

Immeasurably Deeper

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A 40-day devotional
for a deeper life in the Spirit

Edited by
Abby Guinness

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Blessed are those who trust in the Lord... they shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.

Jeremiah 17:7–8 (NRSV)

... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Galatians 5:22–23 (TNIV)

You may want to work through these devotionals in forty days, for Lent, or any other season. If you have longer, we would recommend reading one per week over forty weeks, choosing to take more time pressing deeper into relationship with God and his life-giving Spirit. This will give you a chance to implement the suggestions, ideas, and practices suggested throughout the week and explore how they might be applied specifically to your situation. You will find it helpful to have a Bible nearby as longer passages are referenced rather than printed in full.

In engaging with God and his Spirit through this resource, we pray that you will find deep refreshment, which will, in turn, bring refreshment to others.

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1

PRAYER

MP

To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives.

Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*

SOMETHING TO READ

Here's what I want you to do. Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace.

The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They're full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don't fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need. With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply.

Matthew 6:6-9 (MSG)

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Prayer, according to one ancient definition, is “keeping company with God”. I believe prayer is one of the most underdeveloped spiritual disciplines of the Christian journey. In his book on the subject, Phillip Yancey says that in prayer, “I open my soul, exposing by will what God already knows by wisdom.” But prayer requires things of us that we are not always willing to give. Time. Attention. Vulnerability. Submission. Transformation. And often, we feel inadequate to pray because we are stuck in works-based righteousness that makes us a slave to approaching prayer as a vending machine or a crown jewel in a glass case. Perfection as a means and/or an end to prayer is not the answer.

What if prayer is the constant act of learning? If the disciples had prayed all their lives, but desperately needed Jesus to teach them (Luke 11:1), how much more do we need our Lord to engage with us in our intercession, showing us what and how to pray? Jesus commanded that his disciples pray, conveying a certainty that it could make a difference in a world opposed to the will of God. Even though Jesus appeared to create a formula for what prayer should look like (Matthew 6:9), we instinctively know this was a mere glimpse of the attitude in which to come before the Father.

Prayer is not the collection of the right words any more than it is the motivating factor to obtain our deepest worldly desires. In prayer, we are constantly learning the contextual heart of the Father. We come to realize that prayer is not just an inner dialogue taking place, but the Spirit of God is praying within us and communicating his will. Because of this, we may “approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:16, TNIV).

SOMETHING TO TRY

Over the next week, begin praying for something you care deeply about. Spend time with the Father each day on this one subject, trying different prayers. Commit to learning how to pray for this one intercessory subject. Be sure to draw near to God through each prayer, learning how he wants you to pray.

Some questions to ask God:

- *What is your will?*
- *What would please you?*
- *How can this advance your kingdom?*

SOMETHING TO PRAY

Our Father in heaven,

Reveal who you are.

Set the world right;

Do what's best –

as above, so below.

Keep us alive with three square meals.

Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.

Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.

You're in charge!

You can do anything you want!

You're ablaze in beauty!

Yes. Yes. Yes.

Matthew 6:9–13 (MSG)

2

CONFESSION

AG

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:8–9 (NRSV)

Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.

James 5:16 (NRSV)

SOMETHING TO READ

Nehemiah 1:1–10

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

When sharing a bedroom with my brother when we were little, if we'd been talking or causing mischief, as the bedroom door creaked open and a parent appeared, before anything could be said I would instantly, and loudly, announce (with a pointed finger to eliminate doubt), "It was him!"

I've never liked admitting guilt. But growing up with the Anglican liturgy I have always loved the helpful routine of asking for forgiveness for those things we have done purposefully or might have done unwittingly or by omission.

We need to confess our sins to God, to acknowledge to him where we have marred his image in us. To omit confession is to make ourselves God, and judge that we are capable of deciding what is right and wrong. A routine searching of the self for where we have made ourselves higher than we ought is an opportunity for the Spirit to work in us.

In some cases, we also need to confess to others.

There was a time when I was running headlong into something damaging, not only to me but to others, so I asked a friend to hold me accountable. She faithfully asked me how it was going and I convincingly lied. I couldn't bear to tell anyone how badly I'd failed, how willingly I'd given in to temptation and done what was wrong. There were mercifully no repercussions so I didn't need to tell anyone, and I didn't for several years.

The memory of it, however, would regularly pop up during the times when I was most trying to connect with God or serve in church. Finally, after it had waved itself under my nose at yet another unwelcome moment I dragged a friend into the garden and blurted it all out. I said, "I know what I did was wrong and I'm sorry. And I know God has already forgiven me. But the memory of it won't leave me alone because no one else knows." Liz listened without condemnation. She prayed for me. I didn't cry or feel anything particularly special. But the memory of that sinful incident has never bothered me again.

Confession to God was important and I did it so many times. Confession to another person, along with prayer, was what made me able to finally accept God's forgiveness deep into my subconscious, instead of just knowing it in my head. Without fireworks, the Spirit dissolved the issue so it could no longer be a blockage to my knowledge of forgiveness or to God working through me.

SOMETHING TO TRY

Use the prayer below. Take a moment to pause after the word “sins” and consider what they might have been for you in the last twenty-four hours. Leave them behind as you continue the prayer. You could consider making this a daily, weekly or monthly routine.

If there is a particular action, thought, or relationship that always jumps into your mind to remind you of your sinfulness, find someone outside of the situation to whom you can safely confess. Let them pray for you.

SOMETHING TO PRAY

Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour,
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen.

3

MEDITATION

CM

**Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in your sight,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.**

Psalm 19:14 (esv)

SOMETHING TO READ

Psalm 19:1–14

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

My life requires me to be something of an organizational ninja. Like you, my day consists of different boxes – a work box, a volunteering box, a family box, a friend box, a chores box and, with two teenage girls, I have a particularly large taxi-driving box. I wake up in the morning ready to consult my colour-coded online diary and my up-to-the-minute to-do list so that I can mentally schedule my day and get those boxes ticked.

Is it just me, or has life got exhausting?

So how in the world, in the midst of the chaos, can we think about meditation or focusing quietly upon God? Is it even possible to contemplate contemplating anything for more than a nanosecond?

Perhaps, like me, you have had to face the uncomfortable truth that we generally make time for what matters to us most. We may say that God is first and foremost in our lives but our diary might beg to differ. I may say I don't have time to pray or to meditate upon Scripture, but I also manage to talk about the latest boxed set series I have found time to digest or the latest project I have managed. And while of course we can do all things for God and with God, sometimes we need to actually rest in his presence and focus on our loving heavenly Father. Our busy souls long for it.

But where and how do we start? Psalm 19 is a great inspiration, and although the last verse is the most famous (thanks, Boney M!) it is everything preceding it that teaches us about how the psalmist, David, reflects upon God. Firstly, David soaks up the wonders of creation, taking in the grandeur and majesty of our maker. But he doesn't stop there. David then considers the truths and the commandments of God and how sweet and rewarding it is to walk in his ways. But the psalm doesn't stop there either. He then confesses his "presumptuous sins" and declares again his deep desire to be clean and blameless before his maker.

Creation. Commandments. Cleansing. David wonderfully meanders through the valleys of God's goodness and captures those thoughts in his songs, words and actions. Sometimes, I too find it helpful to sing a song to God or to write about a particular line of Scripture. Other times, as unskilled as I am, I try to draw the details of a flower or the contours of a landscape. Some days, I know that walking by the river while listening to inspiring music will focus my thoughts best, while another day I will need to just sit still so that my hectic mind can unravel enough for the Spirit to whisper above the constant mental clutter.

I wonder what works best for you? Where do you find those contemplative spaces that allow you to fix your focus upon God and be still in your soul? Perhaps you could find a way to do it more regularly. It might even be an idea to put it in the diary.

SOMETHING TO TRY

Find a quiet spot and imagine yourself taking a path through the normal forest of thoughts that fill your mind until you find a sunny, quiet clearing where you can sit still with God. If other thoughts pop up, acknowledge them and let them go back into the forest. If it helps you to focus, repeat the word “maranatha” slowly – it is an Aramaic word from the language of Jesus and it means, “Come, Lord”. Now, in the stillness, think of one aspect of God or Psalm 19 and talk to him about it. You might want to draw, sing, or write about what you discover as you mentally sit in the clearing.

SOMETHING TO PRAY

**Heavenly Father, you tell us in your word that
when we seek you we will find you.**

**Thank you that as I meditate upon you, your
creation, your truths, and your word, that your
Spirit is at work in me.**

**Thank you Lord, that I can be still and dwell
in your presence and know that in all of the
busyness, you are God.**

4

SCRIPTURE

CR

The Bible can feel like a meal that is too much for us to take in. We are overwhelmed and don't know where to start, but we need to chew more.

D. L. Moody said, "The Bible was not given to increase our knowledge; it was given to change our lives."

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness...

2 Timothy 3:16

SOMETHING TO READ

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

Psalms 1:1-4