

FIREHOUSE CHURCH 31 DAY DEVOTIONAL 2022

A complete 31 day devotional to help bring you one step further in your personal journey with the Lord.

TODAY we begin a brand new journey that I pray will help you start off 2022 on a good note. For the next 31 days, we are going to take thoughts captive, we are winning the battle of the mind and LEARNING GOD'S LOVE. When we conquer our mind and our mindsets, we simply cannot be conquered! So, let us believe God together for positive life changes that will set us on a new course.

Just as our physical body needs food for nourishment, our spirit man needs to be fed as well! We all know and understand that a child needs to take in the proper nutrients to grow into strong healthy adults, but many people don't realize that the Word of God is the 'food' that God has given us to strengthen and feed the spiritual part of us. The Bible is the very 'bread of life' that transforms us into who God created us to be. When we are 'full' of His truth, we can grow from spiritual 'babies' into strong men and women of God. I pray that these devotionals will encourage, uplift you, and increase your appetite for the spiritual food God has given us... His Word!

As we turn the page of 2021, we find ourselves facing a New Year - and with it - LEARNING GOD'S LOVE.

Pastor Fernando & Liz Villicaña
Lead Pastors, Firehouse Church Brea

JANUARY 1

Ephesians 2:10 We are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Happy New Year. We just read that God has planned for all of us to do “good things” in life and ministry. Some people have that special place they can go and reflect on life, I am no different. For me it's a park bench near my home at that perfect spot. I look out at the lake, the trees and a special bridge made of old looking lumber. For many that old park bench was just a place to sit for a moment or two. But for me; it became my office.

On that park bench, I reflect on God, who didn't choose someone else to express His presence to the world, who didn't tap the celebrity preacher or the popular person to get things done. He chose people like you and me. We are the means, the method, the object, and the delivery vehicles for God's message of love. God can use anyone, for sure. If you are the one who won the “Best Personality” award, you're not disqualified—it just doesn't make you more qualified. You see, God usually chooses ordinary people like us to get things done.

As I sit on my park bench, it becomes clear that we need to stop plotting the course and instead just fly and land the plane where God has instructed us. We keep flying because love is never stationary. In the end, love doesn't just keep thinking about it or keep planning for it. Simply put: love just does. As we leave 2021 behind us and find ourselves in a new year, let's reflect on the love of God - a love that motivates us, a love that never fails. Lets fly and land our plane according to God's good grace.

Dear God,

HELP ME TO PUT MY LOVE INTO ACTION.

JANUARY 2

Luke 14:16-17 Jesus replies with this story: “A man prepared a great feast and sent out many invitations. When the banquet was ready, he sent his servant to tell the guests, ‘Come, the banquet is ready.’”

When I was young and thought about God and church and Jesus, I would shy away because I thought getting close to God meant that I had to be a priest or something. I thought there were lots of long corridors to navigate, there were arrows pointing in all kinds of directions, and the religious people were the security guards. They were the people checking to see if you had been invited. But Jesus never acted like that. When you read the Bible, the people who loved Jesus and followed Him were the ones like me who don't always get invited places. Yet Jesus told His friends they were invited anyway. In fact, He told them that the religious people weren't the ones who decided who got into heaven and who didn't. He said the people who followed Him should think of themselves more like the ushers rather than the bouncers, and it would be God who decides who gets in. We're the ones who simply show people their seats that someone else paid for.

Can you even believe that Jesus would invite people to a banquet and they wouldn't want to show up? When we accept Jesus' invitation to show up to life, we get to do life with Him.

Dear God,

THANK YOU FOR ASKING ME TO SIT AT YOUR TABLE.

JANUARY 3

Psalm 120:1 I took my troubles to the Lord; I cried out to him, and he answered my prayer.

What I've learned the more time I've spent following Jesus is that God delights in answering our impossible prayers. The kind of prayers made in a dark cell by someone holding unwashed hands. Prayers asking for the things we couldn't possibly think could happen for us or someone else. Ones we might even feel a little bad saying, as if it's just asking God for too much. But what we can forget is that we're talking to a God who knows that what we need the most is to return to Him, and live our lives for Him. And like the judge, God knows that we can't fully return until we know we've been forgiven.

God pursues us into whatever dark place we've landed and behind whatever locked door holds us in. He holds our unwashed and dirty hands and loves us deeply. He speaks to ordinary people like us and tells us that we are important enough to redeem, save and love. He tells us that He is there for us no matter how hard the wind blows and no matter how fiercely our storms rage. As we show Him our scars through prayer, He shows us His scars through love.

Dear God,

**THANK YOU FOR HEARING AND ANSWERING MY IMPOSSIBLE PRAYERS.
HELP ME TO HEAR YOUR VOICE AND TO SEE WITH CLEAR EYES WHAT YOU
WANT ME TO DO.**

JANUARY 4

Galatians 3:26 For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

I heard a self-help guy say once that you could look in the mirror and give yourself something he called positive affirmations, like saying to yourself you are good or smart or talented. I don't know if that works, to be honest. Maybe it does. But I do know one thing that works every time— it's having somebody else say something good about you. I think God speaks something meaningful into our lives and it fills us up and helps us change the world regardless of ourselves and our shortcomings. His name for us is His children. He hopes that we'll believe Him...He hopes we'll start to see ourselves as His beloved rather than think of all of the reasons that we aren't.

Words of encouragement are like that. They have their own power. And when they are said by the right people, they can change everything.

Dear God,

THANK YOU FOR ADOPTING ME AND GIVING ME A NEW NAME. HELP ME TO SPEAK LIFE AND GOODNESS TO OTHERS, JUST AS YOU DO TO ME.

JANUARY 5

Philippians 4:8. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.

There's nothing wrong with being typical, I guess, but there is nothing fundamentally right about it either. I've never read in Genesis that God created "typical" and called it good. Instead, I think men who were bored made up typical and called it, if not good, at least acceptable. People who follow Jesus, though, are no longer typical—God is constantly inviting them into a life that moves away from typical. Even if they have normal jobs, live in normal houses, and drive normal cars, they're just not the same anymore.

The ones Jesus first picked to follow Him started out typical, to be sure. They were unschooled and ordinary. Fishermen, business people, blind people, loose women, rip-offs, and vagrants. They were people who had been injured in life and patched together by the grace of God. But what Christ-followers lack in velocity, they make up for in intensity. They are people who have experienced an intensely intimate friendship with Jesus and move forward with an intensity to parallel that experience.

We could leave all of the comparisons and all of the trappings and all of the pretending of religion. Jesus told the people that it's not enough to just look like you love God. He said we'd know the extent of our love for God by how well we loved other people.

Dear God,

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR EXTRAORDINARY LOVE. HELP ME TO LOVE OTHERS
IN EXTRAORDINARY WAYS.**

JANUARY 6

Nehemiah 9:17 But you are a God of forgiveness, gracious and merciful, slow to become angry, and rich in unfailing love.

As I've grown older, I've come to learn most people aren't bad in the traditional sense. I mean, they aren't malicious or plotting a bank robbery or setting up scams. People want to be loved and not be lonely. And for that reason people look to find some security and inclusion in life. The problem is, they generally look to the wrong things to satisfy the approval/attention deficit. I am not justifying poor behavior, but understand that there is usually a deep rooted reason why people do the wrong things.

Sometimes things can go horribly wrong and we end up flat on our backs in a blood-soaked T-shirt. I don't think God is mad at us when that happens. He knew when He made the world that there was going to be some pain and people were going to get hurt—whether they did it to themselves or others did it to them. He knew people were going to manipulate each other and cheat and try to get love and respect in inappropriate ways. Still, it's hard for me to see Him enjoying the pain when we fail.

These days, the view of God I hold on to isn't Him being mad because I've missed the mark. It's the one of Him bringing me into His arms and carrying me away to get healed.

Dear God,

THANK YOU FOR FORGIVING MY MISTAKES, AND FOR BEING THE ONE WHO HEALS ME.

JANUARY 7

Proverbs 12:26. The godly give good advice to their friends; the wicked lead them astray.

Let's face it - you usually become like the people you hang around, and to a great degree, you end up going wherever they're headed. When there is someone else behind the steering wheel, it needs to be someone you trust with your life, because you've given a great deal of control over your life to them.

I don't mean to sound callous, because the bad ones need friends too. You just don't need them (bad friends that is). Jesus doesn't give satan any grace. He just speaks the truth to him and then tells him to go away. If satan had come back saying he was sorry, that would be different; but of course he doesn't and he won't.

Some people learn to be caring, and some people don't. You won't always know right away in the makeup of the people you meet. What I've decided is a pretty good idea is to just ask people where they're going before you get in the car with them. If they aren't heading where you want to end up, just wait by the highway a little while longer and in time, the right one will come.

Dear God,

HELP ME TO DISCERN GOOD COMPANY FROM BAD. PUT GOOD PEOPLE IN MY LIFE, AND HELP ME HANG ON TO THE GOOD ONES I ALREADY HAVE.

JANUARY 8

Ephesians 3:20 Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.

Jesus' disciples must have seen joy and suffering, triumph and tragedy, and in the end there was just a man, an idea, and an invitation without a lot of details. The disciples were unschooled and ordinary, like all of us. Yet they didn't need all the details because they were on an adventure with a Savior who wanted to take them.

You don't need to know everything when you're with someone you trust. That's probably why Jesus' disciples never said they were on a missions trip. I think they knew love already had a name and they didn't need a program or anything else to define it. We don't either. The kind of adventure Jesus has invited us on doesn't require an application or prerequisites. It's just about deciding to take up the offer made by a Father who wants us to walk with Him. I've often shared over the pulpit here at Firehouse Church the fact that "God has an ability to go beyond our ability."

Dear God,

THANK YOU FOR THE INVITATION. I LOOK FORWARD TO THE ADVENTURES TO COME!

JANUARY 9

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

The Bible says people who are friends of God are new creations. The way I heard it's supposed to work is that the old version of us goes away and a new original is painted. It's always great to own an original of something. What I also know now is that our infinite value, the original masterwork that we are, is placed in us because God is the master artist, not us. The best we could muster ourselves would be a fake.

God invites us to be new creations, original art, and to live a life of engagement. He says to leave the cheap imitation in a closet somewhere. He doesn't say when you hang the real you out there—the priceless one—that things will go great either. It's pretty clear from watching Jesus' followers, past and present, that when you risk the real you, you'll probably take a hit. God did when He hung Jesus out there. But one thing I do know is this: when we do take hits, and we will, God isn't going to think less of us. Instead, He gets up early, lights a fire, sits in His favorite chair, and gazes at the original masterpiece He made in us. And you know what? He loves us even more, imperfections marks and all.

Dear God,

THANK YOU FOR USING MY IMPERFECTIONS AND LOVING ME IN SPITE OF THEM.

JANUARY 10

Romans 11:33 Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways!

When people ask me what it looks like to follow Jesus, I usually say that following Him looks like dealing with all of the issues everyone else does—disappointments, tremendous joy, uncertainty, the whole bit—and having your mind change all the time as you learn how Jesus would've dealt with things. Following Jesus is about having your paradigms shift as you navigate a wide range of emotions while living the big life Jesus invites us into. Because I know Jesus, where I once thought of things in one way, now I think of them in another way. It happens all the time, every day.

Jesus seemed to say that a lot Himself. He would say, "You once thought this, but now I tell you that it's different." And through the many paradigm shifts I've had following Jesus, the one that seems to universally apply is that we should strive to trust in Him. That's faith. And God is pleased as we endeavor to live by our faith.

Dear God,

**WHEN THE STORM SHIFTS MY BOAT, THANK YOU FOR BEING MY EVEN KEEL
AND HELPING ME WITH MY FAITH.**

JANUARY 11

Lamentations 3:30 Let them turn the other cheek to those who strike them and accept the insults of their enemies.

When people get angry or defensive they tend to make mistakes. But nobody can be defensive with their palms up. Go ahead and try it. Right now, wherever you are. Turn your palms toward the sky. I learned this technique from Jesus actually. Some people walk around with their fists clinched, defensive, afraid people are going to take advantage of them. I realize there are many evils in the world that caused them to clench their fists rather than open their palms up. Through years of offenses and set-backs, I am learning to walk and live with my palms up, just like Jesus did. Palms up means you have nothing to hide and nothing to lose. Palms up means you are strong enough to be vulnerable, even with your enemies. Even when you have been tremendously wronged. Jesus was palms up, to the very end and sits on the right hand of the Father as a glaring example of sacrifice, humility and love.

Dear God,

HELP ME TO KEEP MY PALMS UP—BOTH FOR YOU AND FOR OTHERS.

JANUARY 12

*Luke 8:25. The disciples were terrified and amazed.
“Who is this man?” they asked each other.
“When he gives a command, even the wind and waves obey him!”*

I love those passages in Scripture where Jesus teaches the disciples something, saying, “I want to teach you to think differently about life.” They walked with Him for years, and some of them didn’t learn everything they needed to know until after He’d gone back to heaven. Yet, even though they were slow to learn, they still referred to themselves as His beloved. Failure is just part of the process, and it’s not just okay; it’s better than okay. God doesn’t want failure to shut us down. God didn’t make it a three-strikes-and-you’re-out sort of thing. It’s more about how God helps us dust ourselves off so that we can swing for the fences again. And all of this without keeping a meticulous record of our screw-ups.

Dear God,

HELP ME TO LEARN FROM MY FAILURES AND MISTAKES. THANK YOU FOR REDEEMING THEM!

JANUARY 13

Amos 5:15. Hate evil and love what is good; turn your courts into true halls of justice.

There's a character in the Bible named Joshua. Over and over God told Joshua and his posse to be strong and courageous. God doesn't say in the Bible that we're supposed to man up, or dance around the fire naked and tell manly stories. Instead, we're just supposed to be strong and courageous. That's it. The way I read it, it sounds an awful lot like God is calling us out and telling us to pick a fight.

I want to pick a fight because I want someone else's suffering to matter more to me. I want to slug it out where I can make a meaningful difference. God says He wants us to battle injustice, to look out for orphans and widows, to give sacrificially. And anyone who gets distracted with the minutiae of this point or that opinion is tapping out of the real skirmish. God wants us to get some skin in the game and to help make a tangible difference.

I can't make a real need matter to me by listening to the story, visiting the website, collecting information, or wearing the bracelet about it. I need to pick the fight myself. Then, most important of all, I need to run barefoot toward it. But I want to go barefoot because it's holy ground; I want to be running because time is short and none of us has as much runway as we think we do; and I want it to be a fight because that's where we can make a difference. That's what love does.

Dear God,

HELP ME TO CHOOSE A WORTHY BATTLE.

JANUARY 14

Isaiah 42:5. God, the Lord, created the heavens and stretched them out. He created the earth and everything in it. He gives breath to everyone, life to everyone who walks the earth.

Being engaged is a way of doing life, a way of living and loving. It's about going to extremes and expressing the bright hope that Jesus offers us, a hope that makes us brave and expels darkness with light. That's what I want my life to be all about—full of hope and love. I want to be engaged to life and with life.

I enjoy those parts of the Bible where Jesus talks about how much He loves His bride (the church). It makes me wonder if the trees and mountains and rivers are things He planned in advance, knowing they would 'WOW!' us. I wonder if God returned over and over to this world He placed us in thinking what He had created was good, but it could be even better, even grander. I wonder if He thought each foggy morning, each soft rain, each field of wildflowers would be a quiet and audacious way to demonstrate His tremendous love for us.

Dear God,

THANK YOU FOR SHOWING YOUR LOVE TO US BY CREATING A BEAUTIFUL WORLD.

JANUARY 15

John 3:16 For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

The world can make you think that love can be picked up at a garage sale or enveloped in a Hallmark card. But the kind of love that God created and demonstrated is a costly one because it involves sacrifice and presence. It's a love that operates more like a sign language than being spoken outright. What I've learned about the brand of love Jesus offers is that it's more about presence than undertaking a project. It's a brand of love that doesn't just think about good things, or agree with them, or talk about them. What I've learned reinforces the simple truth that continues to weave itself into the tapestry of every great story: God loves all of us with an everlasting love - a sacrificial love that never fails. What will my sacrifice look like today? What expression of love will flow from my heart today?

Dear God,

THANK YOU FOR SHOWING ME WHAT A SACRIFICE LOOKS LIKE. HELP ME TO LOVE IN ACTION AND IN SACRIFICE.

JANUARY 16

Luke 10:1 Look, I have given you authority over all the power of the enemy, and you can walk among snakes and scorpions and crush them. Nothing will injure you.

Why would this scripture be written/communicated to us? Because power is useless until it is utilized and put to action. God is telling us that He has given us certain powers. He has given us power and authority that once exercised will allow us to continue on our mission to live for God and spread the gospel in spite of any evil or hinderance that may come our way. Have you ever experienced a day, a month or even a year where you feel the power of the enemy has targeted you specifically? Well, in Luke 10:1, the Lord is reminding us that He has given us a power greater than that of our enemies, and that nothing shall by any means hurt us. Attacks may come, but ultimately we win as we quote the Word of God and walk in His fulness. Today, I choose to walk in His promise.

Dear God,

**THANK YOU FOR THE POWER YOU HAVE LEFT ME TO DEAL WITH ANY
LEVEL OF ATTACK OR OFFENSE AGAINST ME.**

JANUARY 17

Psalm 23:2 He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams.

I don't think God is a Hampton Inn traveler. Jesus doesn't invite us on a business trip. Instead, He says let's go after those things that inspire and challenge you and let's experience them together. You don't need a lot of details or luggage or equipment, just a willingness to go into a storm with a Father who's kicking footholds into the steep sides of our problems while we kick a couple in ourselves too. He guides us into those footholds with His strong hands while we're safely tethered to Him by a bright red rope of grace, which holds us securely. Somehow in all of this, the terrain we navigate doesn't seem as scary either, because when we're on an adventure with God we're too excited to be afraid and too engaged to be thinking of anything else.

Dear God,

TAKE ME ON A TRIP OF YOUR DESIGN. I'M READY FOR YOUR ADVENTURE!

JANUARY 18

Micah 6:8 O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

If you ask a thousand people who don't want anything to do with religion why that is, they'll tell you all the reasons they don't like it, but I doubt they'd be describing the real stuff. They'll describe a guy or a gal on a television show who told them if they gave money, they'd get rich. They'll talk about the big hairdo or outrageous makeup of some televangelist and the absurd things they said and did. They'll talk about someone who was religious but broke their hearts or their promise, or lied and got caught or went to jail, or who cried a lot on camera but it looked like they were faking it. Or they'll talk about someone who told them that God hated who they were or how they acted or who they married or couldn't forgive what they'd done. It's a sad situation, honestly. The only way they can keep from being deceived anymore is for somebody to give them a taste of the real thing. And what's great is that we each have a shot at being that person.

When we meet people who have been fed the fake stuff about who God is and what He's about, it's not surprising that they have a little indigestion. So we can show them that God is full of love and is the source of hope. People don't want to be told that their experiences were wrong. Instead, we get to be the ones to show them real love from a real God.

Dear God,

SHOW ME HOW TO SHOW OTHERS WHAT YOU ARE REALLY LIKE. HELP ME TO BE FOR YOU RATHER THAN AGAINST PEOPLE.

JANUARY 19

Luke 9:24 If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.

Finding things and losing things is what the Bible is all about. God even seemed to encourage it. He talked about losing your job, or even your life, if you want to find it. He talked about losing your status to find real power. He shows that Jesus comes looking for us because people, like sheep, have a knack for getting lost. And when He finds us, we usually aren't dressed in a tux.

Things that go wrong can shape us or scar us. I've had some things go well in my life and some things not go so well, just like you. More have gone well than have gone poorly, but I'm not trying to keep score because I have a different way of measuring those things now. God finds us in our failures and our successes, and He says that while we used to think one way about things, now He wants us to think another way about those same things. And for me, I've realized that I used to be afraid of failing at the things that really mattered to me, but now I'm more afraid of succeeding at things that don't matter.

Dear God,

GUIDE MY SUCCESSES AND BLESS MY FAILURES. HELP ME TO KEEP MY PRIORITIES IN CHECK.

JANUARY 20

Proverb 4:11-12 I will teach you wisdom's ways and lead you in straight paths. When you walk, you won't be held back; when you run, you won't stumble.

I've learned that God sometimes allows us to find ourselves in a place where we want something so bad that we can't see past it. Sometimes we can't even see God because of it. When we want something that bad, it's easy to mistake what we truly need for the thing we really want. When this sort of thing happens, and it seems to happen to everyone, I've found it's because what God has for us is obscured from view, just around another bend in the road.

It's in my nature, maybe all of our natures, to try to engineer things. So I skew the answers to get what I think I want. But when I do that, I also get what I don't want too. I remember asking God "why" something that I wanted didn't materialize. Little did I know that in the long run, not getting what I asked for would end up being a lifetime blessing. If we would just look back and say, "Thank God I didn't get what I wanted at the time", we would see that the hand of God was involved. The truth is "all things work together for good to those who love the Lord and are called according to His purpose."

Dear God,

MAY I ALWAYS BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR YOUR PLAN AND YOUR GUIDING HAND.

JANUARY 21

Proverbs 16:24 Kind words are like honey—sweet to the soul and healthy for the body.

Words can launch us. God made it so that ordinary people like you and me can launch each other. I believe it's true that the right people can say words that can change everything. Now that I find myself in a new year, I will inevitably find myself in new opportunities to encourage a whole new group of people. To encourage someone, (even one person) has the potential of changing their course in life or cause them to continue living for one more day. My Pastor once told me: "There are three things you may never get back - the shot arrow, a spoken word, and opportunity. Let's take the time to be a blessing to others by speaking words of encouragement and love.

Dear God,

HELP ME TO BE AN ENCOURAGER IN BOTH WORD AND DEED.

JANUARY 22

*Jeremiah 29:11 “For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord.
“They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”*

I think God’s hope and plan for us is pretty simple to figure out. For those who like formulas, here it is: add your whole life, your loves, your passions, and your interests together with what God said He wants us to be about, and that’s your answer. If you want to know the answer to the bigger question— what’s God’s plan for the whole world?—buckle up: it’s us.

I have an alarm clock that talks to me, I have a computer that talks to me, and I have books that talk to me. I even had a navigation system in my car that talks to me. I could pick the accent. I like the one that sounds like my British butler is steering the car. Just for fun, when I had guests in the car, I’d sometimes switch the language to have it talk to me in Mandarin Chinese. And you know what? We still got to where we were headed. Like my communication with God, I don’t need to hear words I recognize all the time to know what direction God wants me to go, because there’s all kinds of other information I can triangulate off of - the Bible, preachers and oh yes, my wife Liz too (lol).

Could God speak to me audibly if He wanted to? You bet, and I hope He does sometime; I’ll let you know. Until then, it seems that what God does most of the time when He has something to say is this...He doesn’t pass us messages, instead He passes us each other.

Dear God,

***THANK YOU FOR DIRECTING MY LIFE, EVEN WHEN I’M NOT SURE HOW YOU
ARE DOING IT!***

LEARNING GOD’S LOVE

JANUARY 23

Psalm 136:26 Give thanks to the God of heaven. His faithful love endures forever.

Most everyone at Firehouse Church knows I love my wife very much and I always will. For the past forty-five years she's been my lover and best friend. My love for her and her love for me is the fire that warms our family. But the reason I wanted to tell you this is that it has to do with another thing I learned following Jesus. Because God made me to love Liz, He also gave me a very real way to understand what is happening in the universe.

Because of our love for each other, I understand just a little more how God has pursued me in creative ways, ways that initially did not get my attention. Nevertheless, He wouldn't stop. That's what love does—it pursues blindly, unflinchingly, and without end. When you go after something you love, you'll do anything it takes to get it, even if it costs everything.

Dear God,

THANK YOU FOR THE EXTRAORDINARY LOVE YOU HAVE FOR ME.

JANUARY 24

Psalm 34:18 The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.

At some point I stopped staring at the broken asphalt that was my life before I gave my life to Jesus Christ. My life had not been shattered into many pieces by a massive tragedy, but it consisted of many disorganized pieces. I simply decided that I wasn't going to let the residual rocks and small pieces of gravel get in the way of me living a life pleasing to God. It has always seemed to me that broken things, just like broken people, get used more; it's probably because God has more pieces to work with.

Jesus talked about lawyers a lot too. None of it was very flattering, actually. He usually lumped lawyers in with liars and people who didn't speak the truth. Jesus said they were getting in the way of people knowing God, which is a really bad thing. He said the same thing about religious people too, sometimes in the same sentence. But He also talked about everybody else and what He said to them is that we all could be used, not just when we're broken, but especially because we're broken.

Dear God,

USE MY BROKENNESS AS YOU SEE FIT.

JANUARY 25

Genesis 45:4-5 “I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt. But don’t be upset, and don’t be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives.”

There’s this beautiful story in the Bible about a guy named Joseph. The story of Joseph has more turns in it than Lombard street in San Francisco. It’s an emotional roller coaster, but it ends up with Joseph being second-in-command in Egypt. And twice at the end of the book Joseph says that the reason God put him where He did was to save many lives. And if you think about it, the reason God chose Moses was to save many lives. And the same goes for Jonah and Peter, all the apostles, and Jesus. And us, too, for that matter. We were all meant to save many lives. God is always trying to save lives, and it seems like He usually uses the least likely people to do it.

So the next time God asks you to do something that you feel is a bit beyond your capabilities or way over your pay grade, something that might save lives, say yes. God will enable those He calls to action.

Dear God,

GIVE ME THE COURAGE TO SAVE A LIFE IF THAT’S WHAT YOU’RE ASKING ME TO DO.

JANUARY 26

Lamentations 3:22-23 The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning.

There is only one invitation it would kill me to refuse, yet I'm tempted to turn it down every so often. I get the invitation every morning when I wake up to actually live a life of complete engagement. It doesn't come in an envelope. It's ushered in by a sunrise or the sound of a bird. It's the invitation to actually live, to fully participate in this amazing life for one more day. Nobody turns down an invitation to the White House, but I've seen plenty of people turn down an invitation to fully live.

Turning down this invitation comes in lots of flavors. It looks like numbing yourself or distracting yourself or seeing something really beautiful as just normal. It can also look like refusing to forgive or not being grateful or getting wrapped around the axle with fear or envy. I think every day God sends us an invitation to live and sometimes we forget to show up or get deceived into thinking we haven't really been invited. But you see, we have been invited—every day, all over again.

Dear God,

***HELP ME TO SEE EVERY DAY AS AN INVITATION TO ENJOY YOUR
GOODNESS.***

JANUARY 27

Job 37:5 God's voice is glorious in the thunder.

God's voice to me throughout my walk with God has never been audible. I mean I've never heard God speak to me with my physical ears. So rather than spending time wondering why I don't hear audible voices, I just try to listen harder with my heart, and I've realized a couple of things that seem kind of obvious now. God doesn't talk to me in an audible voice because God isn't a human being; He's God. That makes sense to me, because human beings are limited and God isn't limited at all. He can communicate to us in any way He wants to. Through flowers, other people, an experience (good or bad), a feeling of joy, goose bumps, a newfound talent, or an appreciation we acquire over time. It doesn't need to be a big mystical thing like some hyper spiritual people have made it out to be. Sometimes it is just a "still small voice" in our spirit.

Dear God,

SPEAK TO ME WHENEVER AND HOWEVER YOU CHOOSE.

JANUARY 28

Proverbs 20:15 Wise words are more valuable than much gold and many rubies.

When I don't know the answer to where I am or what God wants me to be doing in my ministry or life I try to get a bearing on at least a couple of fixed points that I can trust. One is Jesus. I know it sounds like a canned Sunday school answer, and I tend not to like those, but it's true. I take a bearing off what I know about Jesus. I look at what He had to say about where I am and then I draw a line from Jesus to me.

The other fixed point I use is a group of people I feel God has dropped into my life, kind of like advisers. These people have their particular areas of wisdom and experience, and I use them to bounce ideas off of and get their input. In turn, I'm an adviser to many of my friends and family members too. For instance, I'm an adviser to my children. I've appointed myself to be in charge of homeland security for them. These advisers help me in the area of direction because I take a bearing on their counsel as another fixed point in my life and draw a line from them to me.

Where all of these lines cross is where God probably wants me to be. I think that navigating a relationship with a living God can be just that easy, and the math is easy too. It's Jesus plus nothing.

Dear God,

***THANK YOU FOR THE FIXED POINTS IN MY LIFE.
MAY I BE A TRUSTWORTHY FIXED POINT FOR OTHERS TOO.***

JANUARY 29

Exodus 15:13 With your unfailing love you lead the people you have redeemed. In your might, you guide them to your sacred home.

While painful at the time, I can see now, many years later when I look in the rearview mirror of my life, evidence of God's tremendous love and unfolding adventure for me. God's grace comes in all shapes, sizes, and circumstances as God continues to unfold something magnificent in me.

And when each of us looks back at all the turns and folds God has allowed in our lives, I don't think it looks like a series of folded-over mistakes and do-overs that have shaped our lives. Instead, I think we'll conclude in the end that maybe we're all a little like human origami and the more creases we have, the better. Our destination is heaven, and God is willing and more than able to secure it for us.

Dear God,

***MAKE THE MOST OF MY CREASES. PLEASE GIVE ME THE STRENGTH TO
CARRY ON THROUGH DISAPPOINTMENT.***

JANUARY 30

1 Corinthians 10:31 “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

Great way to start the new year because many of us have over-indulged through the holidays. This verse shows that God truly does care about every area of our lives! The fact that we can give glory to God in even our eating and drinking shows that He wants to be involved in this area, and that it is important to Him! It's important to note that giving glory to Him through what we 'eat' is getting God involved in every aspect of our lives. In a spiritual sense, this is God reminding us that absolutely everything we do means something. Whether it deals with every day decisions, how we interact with one another and (of course) where we stand in our walk with Him. Everything we say and do carries with it the capacity of giving glory to God. So, the big question is this: Is what I say and do giving God glory?

Dear God,

MAY ALL I SAY AND DO REFLECT YOUR LOVE AND BRING YOU GLORY

JANUARY 31

1 Corinthians 2:9 That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.”

What's your next step? I don't know for sure, because for everyone it's different, but I bet it involves choosing something that already lights you up in the Lord. Something you already think is beautiful or lasting and meaningful. Pick something you aren't just able to do; instead, pick something you feel like you were made to do and then do lots of that. You weren't just an incredible idea that God never got around to making. The next step happened for the world when God brought you into this world. You're here and I'm here. God decided to have us intersect history, not at just any time, but at this time. He made us to be good at a few things and bad at a couple others. He made us to love some things and not like others. Most of all, He made us to dream.

We were meant to dream a lot. We're not just a cosmic biology experiment that ended up working. We're part of God's much bigger plan for the whole world. Just like God's Son arrived here, so did you. And after Jesus arrived, God whispered to all of humanity...“It's your move.” Heaven's been leaning over the rails in the same way ever since you got here, waiting to see what you'll do with your life.

Dear God,
HELP ME MAKE MY NEXT MOVE.