



A 35-DAY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

Growing: Taking Next Steps

DAY 1 ~ JANUARY 7

Doug Vance

Have you ever eaten a stale potato chip? It's a strange feeling because you were expecting this crisp and flavorful slice of potato but instead, you got something else. Maybe it's knowing there is a good chance the rest of the bag is in the same predicament or maybe it's even your fault because you left the bag out all night (that was my case a week ago), either way, we can all agree that stale is bad.

That's why I thought it was odd when the writer of Hebrews calls his church stale. He says in Hebrews 5:11:

"There is much more we would like to say about this, but it is difficult to explain, especially since you are spiritually dull and don't seem to listen."

Just like a bag of chips left out all night, the people of his church had become stale. Instead of excitement there was only dull spirituality. Instead of passion there were only stale attitudes. Instead of obedience there was laziness. They were spiritually dull and didn't seem to listen. He continues in verse 12:

"You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God's word."

They weren't teaching others because they weren't growing. They weren't growing because they weren't listening and they weren't listening because at some point they stopped caring about what God was doing in their lives. The truth is if we aren't growing then we are stagnant and that is a dangerous place to be. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3:6:

"I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow."

This is a perfect illustration of how God wants us to grow. The seed represents His truth planted in our hearts and we water that seed when we find spiritual guidance in church or even in our own personal study time. When the conditions are right God causes it to grow.

Do the conditions in your life encourage growth? What areas of your life have been growing closer to God? What areas haven't? Are you one that needs to seek spiritual guidance or are you ready to be a guide for someone else? However God is trying to grow you, remember that a life that follows Him is never stale.

Growing: Taking Next Steps

DAY 2 ~ JANUARY 8

Jamey Stuart

“Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won’t collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn’t obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash.” Matthew 7:24-27

Can you imagine sitting under the teaching of Jesus? It must have been an incredible thing. I can just imagine following the crowds to the edge of town to hear Jesus teach. There was a good chance you would see a miracle, maybe get a free snack, and at the very least you knew that this man *“taught with real authority—quite unlike their teachers of religious law.”* (Matthew 7:29) Those listening to Jesus at the time might not have fully comprehended that Jesus wasn’t just a good teacher; He was also the second person of the Holy Trinity.

Tens of thousands of people heard Jesus teach during His life time. Every one of them heard extraordinary teaching that was unlike any teaching before that time or since. And yet, not everyone was transformed by his teaching. In fact, by Acts 1, only 120 people considered themselves to be followers of Jesus. Lots of people heard the words of Jesus. Lots of people listened.

Yet, the only ones who were positively impacted by the teachings of Jesus were the ones who *followed* the teachings of Jesus. In our church culture we would say that the only ones who benefitted from the teachings of Jesus were the ones who took **next steps**.

We have several teachers at Believers; and through the internet we all have access to the greatest Bible teachers in our country with just the click of a button. But don’t kid yourself, the *caliber of teaching* is far less important than the *consistency of applying*.

People throughout the ages have sat under the teachings of Billy Graham, Charles Spurgeon, John Wesley and even Jesus without benefitting at all. The problem isn't the teaching, it's the applying. Jesus said those who hear and follow His teaching are wise and will stand strong when the storms of life come. James warned us not just to listen to truth, but to apply it (James 1:22).

What was the last Next Step you have taken in your spiritual life at Believers? Why not decide in your heart that 2013 will be the year of Next Steps for you. If you do, Jesus says that you are wise! And when storms hit this year...and they likely will...you will stand strong. Take a step!

Growing: Taking Next Steps

DAY 3 ~ JANUARY 9

Mark Kent

“Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.”

John 15:4-5 (NLT)

Growing up, I used to love to climb trees. I was always a little frightened of heights; but I had faith in my ability to climb. One of my neighbors had an apple tree and he told us as long as we climbed up we could have apples from the tree; he wanted us to leave the apples alone that were within his reach. I didn't mind because it seemed to me the apples higher up tasted better. But I did discover that the ones closest to the tree trunk seemed to be larger and sweeter than the ones further out.

I always remember that every time I see this familiar passage. This is part of Jesus' last teaching to his disciples at His last supper with them. The further away a branch is from the trunk (vine), the easier it is to be broken away by wind and storms. The farther away a branch is from the trunk, the harder it is to receive the nutrients it needs to produce growth. In order for us to grow and ultimately produce fruit we have to stay close to the trunk (vine). Sometimes we are distancing ourselves from the vine and not even realizing it. We can come to church every Sunday; but if we aren't taking next steps to spiritual maturity, we may one day find ourselves looking up as we've been severed completely from the vine.

Growing: Taking Next Steps

DAY 4 ~ JANUARY 10

Nannette Brindle

“For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow.”

James: 1:3 (NLT)

Face Plant

I wanted to snowboard. My friends all did it. I had been a skier for as long as I could remember. I was really good too, black diamonds all the way. I'd skied almost every mountain in New England by the time I was 18. How hard could it be?

So, I geared up and hit the mountain. Not the bunny slope either. And...I never thought I would make it down. I was all over the place. I couldn't get my balance right and I didn't like the way I was attached to the board at all times. Falling was head over heels, landing face down in the snow. Face plant. I did that A LOT!

It was hard. I had bumps & bruises. I wanted to quit, but didn't. I just got up, regained my composure and used what I had learned from each fall until I made it to the bottom. I did it again and again. By the end of the day I had made it down that mountain several times and at least once without falling 😊.

Am I going to have trials that will test my faith? Of course.

Might I fail and things not turn out as honorably as I hoped? Absolutely.

Should I just give up? No, use it as a learning experience.

The next time I find frustration, bitterness or anger creeping in; the next time I am face planted in trials, I will pray and ask God to help me, change my heart, and build an endurance of faith.

Growing: Taking Next Steps

DAY 5 ~ JANUARY 11

Brittany Koch

“But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.” James 1:22-25

I'm an event person. I mean, I appreciate gifts that are tangible, but I love to have an experience. Do you have a favorite sports team? What about a favorite musical artist? Have you ever been to a game to see your team play, or been to a concert to hear the musical stylings of the artist? It's amazing, isn't it? You may tear up or maybe get an adrenaline rush, and chances are you're up on your feet for at least a portion of the event. But, that experience probably cost you a pretty penny. And not just the tickets; we also have the jerseys, cds, and t-shirts. Why? Because we love it! Once we find that team, artist, or show that we love, it's exciting to dive in, find others who share the same passion, and take steps towards being a die-hard fan.

I think if James were a fan, he would be a die-hard, sold out fan. He tells the Jewish believers in chapter one that they need to do more than listen to God's word. He wants the believers to grow and mature. When the believers hear God's word, James' encouragement is to do something, follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit and grow! Don't just see the game on TV—buy the jersey, get the tickets, paint your body with team colors even! Don't just listen to the radio—download the album, go to the concert, splurge on the backstage passes. We take steps to become better fans, are we doing the same thing for our spiritual life?

James says that if we just listen to God's word but don't take next steps to become better followers of Jesus, we're only fooling ourselves. That's right; no one else is fooled when you say you're a Christian, but aren't serving, loving

God's people, or giving. The actual Greek language here is that we convince ourselves and believe the lie that we don't have to do anything but sit in church and listen. James' goal here is to wake them up from the deception they are in. But he also says that if we do take those next steps, that God will bless us for doing it.

Are you a great fan but just an okay follower of Jesus? Wake up and start taking next steps in your walk with God.

Growing: Taking Next Steps

DAY 6 ~ JANUARY 12

Meghan Hutton

“There is much more we would like to say about this, but it is difficult to explain, especially since you are spiritually dull and don't seem to listen. You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God's word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food. For someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn't know how to do what is right. Solid food is for those who are mature, who through training have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong.”

Hebrews 5:11-14

Can you imagine not being able to eat solid food and having to survive on milk alone? Do you consider your spiritual diet one that is full of variety or are you still drinking milk like a baby? This passage of scripture challenges Christians to constantly be growing in their spiritual development, just as we grow physically. I know for me, having grown up in church, accepting Jesus at a very young age, I have experienced many times in my life where, spiritually, I was barely surviving. In my teenage years, most of my friends were “younger” Christians who looked to me for answers and I was ashamed to say I usually did not have the answers. As a pianist, I often look back and think to myself, “I should have practiced more.” As a Christian, I tend to think something similar, “I should have studied God's Word more.”

We must be careful that we do not spend our whole life as a spiritual baby who survives only on milk, attending church because we know we “have” to but not really listening, going through the motions of serving and putting on a fake smile, and opening the Bible only when we have nowhere else to turn. Whether you've been a Christian for one day or many, many years, there is always room for growth. In fact, God commands it. We must work towards spiritual maturity so that when we are faced with life's challenges we *“have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong.”*

Growing: Taking Next Steps

DAY 7 ~ JANUARY 13

Sam Hager

I have a 4 year old daughter who might be the loudest, craziest kid you have ever met (if you don't believe me we accept all offers to babysit)! One of the many things I love about Addyson is that we share a passion for music and singing at the top of our lungs. She knows every single Disney princess song by heart...and unfortunately I have to sing the prince parts so I know all of them by heart too. (*A Whole New World, don't you dare close your eyes.*)

Addy and I were driving down the road the other day and I was playing a new worship CD and she didn't know any of the songs. But it didn't stop her from singing the wrong words as loud as she could to every single song. At that point I began to say, "Addy you aren't even singing the right words" but before I could get it out of my mouth, I stopped and listened to what she was singing.

Psalm 40:3 says, *"He has given me a new song to sing, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see what he has done and be amazed."*

Addyson was singing a new song; every word that came out of her mouth was a song of praise to God for how good He is! The Message version puts it this way: *"He taught me how to sing the latest God-song, a praise song to our God. More people are seeing this: they enter the mystery, abandoning themselves to God."*

Do you want to see spiritual growth in our Church?

Community?

Families?

Selves?

Then, think about this: when was the last time you sang at the top of your lungs praises to the God who has blessed us beyond all measure? When have you just totally abandoned the "right" words to a song and sang a new song? Did you know that Solomon wrote more than 1,000 songs? I mean come on... there's no way to remember the words to all those songs! So if you are desiring

to grow in your own spiritual life, close the doors, turn the radio, computer, MP3, iPhone, droid, etc... up as loud as it will go and sing a new song to God!

Relationships: I WAS MADE TO BELONG

DAY 8 ~ JANUARY 14

Jamey Stuart

“Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.” 1 Peter 5:8

Ever hear of the “buddy rule”? Probably when you were a kid in school you heard of it. If you were to go on a field trip you were told to “get a buddy.” The point of the buddy system is that it is tougher to get lost if you have someone that you are paired up with.

In the Army we had a buddy too. I guess they figured that no one would get left behind if you were paired up with someone. I remember one night I was in the field for a training exercise; my buddy and I had dug a fox hole. We were going to spend the night there. We took turns sleeping (or at least trying to sleep). One person stayed awake, stayed alert to keep an eye out for any danger, and the other would rest.

If we benefit from having a buddy in grade school and the military and just about any other endeavor in life, why wouldn't we benefit from having a spiritual buddy? Peter says that we are to stay alert. A good buddy can help you to stay safe spiritually!

Do you have a spiritual buddy? Sign up for a small group and buddy up now! Your spiritual safety depends on it!

Relationships: I WAS MADE TO BELONG

DAY 9 ~ JANUARY 15

Brittany Koch

“We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy.” 1 John 1:3-4

I love Believers small groups. If you've ever been in one, you know what I mean. There is just something so special about sharing a part of your week with people who love Jesus, are of like mind, and enjoy each other. There's this really amazing give-and-take, where one week you are able to listen and the next week someone speaks truth into your life. “Fellowship” sounds like an old word, one that is not normally part of our daily vernacular, but when you actually experience it, it's fabulous.

The fellowship that John describes in 1 John all centers on Jesus. He says we are able to fellowship together because of what we share with each other about Jesus. This fellowship actually means having things in common and partaking in them collectively—small group! Meeting together to do life with Jesus at the center is what John says will enable us to fully share our joy.

Small groups not only enable us to learn about Jesus and share that joy with our friends, but it keep us accountable. When life gets tough, it can be easy to skip church for a week, a month, a year. But miss one week of group, and several people will wonder where you are. And even when life is hard, it can be lot easier to go through with people who we fellowship with.

Have you been in a Believers small group? Are you planning to sign up for one this spring? We were made to belong, to grow, and share. Join a group and belong, grow, and share.

Relationships: I WAS MADE TO BELONG

DAY 10 ~ JANUARY 16

Heather Carl

“Everyone who confesses openly his faith in Jesus Christ—the Son of God, who came as an actual flesh-and-blood person—comes from God and belongs to God.” 1 John 4:3

I grew up a military brat and then converted to a pastor's kid; those roles made for a very nomadic childhood. When I was heading into the 8th grade, my parents told me that we were moving to Brooklyn, NY. At the time, we were living in Saskatoon, SK (Canada) and I was NOT happy about the news. I remember specifically notifying my mom that we could move but I would not make any friends. Being true to my word, I worked diligently at staying to myself – I was known for being very quiet at school, even got teased for being shy and weird. I didn't care though. I didn't want to work so hard at belonging to a new group of friends just to up and leave, again.

By the time I was 19 years old, when I got married, I had moved 30+ times – not always to a new state or even a new school, but a move nonetheless. Staying disconnected became the norm. I found ways to have lots of “friends” while ensuring that my connection to them was very fluid. Honestly, it wasn't until I was a bit older that I realized the impact my choice to “live on the surface” had in my day to day life. I would adapt who I was to fit into various circles at different times, giving myself the impression that I could belong to whomever, whenever. It was a misleading sense of control.

A couple of years after my husband and I began attending Believers, the church studied Rick Warren's book, *A Purpose Driven Life*. That was a turning point for me. Through that 40-day spiritual journey I began to see how I related to those around me – friends, co-workers, and my family. I had become so accustomed to keeping everyone at an arm's length distance, I wasn't even letting my husband know the real me...I don't think I knew the real me.

Since then, I have become very aware of the importance of letting others into my life. It's been a process, but one that has brought me to a place of realizing

that I ultimately belong to Jesus! Today, I appreciate all of the people that have filtered in and out of my life – God has allowed me to have relationships with wonderful people, even if it's been for a season, that have pointed me to Him. We were created to do life with others – even Jesus, knowing that His time on earth was short, invested in and received care from others! There are great lessons to be learned from one another in genuine, authentic community.

Will you join me in breaking down walls of inhibition and uncertainty, trusting God (to whom we BELONG) to place people in our lives to love and challenge us, even if for a season? Will you sign up for a small group this week?

Relationships: I WAS MADE TO BELONG

DAY 11 ~ JANUARY 17

Mark Kent

“Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.”

Ephesians 4:2-3 (NLT)

My youngest daughter represents the best of my wife’s traits and the worst of my traits. She’s a gifted artist and speaks her mind; sometimes working and speaking without thinking it through. It’s a combination that is full of rewards and challenges. The trick for her will be finding the balance between the two. One way she does this is by living out this passage from Paul about how to maintain unity in the body.

When she and I squabble (more often than I like); she will usually go off and find that humble and gentle spirit to come back and be patient with me, making allowance for my faults. We are a family and we love each other. In order for us to have the unity that we know God desires for the family, we have to make EVERY effort to stay united.

God wants the same thing for our church family. While the Apostle Paul goes on in this passage to talk about gifts and how each one should use them to help the church body grow strong; I believe we have to become experts in our patience with each other and our fault allowance before we grow in our giftedness. The only way this can happen is for us to make EVERY effort to stay united. There’s an ancient chorus that says, “We are one in the Spirit, we are one in Lord. And we pray that all unity will one day be restored. And they’ll know we are Christians by our love.” To be the Church, we need to love each other before we can show our love to those outside.

Relationships: I WAS MADE TO BELONG

DAY 12 ~ JANUARY 18

Nannette Brindle

"I have other sheep too. They are not in this flock here. I must lead them also. They will listen to my voice. In the future there will be one flock and one shepherd." John 10:16

Recently, I had a get together at my home. 42 women came. 42! Ok, spacing wasn't the best; half of them didn't know the other, and 2 of them I had never met. But we had fun! When I was gathering my invite list I didn't limit it to just my core group, people I serve with or who was the *in* crowd. I just invited people. I wanted to mix 'em all together.

Don't get me wrong, I have been challenged in the past with: "tell me who you're inviting and maybe I will come" and "why did you invite them?" Guess what? I don't care about things like that. I welcome all of my guests, even ones I don't know. So, when I stand on my furniture and look out over a room of smiling and laughing women, I don't see separation between the groups. I see new relationships being formed. I see women talking to someone that normally they may never have approached. It gets better and better each year. And, it is good ☺.

Jesus didn't come for just a few people. He didn't come for a specific type of people. He didn't come for just the good people. He didn't come for just the *in* crowd. He didn't come for only those who know Him. He came for the *entire world*. That's a lot of sheep. Even though there are sheep all over the world, there is only one Shepherd, Jesus!

Dear Jesus, thank you for your Word that, if we only look, teaches us these great things! I long for the day when there are no fences around what makes us different, a day when all people will praise you together, as one. Thank you for giving me what I need to share your grace with others so that they will not be forgotten or excluded from your flock. Amen

Relationships: I WAS MADE TO BELONG

DAY 13 ~ JANUARY 19

Todd Breeding

“Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your Christian brothers and sisters all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering you are.” 1 Peter 5:9

After reading Matthew 26:56-75 again and again, the relationship being discussed here is obviously between Peter and Jesus. We know from the story that Peter loved Jesus without question. But, when the chips were down and Jesus was at a point of no return, Peter chose door #2 with the cheap prize rather than door #1. Jesus even knew this was going to happen and told Peter what he was going to do, much to Peter's dismay.

This just reinforces to me that no matter how close we think we are to God; no matter how much we talk or listen to Him; no matter how much we love, adore, cherish, or honor Him, we are always vulnerable to the devil's will. The devil is always looking for “just the right spot” to slide into our lives and turn us to door #2 and break our relationship with Him.

For Peter, his spot was the possibility of being drug down with Jesus. Maybe Peter knew that door #1 would include a painful ride to the grave. Whatever the reason for his decision at the time, the damage was done, three times no less. This was a relationship busted. Or was it?

The bright spot here is that Hebrews 10:19 reminds us that through Jesus' selfless act, we can go through the curtain and to Him at any time and not have to be some holy upper crust. No more proxy visits. Like Peter, we can go to Him no matter our past decisions and sins, just as we are, thanks to grace. Not even a full denial can keep us away. Ahhhh, grace. 1 Peter 5:9 also reinforces our faith by helping us to remember that we are never alone in our struggles with picking the right door. Our sharing of life and maintaining relationships with believers all over the world help us to not be tempted by the devil with door #2 or even #3. We can always lean on our close believer friends with assurance that they know what we are going through and will be there to support us. The biggest reality is

that through the full giving of his body to the horrific act of crucifixion, we will never have to face door #2 alone again.

Relationships: I WAS MADE TO BELONG

DAY 14 ~ JANUARY 20

Doug Vance

Each of us have experienced those awkward moments in life where we felt like we didn't belong. For many of us, these moments are short lived and we quickly strike up a conversation with someone with similar interests or we see an old friend who walks in and saves the day. This wasn't the case for me and my freshman year of high school. My classes were fine; it was lunch time that I dreaded. All my friends had 1st and 2nd lunch while I got stuck with 3rd. It took me a week to find someone who didn't want to beat me up (I was a freshman remember) but it felt like an eternity.

We were created to desire relationships so it doesn't shock me to see so many people empty inside because they find themselves in similar situations. Some even feel this way in church. It's sad because the church was founded on relationships; our relationship with God and our relationships with each other. Acts 2:42 shows us how the early church focused on this:

"All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer."

The church wasn't content with Sunday relationships; instead they were living life together. They saw the difference between a shallow relationship and one that was built and focused on God. God was blessing them because of it as well. Just a few verses later we read this:

"...all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved."

Acts 2:47

We all crave real relationships. We all have a desire to belong and a church that focuses on this is contagious! I love what Hebrews 10:24-25 says:

"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

Look at the contrast here. Meet together and get excited about what God is doing, or neglect our meeting together and totally miss out. Seems like an easy choice to me. How focused are you on relationships? How important is church and meeting together in your life?

Serving: IT'S NOT ABOUT ME!

DAY 15 ~ JANUARY 21

Doug Vance

One of my favorite Christmas memories from growing up is how my dad used to serve my sister and I every Christmas morning. My focus was always a selfish one: open all my presents as fast as possible. I have never been good with secrets and not knowing what was in those expertly wrapped gifts would drive me crazy every year.

My dad's focus however was a selfless one. His self-appointed job was to hand out the gifts and help clean up as we tore through them. He was always the last one to get to his own gifts but I think he found more joy in watching us than he would have opening his own presents. He is a servant at heart and has always been a great example that I have tried to follow.

Peter writes in 1 Peter 4:10-11:

"God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ."

When we look at our spiritual gifts in this way it reminds us how important it is to actually use them. We don't serve to simply make someone's life easier we do it so that God will be glorified. When my dad would serve us on Christmas morning it made us happy for a while but, when I realized that he was doing it because of the gift that God had given him it inspired me. It made me want to serve others in the same way. For me it was life changing.

That's why serving is so important. We are showing others how God has gifted us and that is a great example of His love for them. How are you bringing glory to God?

Serving: IT'S NOT ABOUT ME!

DAY 16 ~ JANUARY 22

Sam Hager

"I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me."

Matthew 25:40

I grew up in a home where my father was a Senior Pastor and my mother worked as the church secretary. We lived in the church parsonage (house right next to the church) and the parking lot of the church was actually connected to our driveway. I didn't have too many chores as a kid because I was the baby of the family (insert joke here)! I did however, have a job that was pretty unique.

The church garbage dumpster was for some reason right in front of our house, right next to the busy highway. Every Monday morning, like clockwork, my dad would make me jump on the garbage that had piled up from the previous week so that we could fit more garbage into it (my dad would save money anyway he could). People would honk, yell, and laugh out their car window as they drove past...how embarrassing!!

Those experiences remind me a lot about serving and why we are called to serve. Serving will take you completely out of your comfort zone and it might be something you don't think you would enjoy or even have a talent for. Let me tell you something I forgot to mention... I LOVED jumping on the trash!! Ok the first time I did it I thought this is gross but once I started jumping it was awesome!

Serving is the same way...once you jump in, God is going to use you in great ways and you might just actually LOVE it! So find a garbage dumpster and jump in!

Serving: IT'S NOT ABOUT ME!

DAY 17 ~ JANUARY 23

Gary Rhodes

I heard a pastor once suggest, "God needs us!" What a fundamental misunderstanding of God's Word that is! God doesn't need us. We need Him! Max Lucado, in his book, *It's Not About Me*, says, "God doesn't need you and me to do his work. We are expedient messengers, ambassadors by His kindness, not by our cleverness. It's not about us and it angers Him when we think it is."

This concept that it's about me stems from what I call, a culture of "Me-ism". An "ism" is a belief or philosophy that one holds dear to. There exists Hinduism, racism, sexism, liberalism and conservatism. These "isms" and many others have followers whose actions are in line with those beliefs. In "Me-ism" there is a deep rooted philosophical view that everything revolves around self and therefore appropriate actions are taken to that end. So if self is the central theme, then all actions will be to promote self!

God doesn't work like that. He has flipped that philosophy upside down. As followers of Christ, we must move away from any form of "ism" that doesn't have Christ and others as our primary focus. 1 Peter 4:11 says, *"Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen."*(NLT)

This isn't about me and it isn't about you. It is about God and the others he has called us to reach. Pray and ask God to reveal to you what needs to change in your life. Determine today to find out what you need to do to put Christ and others central in your beliefs AND in your actions?

Serving: IT'S NOT ABOUT ME!

DAY 18 ~ JANUARY 24

Heather Carl

“Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically.”

Romans 12:11

My mom grew up on a dairy farm in Wisconsin – hard work is part of her DNA. I have never known her to remain still for too long. Her work ethic has been an inspiration to me. Despite some of the limitations she's faced physically, she has persevered, committing fully to the tasks before her. Even more influential than her drive to be a hard worker is her heart to serve others with the love of Jesus!

Our home seemed to always be open to anyone that needed a place to go. Mom gives people rides, makes meals, takes them shopping, watches kids...she is characterized by her willingness to respond to the needs of those around her. Now that I'm grown I can see how her influence has had shaped my life, my siblings lives, and the lives of her grandkids. Her heart for loving and serving others is contagious!

I believe growing up in that environment coupled with being a pastor's kid has taught me the truth of 1 Corinthians 12:19-24. Paul explains that the church functions like a body; each person has a specific function, no matter how significant it may seem. If someone isn't serving in their function, the body's health suffers.

Since being on church staff, I've become increasingly grateful for the service of our volunteers week in and week out. Everything from stuffing worship folders to producing our Sunday experiences gets better each time another person joins the team. Plus, the load lightens for those already serving and the joy of serving others is realized!

As Christ-followers, we are called to walk in His footsteps. Mark 10:45 says, *“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* When we're able to serve out of the gratitude we have for Jesus' service to us, His great love is made known!

Will you help make Jesus #1, one person at a time by committing to serve on a ministry team?

Serving: IT'S NOT ABOUT ME!

DAY 19 ~ JANUARY 25

Jamey Stuart

"The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ... Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. If the foot says, 'I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand,' that does not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear says, 'I am not part of the body because I am not an eye,' would that make it any less a part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear?

Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything?

But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. How strange a body would be if it had only one part! Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. The eye can never say to the hand, 'I don't need you.' The head can't say to the feet, 'I don't need you.'"

1 Corinthians 12:12, 14-21

Several times in the Bible the church is described as the "Body of Christ." I love this passage of Scripture from 1 Corinthians 12 where this comparison is taken to the limits. Imagine a body that is one gigantic eye! Or a large, loud mouth; I've met some people where all I've heard is their mouth! I've met some others that I thought were just a big...well, you get the picture. It's ridiculous to think of a body as just one part.

Almost by definition a body can't be a body without lots of parts. Using Paul's comparison from 1 Corinthians 12, which part of the body are you? If you were removed from Believers Church...how would that negatively impact the rest of the body?

You might think, no one would miss me if I left. I don't do very much, I don't bring very much to the table. Have you ever had a hang nail? It's pretty small, but boy, my whole body is impacted by it.

Later in this passage, Paul says that the least visible parts of the body are often the most significant parts of the body. That's true in our church, as well. So, let me ask again; what part of the body are you?

If you don't play a part in the Body of Christ at Believers, why not take a step of faith this week and sign up to serve on the communication card. Or, call the church office and speak with someone about getting connected. Your faith will grow when you start serving!

Serving: IT'S NOT ABOUT ME!

DAY 20 ~ JANUARY 26

Todd Breeding

As a leader of multiple volunteer teams, I think I have seen every kind of servant's heart there possibly is. We are taught that serving is one of our duties as Christians and we are to serve with a grateful heart. I find there are many who do their best with this model, but I often see others who just skate along the crevice of serving or not, out of obligation rather than a grateful heart. There are indeed even others who seem to not heed the idea at all. That is, they choose not to serve due life being too busy or worse, they just don't want to.

2 Chronicles 12:8 says this: *"But they will become his subjects, so they will know the difference between serving me and serving earthly rulers."* This excerpt from the Bible is about the Judeans who had lost the Law of God and are suffering God's anger because of the sin of running away. I venture to wager that we wouldn't have 1200 chariots and 60,000 horses mowing us down due to our lack of action. I do believe tons of grace and God's blessing is in store for us when we do serve with a grateful heart and are able to maintain and grow as we mature in Christ.

From my vantage point, the ones that bother me the most are those who get too busy with life serving other earthly rulers. I know we all have seasons in life where we get swamped and can barely hold our heads up just to get life done. But when that season moves to become the norm for our life, we as Christians need to take a look at what's really important. When it is our time to explain our life and what we have done with it, the last thing I want to say is "I got the kids to soccer, baseball, and ballet." Or "I worked every day of my life and made tons of money." Or how about, "I guess I didn't do anything at all with it...my life didn't amount to much at all I guess."

That last statement should pit your stomach. Take another look at your servant's heart. It may indeed need some realignment. Serving God can be in many forms, so find one and serve gratefully.

Serving: IT'S NOT ABOUT ME!

DAY 21 ~ JANUARY 27

Mark Kent

"I want you to be free from the concerns of this life. An unmarried man can spend his time doing the Lord's work and thinking how to please him. But a married man has to think about his earthly responsibilities and how to please his wife. His interests are divided. In the same way, a woman who is no longer married or has never been married can be devoted to the Lord and holy in body and in spirit. But a married woman has to think about her earthly responsibilities and how to please her husband. I am saying this for your benefit, not to place restrictions on you. I want you to do whatever will help you serve the Lord best, with as few distractions as possible."

1 Corinthians 7:32-35 (NLT)

The passage is nestled in the middle of the Apostle Paul's instruction on marriage. Many people view Paul as "anti-marriage"; but he clearly states that he's not trying to make things harder, he just wants you to limit the distractions that could be prevent you from serving the Lord. This advice is from the same pen that challenged husbands and wives to their respect lofty roles of submission to one another in Ephesians 5.

Over my years of ministry, I've found that people have plenty of other distractions besides marriage that keep them from serving the Lord with their best – family, job, sports (participating & watching), stock market, politics, social media, music, movies, TV, video games,... the list could go on and on. Don't get me wrong; many of these possible distractions are noble and necessary to live our lives. But have you ever measured how much time these distractions take up in your daily life?

Try an experiment today: keep a log of your activities in 15 minute increments. At the end of the day, put a mark beside the things you didn't actually have to do. For every one of those distractions that you marked, think of something you could have done to serve the Lord during that time. Then do those things the next day as part of your daily routine. I bet you will feel better about your accomplishments at the end of day 2.

Generosity: I CAN'T OUTGIVE GOD

DAY 22 ~ JANUARY 28

Gary Rhodes

Recently, there was a special on the History Channel titled, "The Men Who Built America". It was a 4 part docu-drama on prominent men who shaped the economic direction of the US during the late 19th/early 20th century. Men like Cornelius Vanderbilt, Andrew Carnegie, JP Morgan and John D. Rockefeller, used their business sense and risked a lot to amass a great deal of wealth. Not only did they get rich, but their ventures paved the way to an industrialized America; much of what we still experience today.

As they grew older, namely Carnegie and Rockefeller, they began to share much of their wealth with others. They became the first known capitalistic philanthropists of their day. Institutions today, over a hundred years later, benefit from some of the generous contributions of these two men.

Some historians speculate of the motives of these men giving away their money. There are those who think it was out of guilt in the way the money was earned. Others offer that as they got older they came to a realization of their mortality and that their money would not go with them. Regardless of the motive, their actions were generous!

As generous as these men were; billions of dollars in today's money, they weren't as generous as God. No amount of money is more than what God can give. He was generous with His son, Jesus, who died for our sins. That has no price tag. No matter how much we think we or someone else is giving; God gives infinitely more than we could ever fathom.

2 Corinthians 9:10-11 says, *"For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you. Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God."*

God is amazingly generous and when we trust Him, he will produce that same generosity in us! How generous are you? Are you allowing His generosity to flow or are you stifling it? What steps do you need to take to be more generous?

Generosity: I CAN'T OUTGIVE GOD

DAY 23 ~ JANUARY 29

Meghan Hutton

“Ever since the days of your ancestors, you have scorned my decrees and failed to obey them. Now return to me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies. But you ask, ‘How can we return when we have never gone away?’ ‘Should people cheat God? Yet you have cheated me!’ But you ask, ‘What do you mean? When did we ever cheat you?’ ‘You have cheated me of the tithes and offerings due to me...’

Malachi 3:7-12

If someone asked me, “Have you ever cheated God?” I would immediately respond, “No way! I couldn’t even imagine cheating the Almighty God.” Yet, when I stop and think about it, I would argue that every single one of us has indeed cheated God at one point or another.

As Christians, we know that a tithe is ten percent and offerings consist of anything above that ten percent. I have experienced time periods where I am consistent with my giving, but I have been through many time periods where I consistently rob God of what is due to Him. “Life” gets in the way, holidays, unexpected bills, etc. When money gets tight, it’s easier to skip the tithe check than it is to skip our luxuries, which we are spoiled by.

According to this passage of Scripture, there is absolutely no excuse for robbing God. In fact, He even tells us to test Him and He promises to prove us wrong. He promises to open the floodgates of blessings upon us if we just trust that He will be faithful.

Think about a time when you remained faithful even though “life” got in the way? Did God bless you for it? If you struggle in this area, I want to challenge you to put God to the test.

Generosity: I CAN'T OUTGIVE GOD

DAY 24 ~ JANUARY 30

Sam Hager

"They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need." Acts 2:45

My wife and I were able to spend about a month in Guatemala a few years ago doing missions work. It was an amazing experience and the memories we have from our time there will last forever. When I think back to our trip there is one moment that I will never forget. We would go into the rural villages outside of Guatemala City and when I say rural I mean like no roads, electricity, running water, or bathrooms, I hope you get the point.

On one of the days, we arrived at a village and started making house calls to pray and assist the families in any way we could. After spending about an hour at this particular home I was kinda ready to go (there is only so much Spanish I can take when I don't understand it)! As we were walking out the door the lady of the house handed the missionary we were with a live rooster. This caught me off guard and the only thing I could think was "what are we going to do with a live rooster?"

Turns out this lady had just lost her husband in an accident and the reason we were at the house was to provide her with food and benevolence. Instead of her accepting what we were giving her she turned around and blessed us with their family rooster (price unknown but very valuable in their culture).

I thought I was the one bringing the blessing on that day but instead I was blessed with a gift I will never forget. It doesn't matter how much money you have to give because God just wants you to give with a faithful heart. This was a very big life lesson for me and I wish I could say I changed the way I gave immediately but it took a few years until I realized that I don't own the money in my bank account...God has given me everything I need and He calls me to be generous with His blessings.

P.S. The ride home with a live rooster was CRAZY!!

Generosity: I CAN'T OUTGIVE GOD

DAY 25 ~ JANUARY 31

Doug Vance

When it comes to generosity we cannot out give God. This sounds like an obvious principle especially when you look at how God dominates in every other category. Think you're strong? God is infinitely stronger. Think you're forgiving? God will run circles around your forgiveness. Think you're generous? Check out John 10:10:

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

While the enemy only takes, Jesus came so that we could find life. When you see the sacrifice that He had to make so that we could find life it paints a good picture of how generous God truly is. We serve a giving God and just like his forgiveness his generosity is overflowing.

John MacArthur said, "Generosity is impossible apart from our love of God and of His people. But with such love, generosity not only is possible but inevitable."

You see not only do we learn real generosity from God but if we are true followers of Him generosity will be a fruit that we should expect to see in our lives. Matthew 5:14-16 says:

"You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father."

This light that shines in us is God's influence in our lives. We should stand out in such a way that others take notice. This doesn't mean dressing a certain way, or making sure you always have encouraging bumper stickers on your car. This means you should look like God! Is God strong? Find strength in His Spirit. Is God forgiving? He is still running circles around your forgiveness but it doesn't mean you should give up. Is God generous? Of course He is; more so than we could ever be. It does give us something to shoot for though.

What are you holding back for yourself maybe even selfishly? Maybe it's your time. Maybe it's your budget. Whatever it is how can you be generous and follow God's example? Remember, we serve a giving God!

Generosity: I CAN'T OUTGIVE GOD

DAY 26 ~ FEBRUARY 1

Todd Breeding

We recently completed the first phase of a building project to move our church. The idea was (and should always be) that it's never about the building, it's about people. The people are the church.

As the church gathered together in groups of key leaders, committed members, and then the rest of the congregation, everyone was informed as to why the decision was made to move. It was clear; we have just run out of space. We were coming to a point where no one else could have the chance to find God and be saved. Worse yet, the time was near where kids would no longer have a place to grow their walk and find Christ. This was not acceptable.

The numbers were in and the experts agreed that as a church, we exceeded all expectations and the people of the church have spoken. This is what we need to do. We were all elated. We had a huge Sunday service to celebrate and in the days after I was faced with the realization that not everyone got it or they just didn't care.

I was breezing through the main office when I noticed some busyness going on. One of our hard working admin ladies was generating letters to those who didn't get the vision of the move. These folks had chosen not to help at all with bringing more people to Christ. How could they just not get it? How could they just stand idly by? Is life really that tough on them that they can't help at all?

Everyone can do something. I would wager that the most of these folks knew someone who was baptized or knew a kid that accepted Christ through Believers. Maybe, even one of these folks found Christ here. I was really shocked and hurt. Isaiah 32:8 says,

"But generous people plan to do what is generous, and they stand firm in their generosity."

This idea of planning to be generous is huge. A large group of Christ followers here gave generously with the knowledge that the plan was to reach more

people who are lost. They met the goal, even exceeded the goal. Yet, I cannot imagine where we would be if everyone got “it” and realized that what they were investing in is exactly what they have been benefitting from for years.

Generosity: I CAN'T OUTGIVE GOD

DAY 27 ~ FEBRUARY 2

Ronda Parin

One of the many things I love about Believers Church is the way we give. We give to help those in our own body, our community and our world. It is a tangible way for us to share the love of Jesus and fulfill the scripture that says that we are to help those in need. Jesus said, *"For I was hungry and you fed me. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me...when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sister, you were doing it to me."* Financial gift = Spiritual rewards.

Recently, one of our members reached out to a Veteran who slowly, through her prompting, told his life story while sitting in McDonalds. Eleven days before he was to be married his wife-to-be was hit by a drunk driver and killed. After that he was shipped to Vietnam and was wounded in battle; that put him in a wheelchair for life. The woman replied, "I don't know how we can make it through life without Jesus." With tears in his eyes, he said, "I've been blaming Him ever since but I'm wrong."

As she continued to share, she learned that he had just been accepted by the VA to live in special housing but they couldn't take him in until 4 days later. He had been living with his sister and drug-addicted husband; however, his sister became ill and was in the hospital. He could not stay in the house alone. He became homeless and was sleeping in a cemetery beside a church. Without any skepticism she knew that the Holy Spirit was prompting her to provide his hotel until he was able to move to his new housing. She didn't have all the funds needed to provide the room, so she reached out to her church. That's us!!

Believers Church stepped in and funded the hotel. Several people in the restaurant...if you can call McDonald's a restaurant...heard what was happening and wanted to know what church she belonged to. "Believers Church," she said with a smile. The very next day, she called the man to see

how he was doing and not knowing who she was, he said "I'm doing well thanks to a wonderful woman from Believers Church! Financial gift = spiritual rewards.

When we give to God and the work of Believers Church, lives are changed and given hope. Church, we can NEVER outgive God.

Generosity: I CAN'T OUTGIVE GOD

DAY 28 ~ FEBRUARY 3

Heather Carl

““Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do,’ says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, ‘I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won’t have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!’”

Malachi 3:10

My husband lost his job a couple of years after our youngest son was born; it was time for me to head back to work. I was able to be rehired with the company I worked for previously and then moved on to a new company a few months later due to some contract negotiations. It was a good job – I got a check every two weeks, had insurance provided, and a regular schedule. My husband was steadily working handyman and lawn jobs. Just as we were getting into a groove, I got a phone call...

“Heather? It’s Jamey...I have something I’d like you and Nate to talk and pray about.”

“Okay...what is it?”

“As you know, our secretary is stepping down and I was wondering if you’d be interested in that position. I know it’s not really what you want to be doing in ministry, but it’s a need and it’s what we can afford for now. Talk to Nate, let me know what you guys think.”

There was some other stuff mentioned, but you get the idea. I was immediately ecstatic. Honestly, I didn’t care what the position was; I wanted to be working in ministry. When I got home that evening, we started talking through what that kind of change would look like for our family. My prayer was that Hubs and I would be on the same page and if we weren’t, I would understand that it just wasn’t the right time. We talked, we prayed and after a few days we weren’t on the same page. I called Jamey and explained that I would have to decline the offer...we just couldn’t take the 40% pay cut when Nate wasn’t employed with a full-time job.

A couple weeks later, our oldest son was having his tonsils removed. As we waited for him to be taken back to the operating room, we were each reading a John Ortberg book – I read *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat* and Nate's nose was in *When the Game Is Over, It All Goes Back in the Box*. As I read, the words challenging me to step out of the boat were jumping off the page – I couldn't highlight and bend pages quickly enough! The nurses came to take our son back and we headed to the cafeteria for a cup of coffee. We sat in the booth and before I could get situated, Nate looked at me and said, "You have to call Jamey and tell him you'll take that job." "WHHHHHAAAATTT?????" (that's what my head was saying); my mouth said, "Really? You think so? Why?" He went on to explain that he was just feeling like the Lord wanted us to take this step of faith and trust Him to meet our needs.

Just over 5 years ago, I called Jamey back and told him I would love to accept the position if it was still available. I've been blessed to be on staff ever since!

Even with a drastic decrease in our income, God provided for our every need and then some. We continue to step out in faith, giving as the Lord leads and as a result, we see His hand of blessing in our finances. Nate is a realtor and working on commission has it's challenges, but we have seen it time and time again – when we remain faithful to what we've been called to do, we are able to do more than we think is possible.

Will you step out of the boat? Will you trust God to open the windows of heaven for you?

Reaching: FOUND PEOPLE FIND PEOPLE

DAY 29 ~ FEBRUARY 4

Brittany Koch

“For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile. This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, ‘It is through faith that a righteous person has life.’” Romans 1:16-17

I think if you were asked if you are ashamed of the Good News about Jesus you would say “no.” Maybe even “no way!” But, as in most areas of life, actions can speak much louder than words.

I recently had a dream that I was going to die. (Don't worry, it hasn't come true... yet!) But unlike other dreams like this, I was excited—I knew that I was going to meet Jesus very soon! But in my dream I also had a genuine concern for a good friend of mine. I knew that I needed to talk to her immediately. I needed to call her and make sure, 100 percent for certain, that she knew how much Jesus loves her. Because if I didn't, who would? Before I could contact her in my dream, I woke up. But in my waking, my immediate and intense concern for her became real. We had talked about my faith before, she had even come to church with me, but I knew that through this dream, Jesus was prompting me to plant another seed.

Several days went by without me contacting her. I was nervous. What should I say? What would she say? I might come off as crazy if I told her about this dream and how Jesus wanted me to tell her something. But as I thought about it, I wondered, “Am I ashamed of the Good News? Do I care more about her response than I do about being obedient to Jesus?” So I told her. I didn't tell her she was a sinner and that if she didn't get saved pronto she would burn in hell. I simply told her that Jesus loves her so much and I needed to make sure she knew that. And do you know what?! She didn't have a big “come to Jesus” moment; she didn't make Jesus #1 in her life. But she said, “thank you.” She said she's thankful that I said that, and that she appreciates His love, she just doesn't reciprocate.

Through our obedience in telling others about Jesus and His love we grow Believers and further God's Kingdom. Are you ashamed of the Good News about Jesus? Or are you a *Found Person who Finds People*?

Reaching: FOUND PEOPLE FIND PEOPLE

DAY 30 ~ FEBRUARY 5

Mark Kent

“Keep a close watch on how you live and on your teaching. Stay true to what is right for the sake of your own salvation and the salvation of those who hear you”

1 Timothy 4:16 (NLT)

That's always been a scary verse for a lot of Christians. “My teaching? I'm no preacher!” We may not all be preachers; but we are all teachers of a sort. We might teach life lessons to our kids. We might teach a co-worker how to do an operation or program. We might teach children or adults an activity or craft.

And just like good and bad preachers; you can have good and bad teachers. Over the years, I've experienced good teachers and bad teachers. Knowing the material does not equate being a good teacher. I had lots of teachers that had been using the same material for years and still didn't have a clue on how to teach it. Or maybe they just didn't understand how to get the material across to someone who was totally lost. Either way, whether they knew it or not, they were bad teachers.

Is how you live your life teaching those far from God how to find their way to Him? We call that *lifestyle evangelism*. Do your speech and actions outside the church teach Jesus to those you come in contact with? Lifestyle evangelism is a great way to teach an unbelieving world what true Christianity looks like. Are you personally inviting others to experience the evident change in your life? A great hymn of the faith says, “I once was lost but now I'm found”. Are you seeking out those who are lost? Found people find people. Are you a good teacher or a bad teacher?

Reaching: FOUND PEOPLE FIND PEOPLE

DAY 31 ~ FEBRUARY 6

Doug Vance

When Jesus gave the disciples the great commission, “Go make disciples of all the nations”, He didn’t want them to see it as a chore or a burden. He knew that his disciples would passionately pursue the lost and while it might get uncomfortable and it would be difficult it would never be a chore.

It’s easy for us though to get so caught up in everyday life that we start seeing things like worship, devotions, maybe even sharing our faith, as something to check off our list. These things can easily become chores.

Paul says in Romans 1:16;

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

He writes this right after telling the church that he cares for them deeply. Paul had the desire to see people get saved but he also knew that his own desire was not enough. Paul trusted in the power of the gospel. Knowing this gave him strength, courage, and a strong willpower to see his own passion be put to use. With his own passion to see the people encounter Jesus and his trust in God’s power to save anyone, Paul was an unstoppable force furthering God’s kingdom daily.

The awesome thing is we have to same Holy Spirit living within us. Paul also writes in 2 Timothy 1:7-8;

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord.”

This verse nullifies any excuse we could ever come up with. Are you afraid of what others might think? The Holy Spirit can be your strength. Are you too busy with other priorities in life? Pray that the Spirit will help you be self-disciplined. Do you doubt whether or not the gospel will resonate with that person?

Communicate the gospel with love and know that God is the one who changes lives.

When you remember how God wants to radically change the lives of people around you, you will see sharing your faith isn't a chore; it's a privilege.

Reaching: FOUND PEOPLE FIND PEOPLE

DAY 32 ~ FEBRUARY 7

Jamey Stuart

“Scripture reassures us, ‘No one who trusts God like this—heart and soul—will ever regret it.’ It’s exactly the same no matter what a person’s religious background may be: the same God for all of us, acting the same incredibly generous way to everyone who calls out for help. ‘Everyone who calls, ‘Help, God!’ gets help.’ But how can people call for help if they don’t know who to trust? And how can they know who to trust if they haven’t heard of the One who can be trusted? And how can they hear if nobody tells them? And how is anyone going to tell them, unless someone is sent to do it?”

Romans 10:11-17 (The Message)

Have you ever had someone ask you, “Can you keep a secret?” I’ve never met someone who said, “You better not tell me, I am horrible at keeping secrets!” But, I also don’t know many people who can keep a good secret. We love to pass on the news...especially if we shouldn’t.

You want to know a secret? The good news of salvation isn’t supposed to be a secret! Paul says that if you have trusted God, heart and soul, then you have the best news ever. You know what it is to have your sins forgiven. You know how awesome it is to be in a right relationship with the God of the universe. That’s not to say that life is always easy. Followers of Jesus are not exempt from difficulties in life...when you think about it, you wouldn’t have to trust God if you weren’t in a situation that required trust! But you DO know that when you go through something difficult that you CAN indeed trust God and that He will go through this difficulty with you! That is some good news.

Do you know someone who doesn’t trust God like you do? Paul, in this passage, says that you aren’t supposed to keep this a secret. Take the good news of your reliable trustworthy God to someone who needs to know. You can do that by simply sharing your story or inviting someone to attend a Believers service with you...just don’t keep it a secret! There are people who have yet to discover the goodness of God that you have already found!

Reaching: FOUND PEOPLE FIND PEOPLE

DAY 33 ~ FEBRUARY 8

Heather Carl

“Come see a man who knew all about the things I did, who knows me inside and out. Do you think this could be the Messiah?’ And they went out to see for themselves.” John 4:29-30

The story of the Samaritan Woman is one of my favorites in all of Scripture! This woman who is kind of an outcast in her community finds herself in a life-changing conversation while going about her normal routine.

Has that happened to you? Just minding your own business, locked into your day-to-day life when...WHAM!...you're hit with the reality of your brokenness, reminded of Jesus' great love for you and then you just have to share that with someone else?

It's happened to me several times, but one of the most powerful times was a few years ago. I had plans to meet several people at a bar & restaurant after work. For various reasons, it ended up only being me and another woman that I really wasn't pumped about spending one on one time with. As we sat and made small talk our conversation started to get a little more personal. It was easy, it was strangely comfortable. So comfortable that I felt God lead me to tell her about a dark time in my marriage and how He restored it. In the middle of our conversation I was having a little sidebar talk with God that went something like, “umm, I really don't think this a good time to tell *her* about all *this*. She doesn't even really know me...this could really scare her off” and His response? “Yep, keep talking.” So I did. I finished the story and after listening intently she said, “Excuse me; I need to use the restroom.” Oh my, what have I done?? Queue another chat with God – “See! That didn't go well at all!” “Heather, relax...I've got this.” She returned, sat down and said, “So, can I ask you a question?” “Sure” “Do you think good things can come from bad things?”

We sat in that booth for a couple hours. She shared things with me that she had guarded for years. And right then and there, I started getting to know my best

friend. She began a journey of seeking Jesus that night. She's come to find that he "knows her inside and out" and LOVES her tremendously! It has been so exciting to watch her share His love with others.

When we begin to understand who Jesus is, we cannot remain the same! Our response to His greatness HAS to be to tell others about Him. Sure, it can seem intimidating – but the thing is, God wants everyone to know about His Son and the sacrifice He made for our sins on the cross. And, truth be told, God is bigger than our stumbling words. If He's calling you to share your faith with someone He will equip you, He WILL. Stay in His Word, be in prayer, ask Him to use you to love others the way He does. If you do that, others will notice that you are different and when they ask you why, you can very simply say, "I know the love Jesus has for me and He wants you to know Him too."

God could do anything to draw us into a relationship with Him (He is God, after all) but more often than not, He chooses to use us to reach one another. What a privilege – God wants to use ME, He wants to use YOU!

Will you trust God to use you in reaching others with the message of his great love for them? Will you, having been found, help find others?

Reaching: FOUND PEOPLE FIND PEOPLE

DAY 34 ~ FEBRUARY 9

Todd Breeding

Many times I sat in church listening to the same old message about how we should leave the heard and find the lost one. Then, I remembered something odd. It was a Star Trek movie where Spock was trapped behind the glass in the reactor core...yada, yada...and he was about to die. (Yeah, yeah, I know. Not too many devotions have had trekkie stuff huh?) Anyway, he put his hand on the glass and said this phrase, "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few or the one". The trekkie writers made a movie star life saver out of Spock because he sacrificed his life for his crew. He set his needs aside to save the many.

But as this applies to helping people find Christ, the theory could not be more wrong. The needs of the one or the few outweigh the needs of the many. That's what we do. That's why we exist. That's our one major tasking, to find the lost one.

Luke 15:4 says, "If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it?"

A lot of us churchy people have heard and read this verse many times. One point, I think I may have been missing in my mind all those times was that to find the lost, you have to be found first. You have to be the focus of someone's effort to be found. Someone had to set their needs aside to find you. Found people, find people. This is a great phrase and it goes right to the point. You have to have found Jesus and have a real relationship with Him before you can lead people to Christ. This is really too important to miss. If you're not right with Christ, you will miss the chance to bring all the lost in your circle of influence to Christ. Each one of those people also losing the chance for salvation and in turn the lost people they know won't get "caught" either. What a scary thought! More and more lost stack up because you are not right with Him and we can't let that happen.

Reaching: FOUND PEOPLE FIND PEOPLE

DAY 35 ~ FEBRUARY 10

Ronda Parin

“All this newness of life is from God, who brought us back to himself through what Christ did. And God has given us the task of reconciling people to him...We are Christ’s ambassadors...”

2 Corinthians 5:18-20

In 1990, I had the privilege of bringing the message of reconciliation to the people of Bulgaria. While I was there, I met Pastor Paychev, a man filled with joy and a zealous passion for reaching the lost. In the few days I was with him, I learned what a true passion for the lost was. A few years before we came, preaching the gospel was illegal and subject to imprisonment, torture and even death in that country. During this time, Pastor Paychev knew what God was asking him to do; and, with joyful obedience, he would gather children wherever he could and tell them about Jesus. In time, he was found out, arrested, beaten and told to go home with the promise to never talk about this Jesus again. But Pastor Paychev could not bear the fact that children would not have an opportunity to hear the life-changing message of Jesus, so he continued on with his mission. Within a short period of time he was found again, and was arrested. This time the beating wasn't enough and they tortured him by forcing him to stand on his tip toes up against a wall. If he ever allowed his feet to fully touch the floor, he would receive an electric shock. For days this went on. When the authorities figured he had had enough, they let him go. As he was leaving they asked him what his intentions were now, and Pastor Paychev replied “now I go preach Jesus to the children.” In asking him why he continued? His words were as the apostle Paul's, “Christ's love compels me.”

God loves every person in this church, this community, and in the world; He desires that none should perish. Imagine if every Christian had this zealous passion for the lost! Imagine the passion we would love with, the zeal we would pray with, and the power our message would pack!

Ask God today, to build in you that sense of urgency; ask that His love for His children would compel you to reach out. Found people, find people!