I love the first words that leave the mouth of David in Psalm 37.

He says, "*Don't worry about the wicked or envy those who do wrong.*"

It's almost like David understood this well.

Like he's speaking from ***experience*** - having spent time worrying about other people.

- What they thought.
- What they did.
- How they behaved.
- How they dishonored the Lord.

He says, "*Don't worry*" as though He is also ***comforting himself.***

The ESV says, "*Don't fret.*"

"*Fret*" means this = "*to feel or express worry, annoyance, discontent, to cause corrosion, to gnaw at something, to torment, irritate, to wear away or consume by gnawing, fume, rage, or worry.*"

Oh boy.

And he says, "*Don't do that!*"

In other words... "*Don't disturb yourselves with what you see in the world!*"

I find myself saying this on repeat.

I say it when I talk to those I minister to... those I mentor... "*Stop worrying about what is happening in the world around you. While you can be concerned... do not be consumed.*"

Why??

Because a worried spirit... a fretful disposition... a discontented spirit... **is open to many temptations.**

We can sink into utter hopelessness and despair when we live *reactionary* to the world around us instead of living in *response* to God... who He is!

I did a video recently where someone commented something like this, "*I see wicked people prospering all the time. Getting their socks blessed off by God.*"

Oh and the bitter undertones in that comment were palpable.

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My response was simply, "*And sadly, this is the best it will ever get for them. If they do not know Jesus, they will spend an eternity separated from Him... so our hearts should grieve for them.*"

SURELY we should not envy them!

If you know Jesus... you have a peace that the world ***cannot give***, and that the world ***cannot have.***

Worrying... fretting... murmuring... these things certainly are diseases we suffer with as humans.

And can I tell you something else?

Anxiety, depression, fear, worry... all of these diseases that plague us... and remain with us... should not be viewed as a result of *circumstances* only. It is often a deep-seated pain raging within us. One commentator said, "*It is almost always an **inward** ailment, affecting both the body and soul.*" He goes on to say, "*The root of the mischief is in the **rebellious heart**.*"

To worry is contrary to the Spirit of the Gospel.

The Psalmist David here is saying that there is nothing more likely to contribute to envy than the ***perceived prosperity*** of the wicked.

I have a FREE printable (https://app.box.com/s/0ind3vx86yrv9aod5gr84yhb8zq7fwlk), where I have listed out 6 symptoms of fret (worry). They are:
1.) accompanied by **envy**
2.) loss of **appetite**
3.) high **fever**
4.) unbearable **thirst**
5.) **vision** impairment
6.) loss of **memory**

Let's look at these a little closer today:

1.) Envy.
Worry is almost always associated in some way, shape, or form by envy. We worry about what other people are thinking about us... thus envious of their position in life. As though their idea of us has any bearing... any weight at all to our well being. It WON'T if we are living surrendered to Christ Jesus.

We worry about what other people are doing. We say things like, "*Why do they get to go on all those expensive, lavish vacations?! Where is their money coming from?*"

Where is this stemming from? Why are we so concerned and consumed with what they are doing?

Answer Often: **We're envious.**

Look at the definition of the word, "*Envy.*"
By definition it means this = "*a feeling of discontent or covetousness with regard to another's advantages.*"
Biblically it means = "*to be jealous.*"

Take a look at what James tells us in James 3:16, NLT, "*For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind.*"

Look at it in the ESV, "*For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.*"

The NKJV says it like this, "*For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.*"

Where there is envy and jealousy... there will be ***disorder*** (instability). There will be every ***vile (evil) practice.*** The envy... the self-seeking attitude... will bring ***confusion*** and ***evilness.***

Wow.

We have to be on the lookout against envy and jealousy as it wreaks havoc on the heart.

Hebrews 12:15 warns us of this, "*Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many.*"
Bitterness comes, often times, from pride and envy. And the truth is that it will not only wreak havoc on ***our own*** lives... but also on ***the lives around us*** at the same time!

2.) Loss of Appetite.
This is... for the things of God. If we give way to worry... if we allow ourselves to be overcome by fret and anxiety... we will not long for more of Jesus. We will grow weak in our concern for the external world around us living separated from God, prayer will become almost impossible, and the Gospel itself will lose the zest it once had and the priority in our lives it once did. Giving way to worry is one SURE FIRE way to lose our appetite for seeing (and thus experiencing) the goodness of the Lord!

3.) High Fever.
This is... anger. It is very easy when you get in this state of mind... when you become embittered with envy and jealousy... to get consumed by anger and resentment. And it

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is very difficult in our human depravity, to free ourselves from wrath. It is a very difficult disease to break free from.

4.) Unbearable Thirst.
This is longing for something others have. Wanting what you perceive to be a blessing they have and you don't. It is a parching of the tongue that is almost unbearable. The more you pine for what they have, the more unbearable this thirst becomes in your "*perceived*" dry and weary land.

In essence, when you envy what others have, you are admitting to God your discontent with what He has lovingly lavished upon you when you've done nothing to deserve even the smallest of blessing.

5.) Impaired Vision.
We don't see things clearly. When we are envious and jealous, it is all-consuming. We don't see the truth as we once did. We don't receive and perceive the same way we once did. We no longer have proper eyesight to the things of the Lord!

6.) Loss of Memory.
We forget the mercies of God! We fail to remember the gift of our salvation and the way He lovingly carried us through in the past. We fail to ***Remember, Recall, and Repeat*** (the words I have said in my ministry over and over again)!

How utterly useless AND painful is worry and envy!?
It only serves to aggravate and intensify our troubles.
Nothing but evil can come from evil.

Look at what my commentary says, "*Envy leads not only to waste, but to worry, and not only to worry, but to wearing away of our powers, as by the slow and insidious progress of disease.*" (W. Forsyth)

He goes on to say this, "*... envy is in reality a grievous offense against God. We are slow to admit this. We regard 'fretfulness' as more an unhappy temper than a* ***sin****. But in this we err. 'Envy' implies dissatisfaction with God's government, distrust of His justice, and doubt of His truth. When we give way to 'envy,' we place ourselves first, and as good as say, 'If God were just, if He really loved us and eared for us, He would settle things otherwise, and not suffer our enemies to triumph over us.' Thus in our* ***selfishness*** *we blind ourselves to the truth, and act not only* ***unworthily*** *towards God, but* ***inconsistently*** *with our own best faith and hopes.*"

Matthew 12:33 says this, "*The tree is known by its fruits.*"

We can examine all of the evil ones in scripture that allowed themselves to be overcome and outdone by envy and pride and bitterness and jealously:
Cain, Saul, Ahab.

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Oh God, help us! Help us to not worry. To let go of an envious spirit that indeed separates us from you and serves to unfit us for heaven!!

Journal your thoughts here:

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Day 11
Psalm 37:7 says this, "*Be still in the presence of the Lord, and wait patiently for Him to act. Don't worry about evil people who prosper or fret about their wicked schemes.*"

Look at it in the NKJV, "*Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.*"

Now look at it in the AMP, "*Be still before the Lord; wait patiently for Him and entrust yourself to Him; Do not fret (whine, agonize) because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who carries out wicked schemes.*"

Resting and Waiting.

It's ***not*** a call to idleness or laziness.
It is ***not*** a call to indolence, but rather action, enveloped in restfulness.

Two seemingly opposing things can be true at the same time.

My commentary says, "*Restfulness is the preparation for service; it is the interior fountain of* ***active*** *goodness.*" In other words... I CAN be in a restful, peaceful state, WHILE actively DOING GOOD for the Lord.
Restfulness SHOULD BE the spirit by which I do all of my working for the Lord.

Let's look at a couple of these Hebrew words for a minute.
The phrase, "*be still*", or "*rest*" is the word, "*dō·wm*" and it means this = "*to be dumb, to be astonished, to stop, to perish.*"
It also means = "*to be silent.*"

Ahh, yes. I know a little something about this.
Needing to be silent.
Sometimes less is more!
MOST of the time it is!

We rest in the Lord.
We get still before the Lord.
We remain silent while He prepares to speak.

BUT isn't it just like our God to give us a command to ***refrain*** from something at the same time He gives us an order or an assignment to ***actively DO*** something??

He says, "*Rest in the Lord*" and what?
"*Wait patiently.*"

The Hebrew phrase is, "*wə·hiṯ·ḥō·w·lêl*" and it means = "*to twist, whirl, to dance, to writhe in pain, fear, to wait, to pervert.*"

Wow. Such a definition!
It's not passiveness, idleness, or laziness by any means.

Did you see that?
"*to twist, whirl, to dance...*"
That's action!

This is a call to service... with the fret and the anxiety of it all... removed!
"Waiting for the LORD" does *not* mean sitting back helplessly. It means to gather strength... to be energized by the confident expectation that God ***is*** going to act. It's occupying yourself in that which you CAN do while you wait.

Like twisting and whirling and dancing.

Restfulness is a **settled condition** of the Christ follower.
It is determining that I am going to BE IN STATE OF CALM REPOSE **while** things are in chaos around me, **while** things don't appear to be good, **while** the world beckons me back to a state of dread and panic and fear.

I WILL REST and WAIT on the Lord.

Having patience is a sign of *spiritual maturity*.
And it is evidence of a spirit controlled by a higher way of thinking.

One commentator put it as this... having a, "*lofty spirit.*"
(Lofty = "*exalted in rank, dignity, or character.*")

So I encourage you to put before you a question... "***Do I possess a lofty spirit?***" In other words, "*Do I think from a different perspective? One that is NOT of this world. One that is NOT controlled by worldly passions and ungodly concerns?*"

Think about **Jesus** for a moment.
Was He patient? You bet He was!

He came as an infant to a fallen world, was raised in a family that mostly misunderstood Him, and embarked upon a 3 year mission that would bring Him much heartbreak and continual grief and ultimate rejection and death.

And He waited.

Waited for 30 years in obscurity for that short ministry to even begin. And YET He remained in a hopeful state in the presence of evil people, in companionship with

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students who were less than obedient, and stationed before a cross He would have to bear... the symbol to an outside world of everlasting defeat and shame.

He waited.
And so must we.

And HOW WE WAIT matters.

Let's look at some practical ways of waiting.
1.) We are to wait UN-WAVERINGLY.
We see this sort of thing described for us in the N.T.
Heb 10:23 says this in the ESV, "*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.*"

Without wavering.
It's Greek translation means this = "*unbent, unyielding, resolute, firm. Not leaning.*"

We wait confidently. Without bending. Without yielding. Being resolute and firm.

I stand on the firm phrase I always use, "*I live without options.*"
I do not offer to myself any other way than to live patiently... without wavering. (Do I get it right every time? No way! But I am learning what living with no options means, and this is one area I must learn to declare daily over my life. I WILL wait unwaveringly!)

2.) We are to wait CHEERFULLY.
Think about that glorious choice we have in how we will wait!
It is always a matter of ***free will*** and ***choice***!
If the Lord has put me in a position to wait... wait on a job, wait on a diagnosis, wait on a relationship restoration... I have a choice. I can either occupy myself with doing good for others, reading and studying the Word of God, deepening my prayer life. OR... I can busy myself with worry, irritation, impatience, and anger even.

How we wait matters.
(I encourage you to listen to a song that helped me very tangibly years ago during a hard waiting season of mine... "*While I'm Waiting*" by John Waller.)

3.) We are to wait CONFIDENTLY.
Look at all the verses within this one Psalm alone that outline the promises for us **IF** we choose to not worry, to trust Him fully, to delight in the Lord, to commit everything to Him, to do good, and to wait patiently...
Verse 4 - "*... He will give you your heart's desires.*"
Verse 6 - "*He will make your innocence radiate like the dawn, and the justice of your cause will shine like the noonday sun.*"
Verse 29 - "*The godly will possess the land and will live there forever.*"

Look at verse 23. It says this in the NLT, "*The Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives.*"

He directs our steps.
He has complete direction of:

- every incident
- every circumstance
- every confusion

Our steps are ordered.
Prov 16:9, NLT, "*We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps.*"
Prov 20:24, NLT, "*The Lord directs our steps, so why try to understand everything along the way?*"

ALL of our steps are ***divinely ordered*** by God!

- our joys
- our sorrows
- our associations
- our connections
- our wanderings
- our actions
- our thoughts

ALL are divinely overseen and ordered by God!
And SO... we can confidently rest in Him, and His timing in all things!

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Day 12
It IS a sure sign that the a person is walking in the **Spirit of God** ***when they operate their lives in a spirit of love first and foremost <u>toward God and then toward people</u>.***

1 John 4:7 says this in the ESV, "*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.*"

Love is ***a mark by which we may know who has a true spirit of God living in them.***

It is, **by no means**, an ***infallible sign*** - as many operate in love who don't personally know God - it IS a sign if the love is first, beyond everything else, ***fully and completely to the Lord.***

We will see this often in people who profess to be good people, and even might say they are "*followers of Jesus.*" But these people will put first their apparent love for PEOPLE, but ***live devoid of putting God first, if ever in a place of importance anywhere at all.***

1 John 4:12-13 say this in the ESV, "*... if we love one another, God abides in us and His love* ***is perfected in us.*** *By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.*"

The entire rest of that chapter in 1 John 4, deals with love and outlines ***the distinctions made between those who love by the Spirit, and those who are of a counterfeit kind.***

Go read it!

What we know to be true is that there are ***two distinctive identifiers*** of a person living for the Lord, and a person influenced by the enemy... the ruler of the world, Satan.

Love and humility are ***marks of the true believer***... the one ***walking in the Spirit of God.***

Some of their characteristics of **LOVE** include a person who:

- ***maintains a gentle spirit*** that ***subdues conflict among people***
- ***offers a spirit of peace and good will*** among others
- ***excites*** in others ***acts of outward kindness***
- has an ***earnest desire for the salvation of souls***
- is simply ***delightful to be around***

These are, indeed, some of the ***highest evidences that there is an indwelling work of the Spirit of God within a person!***

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Some of their characteristics of **HUMILITY** include people who:

- live with ***a sense of their own littleness, vileness, weakness, depravity, and utter insufficiency***
- maintain a ***self-diffidence (humility), self-emptiness, self-renunciation, and poverty of spirit***
- ***see others as more important than themselves***

These are ***true identifying marks of a person who is living most influenced by, and <u>LED BY</u> the Spirit of God!***

The enemy of our soul, the Devil himself, ***has a fraudulent spirit.*** One that is filled with ***malice and pride.*** And those who belong to him, ***operate under that same kind of spirit.***

It's a counterfeit spirit.

And it is NOT easily discerned.

It is often masked by ***self-love, self-awareness, and a disdain for those things which would even slightly serve to wound our pride, seer our ego, threaten our self-confidence, or convict our consciousness.***

We learn the ways of living best by **Jesus Himself**... ***our greatest Educator who ever lived***. "*... learn from Me [following Me as My disciple], for I am* ***gentle and humble in heart****...*" (Matt 11:29, AMP) "*But anyone who does not love does not know God, for* ***God is love****.*" (1 John 4:8, NLT)

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Day 13
Rest / Catch-up

Day 14
Rest / Catch-up

Day 15
I don't have the answers.

None of us do.

And it's still a sticky note that lives on my bulletin board.

Something I felt God whispered to me, and JUST before the pandemic of 2020 began.

I remember it distinctly because it would be a message I would give to a room filled with 20 or more HUNGRY souls, looking for more of Jesus! And just 2 weeks before the one of the largest global hardships the world has ever faced.

I'd say these words...
"Embrace the mystery."

I would add these words to it in the closing up of my talk... "I am embracing the mystery.. because all is an invitation."

Mystery by definition means this = *"anything that is kept secret or remains unexplained or unknown; obscure, puzzling, or mysterious in quality of character; any truth that is unknowable except by divine revelation."*

And what I have learned is this - we all live with a fair amount of mystery.

And it's purpose ***isn't*** to alienate us from God.

Quite the opposite.

It's been assigned to us ***for the purpose of attaching us in closer relationship with Him.***

It's all **invitation**… ***invitation to deeper communion with God.***

This mystery is an invitation.

An invitation to know the Father.

I cannot always know what He's doing - ***but I can trust Him in the process.***

I cannot know why we are asked to endure some painful battles - ***but I can rest in His provision.***

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I cannot always look at the tree and appreciate it's shadow, ***but I can look back as having relished in it's shade.*** I can look back and ***marvel at it's beauty… the very thing I might have missed if not for it's once inconvenience.***

Proverbs 25:2 says it this way, *"It is God's privilege to conceal things and the kings privilege to discover them."*

You and I - are the kings. And it is our privilege to *"redeem the time, because the days are evil."* (Eph 5:16)

So I will embrace the mystery!

I don't have to know after all.
But I do need to know the One who holds it all!
And knows it all.
And is still ***redeeming it all.***

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Day 16
1 John 4:15.

We've all heard it before.

In the ESV it says this, "*Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.*"

Confession.
Whoever ***CONFESSES.***

This implies a **confession** not only that there was a person who appeared to all humankind in the form of flesh and did suffer those things that are recorded of Him, ***but that He was the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, and His name is Jesus.***

The word "*confesses*" is interesting here.

It is the Greek word, "*homologēsē*", and it means = "*covenant.*"

It's meaning extended is to be understood as *an open, unashamed declaration,* ***not merely a silent opinion****. It means more than "allowing", but rather i****t is a word that carries with it an idea of esteem and affection.***

And John says, "*Whoever CONFESSES... by covenant... who stands openly and unashamed... declaring and not standing in silent opinion... who doesn't just allow the truth of who He is to become the reality by which they live, but who highly esteems Him and has deep affection for Him... THEN God abides in him and he in God.*"

WOW.

Sorta changes everything, right??

Oh Jesus, we CONFESS You boldly today and every day!
You are Lord and we love You mightily!!

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Day 17
Job 29 records the words of the man who is ***remembering the former blessings of his life before the pain.***

Verse 6 reflects on a time, *"When my steps were bathed with cream."*

I found this interesting to say the least.

Sometimes *"cream"* or *"heavy milk"*, even *"butter"* was used for the purposes of anointing the feet. And Job is reflecting here on a time when the richest milk flowed from him.

Some theologians say that Job's cattle produced such a vast quantity of milk that when the servants brought it in from the fields, their pails would literally run over in abundance. So much so that Job couldn't step from his house without stepping into puddles or milk. Some scholars say that this milk acted as a *"washing"* agent for his feet.

Job is recollecting a time when his feet were literally dripping with the cream, practicing the presence of the Lord.

And so it causes me to look inwardly a bit and ask the question my heart knows the answer to, but I have to ask anyway… ***Am I am dripping with His presence??***

When I ***spend time with Jesus.***
When I ***soak in habitation with the Father.***
When I ***read His Word.***
When I ***dwell in the secret place of prayer.***

When I do these things… and then leave these places… I have the power to ***leave an indelible mark!*** You and I CAN affect every room we enter when we remain connected to the Giver of grace.

Write out Eph 6:15 here:

_____

_____

Ahh... there's gonna be people I encounter today who are experiencing pain and chaos. Am I walking into their life with a READINESS to bring peace?

I'm praying for God to keep me ever aware of my potential influence!

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Look up and write out these verses today:

Isaiah 52:7:

_____

_____

Ahh.. beautiful are the feet... implication here is: movement, going somewhere!

Psalm 40:12:

_____

_____

We can trust Him in our going!

Josh 1:3:

_____

_____

It's like God's saying, *"You want to be blessed.. you want to change things? Get going! Get into it!"*

And so we pray: *"Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."*

We declare it like He's commanded in the example: *"Kingdom, come!"* We say, *"I want Your world to infect and influence my world."* So then we must ask for the anointing of our feet.

I'm asking for it today and tomorrow and next week.
Always.

God, anoint my feet with readiness, eagerness, willingness, excitement, usefulness, preparedness, promptness, strength, hunger, and anticipation.

"*Your Word is a lamp to guide my FEET.*" Psalm 119:105.
Walk.
Go.
Get moving on that anointing. Leave a mark for Jesus!

The world is waiting!

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Day 18
Hosea 2:5-7 in the CSB says this, "*Yes, their mother is promiscuous; she conceived them and acted shamefully. For she thought, 'I will follow my lovers, the men who give me my food and water, my wool and flax, my oil and drink.' Therefore, this is what I will do: I will block her way with thorns; I will enclose her with a wall, so that she cannot find her paths. She will pursue her lovers but not catch them; she will look for them but not find them. Then she will think, 'I will go back to my former husband, for then it was better for me than now.'"*

The ESV for verse 6 says this, "*Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths.*"

These were the charges the Lord was bringing against Israel.

The rebellious, stubborn, disobedient, sinful people.

And He is comparing the nation to a promiscuous mother.

The NLT says she is a, "*shameless prostitute.*"
The KJV says, "*harlot.*"

Either way, we get the idea from scripture.

The prophet Hosea was in a unique situation.
He was in an unhappy marriage to an unfaithful wife.

And the Lord is using this circumstance as an analogy of ***God's painful relationship with Israel, His chosen people.***

Just as Hosea's wife, Gomer, was unfaithful... ***Israel acted like a prostitute by worshiping Canaanite gods.***

The Lord says:
"*But now bring charges against Israel - your mother - for she is no longer My wife, and I am no longer her Husband.*" (verse 2)
"*Tell her to remove the prostitute's makeup from her face and the clothing that exposes her breasts.*" (verse 2)

And then skipping ahead to our focus verse in all of this... verse 6... "*Therefore* ***I will hedge up her way with thorns****, and* ***I will build a wall against her****, <u>so that</u>* ***she cannot find her paths****.*"

The prostitute being spoken of here, was ***promiscuous and steeped in sin.***

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Not only was she betraying her husband, she was acting recklessly by, "*running after other lovers*"... and, "*selling herself to them for food and water, for clothing of wool and linen, and for olive oil and drinks.*" (verse 5)

And the prostitute was likened to **Israel**, whose "*lovers*" were the little "*g*" gods in whom they had worshiped ***in place of the Lord God Almighty.***

And God needed to ***get their attention.***
He needed them to ***awaken to their sin.***
And ***return to Him.***

So He had a plan.

Though the consequences for their sin was severe... there was ***Holy justice discovered***, and ***Divine purpose intentioned*** by a God who's promise had been to ***love them, care for them, and ultimately bring full and complete restoration.***

And the same is true for you and me.

Look at verse 6 in the ESV again.
"*Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths.*"

The GWT says it like this, "*That is why I will block her way with thornbushes and build a wall so that she can't get through.*"

At first glance we might be tempted to see only the ***cruelty*** in this.

And **it is** cruel and harsh and unkind... ***ONLY if we are refusing to think from an elevated perspective!***

Think about this for a moment!

The Word says that the Lord ***HEDGES UP HER WAY WITH THORNS, and BUILDS A WALL against her.***

That He ***BLOCKS HER WAY WITH THORNBUSHES.***

Why?

Because ***she had been living wildly.***
Because ***she had become wayward.***
Because in her sin, ***she had lost her way.***

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And she ***needed to be reminded.***
She ***needed to be brought back.***
She ***needed to be corrected and protected.***

BOTH.

I want to propose to you that the Lord set these hedges up, **not** to be cruel and callous. **Not** to be insensitive and heartless.

Quite the opposite.

I think we see God being ***uniquely intentional and fiercely loving*** here.

Could it be... that the Lord set up the hedges and walls with thorns all around her to:

- **Punish** her for her waywardness for the means of greater purpose and use?
- **Protect** her from herself and her continuation of sin?
- **Position** her in a better place to see Him, know Him & have Him?

It's the same way we see Him often deal with us, *though we wouldn't be so quick to admit it.*

Discipline is difficult.

And ***admitting to spiritual setbacks having led to spiritual barrenness is <u>most</u> difficult!***

But He does often work in ways that are hard for us to wrap our brains around! (Aren't we SO thankful that we serve a God whose, "*ways are higher than your (OUR) ways*"*... and whose,* "*thoughts higher than your (OUR) thoughts.*" ??? (Is 55:9)

And so we see it with the way God handles us in our sinful, rebellious disobedience.

He:

- Punishes.
- Protects.
- Positions.

He lovingly and all-wisely:

- **Punishes** us for our waywardness for the means of greater purpose and use!
- **Protects** us from ourself and our continuation of sin!
- **Positions** us in a better place to see Him, know Him & have Him!

He is good,
He is love.
And His correction... and His discipline... ***they are always for a greater purpose.***

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They are ALWAYS for ***our good and His glory!*** (Romans 8:28)

And here's the REAL deal... often the Lord will use ordinary things ***seen as troubles and grievances***... to punish, protect, and position.

Sometimes it's ***a relationship that He allows to grow sour.***
Sometimes it's ***a business deal that falls through.***
Sometimes it's ***a bankruptcy threat.***
Sometimes it's ***a job loss.***
Sometimes it's ***an unexpected illness.***

We don't know how He will choose to work.

He is sovereign and holy.

"*Our God is in the heavens, and He does as He wishes.*" (Psalm 115:3, NLT)

"*I create the light and make the darkness. I send good times and bad times. I, the LORD, am the One who does these things.*" (Isaiah 45:7)

And so ***He will use whatever means necessary to get our attention.***

Whatever. Means. Necessary.

He will even use ***a prophet's unfaithful wife*** to ***redeem and entire population of people back to Himself if need be!***

"... How impossible it is for us to understand His decisions and His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor?" (Rom 11:33b-34)

He will do what is necessary to redeem us and return us to our first love!

It could be, and it IS usually seen, as ***an annoyance, a disturbance, and a hardship***... ***<u>but</u> His workings don't always make sense to our feeble human minds.***

God intends these interruptions to make us better!

And in our ignorance, and in our stubbornness, here we often come, tearing down these hedges thinking that WE know better.

When all the while... ***God's plan was to use them to punish, protect, and position!***

And when we tear down... here the Lord comes again to build up another.

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He is that loving and that good!

Oh friends!! **He is... THAT GOOD!**

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Day 19
If you are reading this - chances are, you are doing our December Devotion Bundle.

And I LOVE the end of the year.
The closing up and the readiness of opening up a new year.

There's always been something so glorious about it!

And if you've been here for any length of time, you know I am always saying, *"Review the Catalog."*

What I mean when I say that is - take time to ***GO BACK OVER*** things you have read, scriptures you have studied, and times you spent with Jesus.

If you are anything like me - you take notes when you are studying. I write down all kinds of things... sections of inspiring commentary I want to remember, important Greek and Hebrew words I want to retain, other scripture references, prayers.

And a couple years ago it dawned on me... I have a HARD time remembering what I read this morning - *let alone* what I studied 2-4 years ago!

So I started to ***"Review the Catalog."***
I wanted to know :

- What was God speaking to me about?
- What did I learn?
- What did I still need to work on?

And..

- How is God still speaking today?

If you've ever wondered where this idea came from, it stems from the scripture found in Lamentations 3:40. It says this in the NLT, "*Instead, let us test and examine our ways. Let us turn back to the LORD.*"
And in the KJV it says this, "*Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD.*"

Let us test... or other versions use the word, "*examine.*" It means = "*to seek, search, to uncover that which has been hidden.*"

Let us try means = "*to penetrate, to examine intimately.*"

Let us turn back means, literally = "*to turn back, in, to retreat, again.*"

It's where it all started in my though process concerning this method.

We need to ***Test, Try, and Turn.***

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Trouble in our lives, especially, ought to cause us to do some self-scrutiny. Some self-investigation.

Turning back should be for the purpose of bettering ourselves. Of asking questions like:

- What is God trying to tell me?
- What do I still need to learn?
- What do I need to repent of?
- What do I need to let go of?
- How is God still speaking today?

Take a look at Haggai 1:5. It says this in the NIV, "*Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Give careful thought to your ways.'*"

It is always best for us to do some self-examination. My commentary says that, "*...those employed for God may be driven from their work by a storm, yet they must GO BACK.*"

It might be time to ***go back.***
Review the catalog.
Listen for His voice once again.

Sometimes it's important to go back in order to move forward.

I wrote it in my journal in 2018 when I started the reviewing process regularly... "*Maybe God's not saying anything new because He's already spoken... and He's still waiting for obedience to what He has already said.*"

And here's what Reviewing the Catalog **cultivates for us:**

1.) Gratitude.

Gratitude becomes normal and natural when we become aware of things conscious of the God who works miracles.

We see Him as the Miracle Worker, and it changes everything! (See Psalm 77:14)

2.) Awareness.

Awareness of His abiding presence and His constant and steadfast faithfulness!

We become more aware of His presence and more aware of His goodness when we ***stay in constant and consistent review of what He is doing and what He has done! What He has spoken and what He is now speaking.*** (See Hab 2:14)

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3.) Strategy.

I am not keen on this word, but it's true. It helps us keep into focus what He has already said and what He ***expects*** from us.

It helps us establish a ***plan of action***. (See Phil 4:9)

4.) Trust.

Trust in God.

It helps us build and deepen our trust in Him and His plan! Ahh… the One who brought us this far and has revealed to us this much… ***He CAN be trusted!***

It helps us ***deeper our dependency on His voice!*** (See Heb 10:35)

5.) Endurance.

You are able to sustain for longer periods of time when you ***stay connected to His voice and His hand. When you stay joined to what He is saying and doing!*** (See Heb 12:1)

6.) Enthusiasm.

You gain excitement for more! You gain and appetite and an eagerness for more of Jesus! A longing for His voice.

(See Romans 15:17)

You cannot review His history and His nature and not want to WORSHIP… not be EXCITED about all He is doing and for the paths you still have to traverse with Him!

Finish today by reading Proverbs 3:1-4.

Note: I will be offering an ***Online One-Day Zoom "Review the Catalog" class*** in late December - stay tuned!!

Day 20
Rest / Catch-up

Day 21
Rest / Catch-up

Inspire Ministries

Day 22
The enemy has a target.

And he works hard at accomplishing his tasks among confessing believers.

In 1 John 2:15-16, the Apostle says this, "*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.*"

Do not love the world.
Or **the things in the world.**

By "*the world*", John here is speaking of ***anything and everything that pertains to the interest of sin***. It includes all of the corruptions and lusts of people who are living in this fallen sin-infested place run by and ruled by the prince of darkness... Satan himself.

The worldly spirit that we are warned against here is ***the demonic spirit that is constantly at war with the Christ follower.*** The spirit that ***goes to battle against the soul*** the moment they embark upon the road to holiness following their heartfelt conversion.

It is the spirit that works among a people to ***lessen their affection for the Lord***, to ***weaken their sensitivity toward things of holiness and righteousness***, and to ***turn them away from Christ with the lies that, "This work for Jesus is too weary and overbearing", and, "This character seems impossible to pursue, much less imitate!"***

You see, it should never be believed by us that Satan would ever convince us of our sin, awaken, in the slightest bit, our conscience, or aim at making us better in any imaginable way!

It is the devil's interest to ***LULL our consciences to sleep.*** To ***keep us quiet***. To ***dull our senses and make us idle, useless, and lame.***

But there IS a **counteraction** that believers can engage upon that ***WILL work to subdue the enemy and minimize the effectiveness of his schemes!***

Wanna know what it is??

Opened eyes.
Declaring mouths.

Inspire Ministries

Psalm 119:18 in the NLT says this, "***Open my eyes*** *to see the wonderful truths in your instructions.*"

Matthew 13:16 in the NLT says this, *"But blessed are your* ***eyes****, because* ***they see****; and your ears, because they hear.*"

Romans 10:9 in the GWT says this, "*If you* ***declare that Jesus is Lord****, and believe that God brought Him back to life, you will be saved.*"

We must live WIDE EYED and FULLY AWAKE!

Aware of the what is happening in our world.... ***without being influenced by it.***

We must live DECLARING God's goodness and His truth!

Refusing to be silenced in speaking for Jesus Christ in whom we have placed our trust and confident hope!

Closed eyes and a quiet mouth are MOST DANGEROUS, Christian friends!

And eyes that are ***willfully shut***, and a mouth that is ***purposefully silent*** is THE most dreadful and THE most fatal of all!

Eph 5:14 in the NLT says this, "*Awake, O sleeper, rise up from the dead, and Christ will give you light."*

Awake and Declare.

These are our *weapons* against spiritual idleness.
These are our *immunizations* against the unseen, and often unsuspected spiritual warfare attacks.

If we would be brave enough to ***live with EYES FULLY ALERT*** and ***a MOUTH ALWAYS OPEN*** in the declaration of God and of His faithfulness and goodness and mercy... *then* ***we would PUT A STUMBLING BLOCK in front of the enemy. We would serve the good purpose of HINDERING his plan. We would be doing well by USURPING any intentions he had to steal, kill, or destroy!***

If we were no longer *weak, passionless, inconsistent* Christians, and if we made a *heartfelt determination* today to ***surrender our will to His by way of opened eyes and confessing tongues***... **oh just imagine the darkness we could dispel! Oh how we could disturb the enemies plans, circumvent his interests, and disquiet his lies!!**

Are you with me???

Inspire Ministries

Day 23
Part 1 of 4

I heard a pastor say once, *"You're a human being, not a human doing. BUT... you will never be rewarded for 'being.' God says, 'Well DONE good and faithful servant!' DONE! DOING something."*

When we have been made in His image… ***He expects us to do something different.***

And so became a question I began posing to myself SO many years ago.

How will I **RESPOND** to the Lord in my life?

How will I ***respond to what He has done, and what He is still doing?***

By definition, the word *"respond"* means this = *"to reply or answer in words, to react favorably, or to correspond."*

The Latin word is, *"Respondere"* which means = *"to promise in return, reply, answer, or pledge."*

Deut 6:4 says this, *"Listen O Israel. The Lord is our God, the Lord alone."*

The Hebrew word for, *"listen"* is *"SHAMA."* And it means = *"to hear, and to **obey**, and **respond**."*

Moses doesn't call the people to simply listen to His words… He calls the people to ***DO what the words say.*** In other words… according to this Hebrew text, ***I do not HEAR unless I RESPOND.***

Knowledge doesn't trump action.
I can have a head full of knowledge, but unless I am allowing it to change **WHO I AM BECOMING**… it is useless.

Write out James 1:22 here:

_____

_____

Write out 1 John 3:19 here:

_____

_____

Inspire Ministries

The pursuit of the in-depth knowledge of the Word should be producing a change in the heart of the believer. The Word should always be ***LIVED OUT.***

Two of the greatest questions we could ever ask are found in Acts, chapter 2.

Acts 2:12, ***"What can this mean…"***
When the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost and there was speaking in other, unintelligible languages.
Acts 2:37, ***"What must I do?"***
When Peter was preaching to the crowds regarding salvation.

Proverbs 3:6 says this, *"In all you ways, acknowledge Me."*
This is the same word as to KNOW here in this passage!

NOT just book knowledge.
It's ***interaction, exchange, encounter.***

NOT just looking at someone and waving…
More than a glance!

Responding to the Lord is a ***co-laboring*** of sorts.

The Gospel was given to be ***known and believed***… but also to be ***obeyed!***
It's about making a decision to ***co-labor with the King of Kings and the Lord of Lord's!***

It's NOT a ***system of notions***, but a ***rule of practice.*** And we get better by-and-by, by the ***PRACTICE of responding well*** to the Lord and to His Word!

I remember hearing it years ago in my spirit!
Long before I could articulate it's meaning.
He gently whispered, *"Often you're frustrated because you aren't holding up YOUR end of the bargain."*

And so it begs the question… ***Where is my frustration coming from?***

Because chances are it is ***a direct result of disobedience*** to that which He has already spoken… my ***INCONSISTENT RESPONSE*** to what He has said!

I can sit in my church gathering every Sunday and hear a very inspiring message that really, *"gets me in my feels"*, but ***I am ultimately responsible for doing something with what I have been given!***

So… **How do we respond well to God??**

Inspire Ministries

1.) Cultivate an awareness of the Spirit of God.

Be on the LOOKOUT for Him!

And where do we often find Him? Encounter Him?

Well first and foremost ***we find Him in the Word!***
But apart from that, we find Him in nature, in conversations with other people, and in regular communion with Him!

We ask ourselves… WHERE IS HE in this situation? Where is He standing?
Now… go stand next to Him. Where He is. Doing what He is doing. Saying what He is saying!

He will always be found among heavenly, Divine solutions!

We must change our mind, and begin ***thinking as a resident of heaven.***
See Jesus in everything!

One of the most impactful scriptures to me, personally, when I first started studying the Word was Genesis 28:16. It's the words of Jacob and he says, *"Surely the Lord was in this place and I wasn't even aware of it!"*

It's about ***cultivating an awareness of His ongoing presence.***
It's finding out where He's at - and looking for Him always!

Presence increases AS my AFFECTION for Him increases!
Knowing becomes BURNING!

Like Him waking me up from slumber to be with Him!
"My heart has heard You say, 'Come and talk with Me.' And my heart RESPONDS, 'Lord, I am coming." (Psalm 27:8)

2.) Allow yourself to be inconvenienced and disrupted by God.

This is part of responding to Him well!

OH! And when you hear, it's important to ***OBEY IMMEDIATELY.***

When I see the Jesus of the Bible and the example He provided for me… suddenly I have no other option than to ***MOVE.***
Staying still is no longer an option.
I cannot stay where I am!
I am absolutely compelled to pursue and example that was given to me!

Inscope Ministries

And remember - your studying… EVEN STUDYING IN THIS STUDY BUNDLE… is your response! It's your YES!

And think about Jesus.
Didn't He allow Himself to be inconvenienced and interrupted for others?

And so because it's modeled in His life, shouldn't it be molded in mine?

In Luke 18:35-42 theres's a story of Jesus healing a blind beggar.

Take some time to read it.

There are TONS of reasons people have for not engaging with the Word.
"I don't remember what I read."
"I fall asleep. I can't focus."

But listen - the Word still nourished you, didn't it??
And by the way - I never knew a parent who didn't love that their child fell asleep in their lap!

Come.
Be inconvenienced.
Oh how He inconvenienced Himself for you!

More tomorrow!!

Inspire Ministries

Day 24
Day 2 of 4

Today is a continuation of our question, ***How do we respond well to God??***

3.) Arise and Shine!

Isaiah 60:1 says this, *"Arise, Jerusalem! Let your light shine for all to see. For the glory of the Lord rises and shines on you!"*

He didn't say, *"Rise and Reflect."*
He didn't say, *"Rise and go call your bestie!"*

He says, *"Arise and Shine!"*
Meaning the HOLY SPIRIT is already in you!
You already POSSESS the light!

So.. think about it.

What things must change in order for you to take on the rising AND shining??

Journal your thoughts here:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Inspire Ministries

4.) Focus on His Omnipresence… not on the outcome!

My willingness to get up tomorrow and continue praying for the issue at hand is proof that I am not in it for the outcome! I'm in it because He says, ***"Do it."***

I cannot reduce the assignment!

And neither can you!

5.) Talk to Him… ask Him the hard stuff!

Focus less on the why.
You may never get the why answered this side of eternity.

“Why is this happening”

It may prove fruitless.

But consider this, *“What are You trying to tell me or teach me in what is happening?” “What do You want me to learn through what I am experiencing?”*

Our questions should always be about ***our betterment and growth!***

Will you do what He is commissioning to You to do - even when you can’t make logic sense of it all??

Journal your thoughts here:

_____

_____

_____

_____

6.) Find out what the Jesus of the Bible is doing.

And then… just do what He does.

I cannot stress this one enough. I feel like it’s the crux of my ministry.

In John 5:19 the Word says this in the NLT, *“So Jesus explained, ‘I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by Himself. He does only what He sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does.”*

The Father’s great character was 1.) Known, 2.) Seen, 3.) Observed, and 4.) Acted upon!

I’ve heard it said before, *“The Lord doesn’t give us commissions that He will carry out if we don’t.”* Ahh… ***they might just get undone altogether!***

We have an assignment and and we will have to answer to what we did with what He assigned!

Just think about that one for a moment!

Write down some things you KNOW the Lord has called you to do.
Maybe it’s a job… a task… an action of obedience.

Inspire Ministries

You've had it confirmed in scripture.
You've perhaps heard other people affirm it to you personally.

YOU are responsible in responding well to that which you now know!

What is that thing or those things you've been called to do?

Now… spend some time practicing your ***YES!***

Inspire Ministries

More tomorrow!

Day 25
Day 3 of 4.

Today is a continuation of our question, ***How do we respond well to God??***

7.) Find a few places in scripture where he gives directs orders.

And then ***begin with small areas of obedience.***

No, really. ***The <u>small</u> things.***

Things like:
- returning the shopping cart to the corral/not just leaving it for someone else to get
- hanging back clothing that fell from a hanger in the thrift store
- tipping largely even when the service was not great

First Peter is a GREAT place to read for some PRACTICAL orders. Take a look at them and write their orders next to the verse:

1 Peter 1:6: _____

1 Peter 1:13: _____

1 Peter 1:25: _____

1 Peter 2:1: _____

_____

1 Peter 2:2 _____

1 Peter 2:11 _____

1 Peter 2:12 _____

1 Peter 2:13 _____

1 Peter 2:21 _____

1 Peter 3:8 _____

_____

_____

Inspire Ministries

_____

_____

1 Peter 3:9 _____

_____

1 Peter 3:10 _____

8.) Be careful listening to other voices.

The problem often doesn't like in our ability to hear His voice, the problem often lies in ***our inability to disregard other voices competing with His voice!***

We have to get to the point where we are coming to Him first and foremost!

Other voices will always tend to work against the Lord's voice in our life.

And listen… He won't speak louder because you're being stubborn in hearing.
IN FACT, the opposite it usually more true. He will speak ***more softly.*** And pretty soon that whisper will be so dulled we miss it altogether!

We have to work earnestly at ***drowning out the other voices until HIS is the only One we hear!***

Now- this doesn't mean we avoid godly counsel… it simply means that His voice has to be the final word I listen to ask well as the first one I respond to!

9.) Celebrate the Victory before it comes.

We have to live like Jehoshaphat in the O.T.
We have to PRAISE ***in ADVANCE*** of the battle!
Or at least in the middle of it.
Oh yes - that would prove to be the most difficult of all!

If you thank God ***after*** the fact - ***that's gratitude.***
If you thank God ***in advance*** - ***that's faith!***

And the breakthrough of our situations usually comes through worship!

I read in a commentary recently, *"Prayer that becomes praise is proof that God is becoming our desire."*

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Just imagine with me the battles He is fighting for you as you preoccupy yourself with praise? As you distract your mind by focusing on those things that are, like the scriptures say, *"true, honorable, right, lovely, admirable, excellent, and worthy of praise."* (Phil 4:8)

Journal your thoughts here:

Inspire Ministries

We will finish tomorrow!

Day 26
Day 4 of 4.

Today we finish with our question, ***How do we respond well to God??***

10.) Pray for effectiveness and usefulness.

It's not about me.
And it's not about you.

The purpose of your faith is not just about you. It must affect the world around you.

Write out 2 Cor 1:4 here:

_____

_____

My commentary for this says, *"The more a soul possess Him, the more truly it will to try to share Him."*

Satan loves to find us ***idle.***
God is pleased when He finds us ***employed*** with His work to do!

I believe that one of the main purposes of our discomfort is to enable us to ***enliven others from our experience.***

This is - being Jesus with skin on!

Mark 10:51 is Jesus speaking and He says, *"What do you want Me to do for you?"*

He knows the answer.
But can I tell you - ***He longs to hear your voice!***

With everything in me I believe Christ delights in knowing the desires of our hearts! He encourages us to speak because it pleases Him to hear!

The strength for our struggle is in our speech!
It is very important that our mouth lines up with HIS purposes!

11.) Pray for the impossible!

Can I tell you something?
Delays of mercy are not denials of prayer.

Inspire Ministries

Write out Psalm 27:13 here:

_____

_____

And so begins the question we need to ask ourself… *"What are the things I am praying for that if HE doesn't show up…they don't get answered??"*

Think about it for a minute!

What are the ***impossible*** things you are believing for?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Are you praying ***regularly and faithfully*** for those things??
Are you praying as though you are ***FULLY and COMPLETELY reliant on God??***

I love it when friends and family members will come to me for prayer. And the thing is, I find this to be true of even my unbelieving community of friends… or those who would never profess Christ in their daily lives. Because to me… this is proof that they have some measure of belief for that which would otherwise be impossible!

And friend… it is totally fine to pray honestly to the Lord and tell Him that you feel like He's abandoned you… that you feel alone in your situation… that you're scared, worried, and frustrated even. He knows!

But let's be sure to follow it up with… *"But God I know with YOU all things are possible, so I am trusting You!!!"*

And while it's good and relatively safe to pray, *"God be with me today."*… BUT, if you have the ***resurrected power of the living God taking up residence within you*** - **He is already there!!**

What we need is **BIG** and **BOLD** prayers like He modeled for us!
"Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." (Matt 6:10, ESV)

Inspire Ministries

12.) Maintain continual adoration for Him!

Deep affection for who He is and How good He is!

Oh friend.. ***remain AWE'd by Him!!***

Sometimes we stop being amazed.
We've come to know His movements and anticipate His mercy.

But you know what scripture tells us?
"Great is His faithfulness; His mercies begin afresh each morning." (Lam 3:23, NLT)

I met with a good friend about 2 years ago who had just gone through one of the biggest scares of her life. A diagnosis one year earlier with *stomach cancer.*

And I will never forget sitting across from her sipping on our Starbucks coffee when she said these words, with tears streaming down her face after a grueling 12 months!

"Cancer?!! WHAT cancer???"

It was gone.
She was healed.
GLORY to God!

And can I tell you there's just something special about being with someone who KNOWS what they have been rescued from!!

Oh friend… ***pray to have that fire inside… always!***

Don't stop being amazed by what He is saying, what He is doing, and by His heart for you!

Don't allow your miracle to get trapped within familiarity!

Oh… and one more thing!! Did you know that you cannot be awed by your problem and His presence at the same time?!

I cannot give influence to my poor circumstance and worry, and HIS powerful capacity and willingness to answer at the same time. I can only be AWE'd by one thing! What will I choose??

My focus determines my forecast.
What I choose to laser focus on will eventually become the condition for which I must be willing to live in.

Inspire Ministries

Remember Elijah in the O.T.??
We see him praying for rain in 1 Kings, chapter 18.

After a 3 1/2 year drought, he declared to hear the rain coming.

Verse 41 says this, "… I hear a mighty rainstorm coming!"

Did he really hear it?
MAYBE he did.

Or was he just praying and believing for that impossibility we've already talked about?!
Or maybe it was His proclamation of victory before the miracle, like Jehoshaphat, that we've already talked about!

Regardless of what it was, it WAS a declaration that preceded God's demonstration!

He was indeed speaking OPPOSITE of circumstances!
His confidence was in God's ability to deliver!

13.) Remain grateful.

Anything you are thankful for has the ***capacity to increase.***

Now I'm not saying that we use manipulation tactics to secure blessing, but what does increase in us is more awareness of His goodness, more knowledge of His heart!

You remember the fishes and loaves story?
(You can read it in Matt 14:13-21!)

AFTER Jesus gave thanks, He was able to feed the multitudes.

Thankfulness was the atmosphere of increase and abundance!

14.) REJOIN with God.

It's never too late to rejoin with God and with His purposes for our lives!

One of the most simple and yet most effective ways we can respond well to God is by just *"doing good."*

And friends… I don't mean morally. The way the world would even deem acceptable.
I mean… holy good. godly good.

Jesus was our model in this!

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Acts 10:38 says this, *"And you know that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around **doing good** and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for **God was with Him**."* (NLT)

Let's finish off with these… the Four P's of Response:
POSITION yourself to hear Him.
PRAY. Develop a relationship with Him.
PARTNER. Co-labor with Him.
PRAISE. See God in your everyday surroundings!

Journal your thoughts on implementing each of these points into your life:

Inspire Ministries

Day 27
Rest / Catch-up

Day 28
Rest / Catch-up