

STEP

Christian Devotional for the awesome
Middle-Schooler

Peter Walker, 2016

'Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.' Psalm 119:114

*I dedicate this devotional to Mary, my daughter,
sailing the seas of middle school right now!
(Matthew 5:14)*

Introduction:

Even the name, 'Middle School', makes you feel like you are not here, and you are not there – you are in the middle! The truth is, however, middle school is not just a place in the 'middle' of somewhere – it is a very important place in its own right! And your stage of life – your age, your friends, your feelings – these are very important right now, also!

There are a lot of changes going on for you at this time. Maybe you are growing up tall, maybe you are not growing much at all... and all these changes really matter, right? Kids at this age and stage can also say things without really thinking, and so hurtful comments might be flying your way... It's hard right now!

OK, but there is some great stuff, too! New things to do and try out, new friends, new places, new movies, etc. You are truly 'growing', both physically and emotionally, and that is exciting.

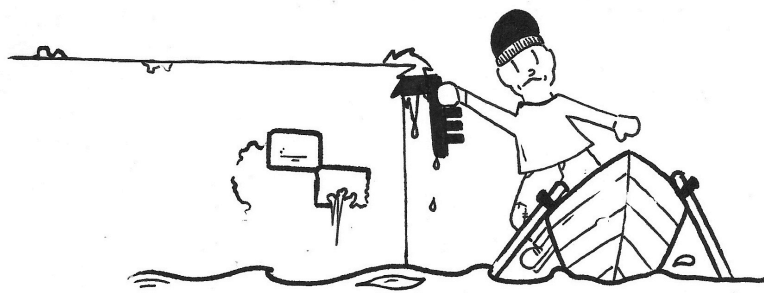
We sometimes are in a hurry to grow up, so that we can do more things and not have pesky parents always bossing us around! But did you know that there is an important advantage in being young? Jesus surprised the 'grown-ups' when he told them that they needed to be like children to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:3). Children – or young people like you – have quite a clear 'view' of who Jesus is, and you trust him deeply. Sometimes when we get older, we lose that trust. We don't have to, but we sometimes do! And this is why Jesus

wanted us grown-ups to become more like you, to see and trust him again.

I hope you enjoy reading these devotional reflections!
I hope you grow in 3 key ways:

- 1) That you come to know Jesus better;
- 2) That you feel more peace and happiness in your friendship with Jesus;
- 3) That you learn some ways to share Jesus with your friends – not from pressure, but from joy and by his Spirit (I Peter 3:15).

There are lots of blank spaces in this devotional, so please write your own notes and thoughts all over the place!



** Thank you, Daniel Walker, for your original 'STEP' art for this devotional!*

#1

Jesus Is Your Friend!

'I have called you friends.' John 15:15

Jesus is an 'invisible' friend, but not an 'imaginary' friend! You cannot see him with your physical eyes, but you really can 'see' him with the eyes of your heart, and hear him with the 'ears' of your heart. Jesus said, *'My sheep know my voice'* (John 10:27). If you believe in Jesus, and spend time alone with him in prayer, and reading the bible, you can and will hear his voice.

Jesus told us that we should actually be happy, and not sad, that he was leaving the earth. He said this was good news because the 'Holy Spirit' would come to us all (John 16:7). You see, Jesus as one person on the earth, meant that he could only be in one place at a time. But when Jesus left the earth, and the Holy Spirit came – this meant that Jesus, by his Spirit, could be with all of us, everywhere, at the same time. Jesus is with you now, by his Spirit.

Spend a few minutes now talking to Jesus, like you would talk to a friend. He is your friend. Your best friend! Tell him what's on your mind, and sit quietly for a minute or two and listen to Him speak to you!

#2

I DON'T HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS!

In middle school as a Christian, sometimes you will get questions about your faith. You might even get people teasing you for being a Christian, or saying things like, *'You can't prove that God exists!'* or *'It is silly to believe that the bible is the actual word of God!'* These kind of experiences can make us feel small, sometimes embarrassed or even a little 'foolish' – like what we believe is for babies, is silly to believe! Have you ever had these experiences, or felt like this?

One thing that is so amazing about God in the bible, and Jesus in the Bible, is that he does allow us to reject him, to not believe in him, to even tease him and 'scoff' at him. In fact, if you think about it, he let us go all the way and even beat him up and kill him. Jesus did show us miracles and asked us to believe him. Some of us see this and say, *'Yes, Lord, I do believe!'* This does honor God, and brings us into his life and his salvation. But Jesus also let people see him – and not believe. People would walk away from him, and Jesus would let them walk away. He loved them, and wants them to believe; but we are given the freedom to 'scoff' at him, and walk away.

Here are two amazing verses that you really do need to read a couple times, and let sink into your soul. They will help you feel the truth about what is happening when people tease or test you. The first verse is God speaking to the prophet Samuel, and the second verse is Jesus speaking to us, his disciples:

'And the LORD told him: 'Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.'
1 Samuel 8:7

'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.' Matthew 5:11-12

#3

WHAT IS HEAVEN LIKE?

I realized today that I have about 30 passwords for different things – my bank account, my email, my phone, online bills, etc. On top of passwords, I also have keys – for the house, for the cars, for my desk at work, for the shed in the back yard... How many passwords and keys do you have?

You know, all these passwords and keys are because here on earth we are not perfectly safe. We lock things because sometimes people take things that are not theirs. Can you imagine an earth where everyone was 100% honest, and you never needed a password and you never needed a key?

When we believe in Jesus, we have a 'job' here on earth. We are like soldiers, in some ways. We do need to enjoy God's peace and love here, but we also have a 'mission', right? We are at work in a world that is not very safe.

As a Christian it is really important to know about heaven, and to think about it sometimes. I often fall asleep at night thinking about some verses that tell me what heaven is like. I want you to read these verses below, and maybe you should consider writing them out and sticking them up by your bed? These passages give us a picture of heaven, and we really are going there!

John 14:1-6

'Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has

many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.'

Thomas said to him, *'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?'*

Jesus answered, *'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'*

Revelation 21:1-5

Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth,' for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, *'Look! God's dwelling-place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'*

Revelation 22:1-5

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any

curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign forever and ever.'



#4

HEAVEN ON EARTH?

'You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.' Psalm 16:11

Ok, so we just looked at what heaven is going to be like. Did you get a chance to really think about it? I just love the image of the 'crystal clear river' flowing through heaven, and the trees and fruit and light that come from God (Revelation 22:1-5). I love that there will be no pain, no crying... And also, how about that amazing picture that Jesus gives us of a house with many rooms (John 14:1-6)? I sometimes imagine this as an enormous hotel, everyone with their own luxury suite, and balcony that overlooks the beauty of heaven...

Now it is important to understand that the most powerful thing about heaven is the ***presence of God***. Remember, everything that exists is because God made it – in other words, it comes out of God's word and his presence. God created the world, but he also is the creator of peace and love and joy. So here is the good news: The best thing about heaven is God's presence, and we can really experience his presence now!

Jesus said these powerful, almost mysterious words: ***'Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.'*** (John 17:3). See here how Jesus is pointing at his presence, as the very 'heart' of eternal life and heaven?

So I want to really encourage you today to take a minute or two – maybe lie on your bed or sit somewhere quiet – and close your eyes and feel God’s presence with you. Jesus said he was our ‘friend’ (John 15:15), and if you sit quietly with him, close your eyes and rest with him, you will hear his voice, and feel him close to you. (John 10:27)

‘This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit.’ | John 4:13

#5

TELLING OTHERS ABOUT JESUS

Jesus does want us to know him and love him, and also to share him with others. When we tell people about Jesus, we refer to this as '*sharing our faith*' or '*witnessing*'.

Have you ever talked to a friend about Jesus, or invited a friend to church with you? How did this person respond to you?

Now, there are some things you need to know about this. First, it can be kinda hard!

Sometimes when we share Jesus with people, and talk about believing in Him, people are really interested, and want to know more! When this happens, it is exciting! At other times, people can sometimes react differently, maybe argue about it or even tease you or reject you as a friend. Jesus said this would happen sometimes, but that we were not to worry about this! (Matthew 5:11; John 15:20)

Here is a very important verse to remember (maybe write this one out and learn it by heart?):

'It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.' | Samuel 8:7

Now, I want to also share this with you. Jesus wants us to be brave in sharing about Him, **but he does not want us to feel lots of pressure or guilt.** Jesus himself cared about people, and shared with them, but he always had peace. (Matthew 9:36) He wants

us to have that same peace – always! Jesus had a very special way of knowing when he should share with people, and when not to share with people:

Jesus always listened to his Father, and watched his Father. (John 5:19) When he felt his Father was leading him to share, he would share, and when he did not feel the Father was leading to share, he would not.

Jesus will also guide you, and whisper to you about when is a good time to talk about him, and when it is a good time just to be kind and loving to people. Jesus will guide you! This is why we need to get close to Jesus as a friend, so that we will know his voice. This way, Jesus will help you be brave to share him, but he will also give you ‘perfect peace’, so that you do not share him out of guilt or pressure.

‘He is kept in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on the Lord.’ Isaiah 26:9

#6

HARD STUFF!

'In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world!' John 16:33

It doesn't take long in this life to start having some tough experiences, right? Hurt feelings, mean words, mean actions. People sometimes mistreat us, and we mistreat others!

Then there is some real painful stuff, and maybe this has happened to you, or to one of your friends. For example, when parents get separated or divorced, or maybe someone has really hurt you, bullied you, or touched you in a wrong way! *(If this has happened to you, please do not be afraid, and tell someone you trust – a teacher, family member or neighbor)*

I want to share something with you, and also give you a 'road map' here. Jesus really loves you! And Jesus loves the people that you love! For example, if your mom or dad is having a tough time in their relationship, Jesus loves them, just like you love them! In fact, Jesus loves them more than you do! Now this doesn't take away the problem, or take away your stress or hurt, but it does mean there is something you can do. ***You can pray for them!*** Yes, this really is powerful!

The bible tells us that when we believe in Jesus, we are not just here in this world, but we are 'citizens' of another world! Yes, the bible tells us that we are *'hidden with Christ in God.'* (Colossians 3:3). You are in this world right now, but you are also *'hidden'* in

heaven with Jesus. Close your eyes for a minute, and you will feel that you are hidden in heaven with Jesus right now!

I encourage you to build a collage of some verses that remind you of this other world that you are in, and stick it up by your bed. When you go to bed at night, you can read over these verses, and close your eyes and really think about them. And then pray! Pray for Jesus to help the people you love. Pray for some friends in school that need help, or need to become nicer people. He will hear you, and he will reach down from heaven and fight for you! Here are the verses you can look up, write down, and stick up by your bed:

Colossians 3:3

Psalms 4:8

Philippians 4:6-8

I Peter 5:7

II Corinthians 5:17

Isaiah 41:10

#7

FITTING IN?!

There is a lot of stuff we can choose in life - if we're lucky! For example, hobbies, clothes, books, food, music, movies. When we get older we can even choose things like what job we would like, what car to buy, what to study, where to live... Choices can be many, and sometimes can be hard. But even harder than 'choices' in life, are things we **cannot** choose. Let's talk a little about this...

So, I cannot choose my height, for example. I can't choose my eye color or the size of my ears (which were a problem for me as a kid!). I can't choose if I'm naturally 'sporty' or even 'popular'. This can be hard! And there are deeper things, too. I can't choose my relations – my mom, my dad, my brothers and sisters. I can't choose what they are like, or what *they* choose to do, or what they let me do!

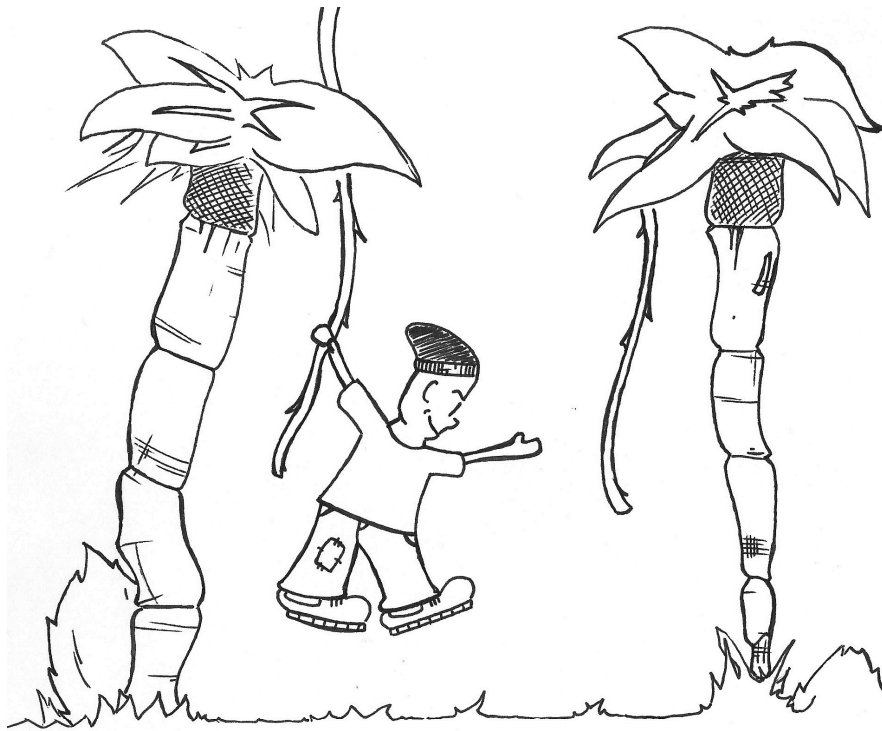
So sometimes we are going to find ourselves a little left out. Maybe others are going somewhere we cannot go, or wearing something we cannot wear. Maybe others 'are' something or someone we are not. It is OK to feel this, and to experience this. It is OK! But here is the very, very good news:

You are a complete original! What this means is that God made you special. You are not one in a million, but one in the whole of history. Never before, and never again will there be 'you'. God knows who you are, and loves you. None of us are perfect now, but we will all be completely perfect in heaven. Don't worry about what others think or say about you. Only

concern yourself with what God says about you. He has a special path in this life for you - a mission that only you can do, a destiny!

Don't worry about what others say you are 'not'. Ask God who it is you 'are'! Ask God today to show you the steps he wants you to take – and the thoughts he wants you to think – for the life and mission God has for you!

(Jeremiah 29:11; Psalm 139:13-18; Genesis 1:27; Ecclesiastes 3:11; John 1:47-48; Luke 12:4-5, 8-9, II Corinthians 4:18; Revelation 2:17)



#8

School & Heaven

Getting up for school can be hard! Do you ever feel like this? The alarm goes off, or somebody wakes you up, and you groan... There were days when I was your age, and I just could not believe I had to haul myself up and go to school. I actually had to cycle my bike to school every day, in the wind, rain and snow!

Now, after I had finally got to school, maybe even dried off a little from rain, I would realize that I was already half way through the school day. Lunch bell would ring, I would be chatting to friends... and then before I knew it, I would be thinking about ***after*** school, because we were on our way to the school day ending! Has this ever happened to you? Where you dread the day, but then before you know it the day is nearly over, and you are thinking and planning your free time?

You know, living life is a little like that day in school. Life can be hard - getting up for school, or facing into some hard work, chores, or trips that we do not enjoy. Sometimes just having to deal with friends – or not so friendly people – and dealing with difficult family relationships. But like all school days, even the tough ones, life also is going to end at some point. When it does end, this hard life ends with it, and we step into a perfect, beautiful, peaceful heaven!

Tough school days end, and then you can run, play, rest, right? Well, this tough life is also going to end one day, and you will run and play and rest in

heaven! Good friends and family will be there, and there will be only good things, joy and peace and fun and feasts! It will be like the end of school – forever!

The apostle Paul writes: ***‘So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.’*** (II Corinthians 4:18).

And Jesus tells us, ***‘In my Father’s house are many rooms. I am going to prepare a place for you... I will come again and take you to myself, so that you can be where I am.’*** (John 14:2-3)

#9

'... he grants sleep to those he loves.' Psalm 127:2

You know, at the end of a long day (and every day is a long day!), we can have a lot on our minds. We might go to bed with some stressful situations on our mind, like a fight with a friend, or a class in school that we are finding really hard; or, we might even sometimes get to bed feeling burdened for our friends that do not know Jesus. Have you ever experienced this? Ever found yourself getting to 'sleep time', but not having peace in your heart?

You know, Jesus cared more about people than we do. He cared about their lives and hardships, and he also cared about their souls and salvation. There was one time when Jesus was feeling so deeply about people, that the bible says he was *'moved with compassion'*, and felt the people were *'helpless and harassed, like sheep without a shepherd.'* (Matthew 9:36). That is a lot of 'burden' that Jesus was feeling! Now, here is where we can learn something really precious. Jesus at this moment did not get upset, or worried, or rush to work with the people. Instead, Jesus turned to his disciples and said, **'Pray to the Lord... that he will send out workers.'** The first thing Jesus did, was pray, and just gave his burdens to God.

Jesus was always burdened for the lost, but he always was in *'perfect peace'*. How? Well, we are told that Jesus only did what he saw his Father doing (John 5:19). In other words, Jesus did not just rush

around to every single person trying to help them; instead, Jesus kept his eyes on the Father, and walked peacefully with him. If he felt the Father lead him to do this or that, or say this or that, he would do it. But if he did not sense from the Father a 'lead' to say or do something, he would not.

Jesus offers us this same guidance and peace. Jesus told us that his spirit is with us (John 14:26), and his spirit will guide us. So tonight, pray to Jesus and give him all that burdens you. Cast your cares on him (1 Peter 5:7). He will take your burdens, and he will get to work for you. You can lie down and sleep in peace! (Psalm 4:8)

'He is kept in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on the Lord.' Isaiah 26:3

#10

'The weapons we fight with... have divine power to demolish strongholds...'

II Corinthians 10:4

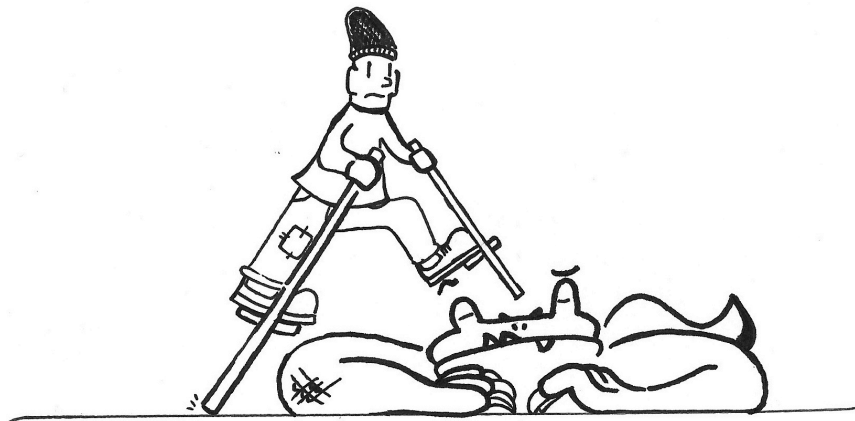
Sometimes in this life as Christians, we are going to meet people who do not like our faith. They can sometimes be cold towards us, or feel 'hard'. Jesus told us this would happen.

I have 2 thoughts I want to share with you about this.

First, do not let this 'coldness' – or cold person - get you down, or steal your joy. Jesus told us that as Christians we are in a 'spiritual war'. We are going to experience in our journey 'people of peace' (maybe these people are not Christians, but they are kind towards Christians), and we are going to experience the enemy and his forces. So do not be surprised, and do not be discouraged. But do remember: the real enemy is not the person! The person who is 'cold' or 'hard' is actually a victim of the real enemy, the devil.

Secondly, pray for this person! Ask God to shine his warm light on their 'coldness', and soften their heart towards Jesus. Do you see the verse above? (II Corinthians 10:4) It tells us that in Jesus we actually have power to break down 'strongholds' – for example, a 'hard wall' around someone's heart. So continue to be kind and loving towards this person, and pray Jesus will break down walls of resistance!

'And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.' Ephesians 6:18



#11 'It's not what you know...'

Maybe you know this saying, '*It's not what you know, it's who you know!*' Ever hear that? What this really means is 'people' (relationships) are going to make the most important things happen in your life. It is not how intelligent you are ('*what you know*'), but what friends you have!

You know, in some ways this is the truth about God as well. There is a lot of stuff we can learn in the bible, and about the bible, and about Christians and about religions, etc. etc. But at the end of the day it comes down to this: ***Do we know Jesus?*** It will not really matter what we know about Jesus, if we do not *know* Jesus. Jesus is not the 'written word' (or a book full of interesting facts and figures); Jesus is the '*living word*' (John 1:14). To know Jesus personally is the reason all the facts and figures exist!

One very interesting moment in the bible is when some important and intelligent religious leaders were arguing with Jesus about God and truth. Jesus told them that they knew the bible very well, but that it did not really matter because they did not believe in him. (John 5:39-40)

It is important you know this. No matter how much you study the bible or get involved in church or do good things... Jesus wants you to simply know him. God became man – Jesus – and lived and died a very hard life, so that he could be with you, and in you! (Colossians 1:27) Jesus is '*God with us*' (Isaiah 7:14), and when you simply 'know him', and be a

friend to him, you are truly doing everything that
Jesus wants. (John 6:40; 15:15)

#12

You are special!

Listen, your mom and dad think you're special! You know that, right? Hey, even if you have a tough relationship with your mom or dad, or they are not around or don't say you are special... you are! Here's why...

In Hebrews 3:4 it tells us that every house is built by someone, but **God is the builder of all things**. So when you look at things that man has made – like a building or a car or a donut! – it is 'true' and right to give credit to man, but it is *truer* to give ultimate credit to God. God is the builder of all the building materials that we use, and he is the one that gives us the ability to think things up, to invent and create things (Deuteronomy 8:18)

The same is true about people. Your mother and father 'made' you. But did they, really? Let's be honest, no human can make a human. In fact, no human can even make one part of a human (like one single hair!). So who really made you? Who is your true Father? It is Christ! (John 1:3).

Now here is the really special news about special you: God made each person in his 'own image' (Genesis 1:27). God does not need to make 'copies' of things, because he is 'infinite'. So although we are the 'same', in that we are all 'people', God has made each one of us different, special and unique. There is only one of you! It doesn't stop here, though...

You have a special and personal relationship with

your Father God. Ok, God does speak to us all in a 'crowd', as well – this is why we have one bible for all of us. But each of us is a special 'child' to God, and he will always give you a personal and private audience with him. If you need to talk alone to God – and you will, a lot – God is right there privately with you. This is also true in your Christian family. Even in this family of Christians, God has a special, personal relationship with you. So although you are one of the Christian crowd, one of the 'human race' crowd, one of your school and community crowd – you are also, always, 'alone' with God in a special, personal, private relationship.

'... I will give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.' Revelation 2:17

*(Here are a few other verses that you might enjoy looking up: **John 21:22** (God has a different path/destiny for each person); **John 5:1-9** (Jesus will do special things for just you, sometimes, and that's OK!); **Psalms 139:1-18** (You are special!); **Luke 19:11-27** (God gives each person special gifts and wants us to invest them. Pray and ask God to show you the 'talent' he has given you, and how you can invest it!))*

#13

'Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.' II Corinthians 7:10

Do you ever feel bad about something? Like, something you did or said to someone? I really do not like when my feelings are hurt. But one thing I hate more than getting my feelings hurt, is hurting someone else's feelings! That makes me feel terrible!

You know, in this life it can be hard to *'right wrongs'*. For example, if you did do something you regret doing, and you say sorry to someone, well, they still might not forgive you! *(Most of the time in my experience, if I apologize, people are quick to forgive)* But here is the real deal about Jesus and his forgiveness: When you say sorry to God for something you feel bad about doing, Jesus forgives you, and he leaves you with ***'no regret'***. That is a powerful type of forgiveness! Jesus *really* forgives you, and then sets you free so that you don't have to feel bad about it any more!

So even if a friend is not so quick to forgive you, or maybe you don't have a chance to say sorry, well, Jesus is the one that has the right to completely forgive you, and leave you with ***'no regret'*** (like the verse above says).

Here is another verse to read carefully, and spend a minute thinking about:

'As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our sins from us.'

Psalm 103:12

So believe God today, and shake off that 'guilty feeling'! Jesus wants you to walk free, and not carry sadness or 'regret' in your heart!

#14

'Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person...' Matthew 10:11

The bible tells us that as Christians we are *'foreigners'* here in this world. (Philippians 3:20) When you are a *'foreigner'* somewhere, that means that you are visiting, or passing through. Your home is in another place, another country. So as a Christian, your true home is in heaven, and here in this world you are just passing through. Does this make sense? Well, I suppose it can only *really* make sense by faith!

In the verse above, Jesus is telling the disciples who were going out on a mission, that they needed to search for *'some worthy person.'*

You know, as a Christian *'on mission'* in school, or other places in this world, you should also search for *'some worthy person'*. A *'worthy person'*, according to Jesus, is someone who is supportive of your faith. Now, Jesus did not say that this *'worthy person'* had to have the exact same faith as you; but Jesus did say that one sign of this *'worthy person'* is that they would be kind to you, show you hospitality and even support the fact that you do believe in Jesus, and you do talk to others about Jesus.

Who of your friends do you consider a *'worthy person'*? Does this *'worthy person'* know Jesus yet? If they do not, maybe you can start praying for them regularly, that they would come to know Jesus, too.

Maybe take a minute now to thank Jesus for this friend, and to pray and ask God that this friend will come to know Jesus.

Here's a great verse to learn by heart:

'... our citizenship is in heaven...' Philippians 3:20

#15

'... a man in Christ... was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell.' II Corinthians 12:2,4

In this scripture above, Paul is talking about himself. He describes an experience of seeing visions of heaven. What he actually saw and heard he cannot even express in words.

You know, these kinds of visions of heaven and of God, are really important to *'keep us going'* – especially through tough times. Have you ever had a tough time, where you are maybe feeling sad and low, and then you remember a happy and safe place or a friend, and you feel you can go on? God loves to give us 'vision' of truth and 'heaven', so that we can keep going in this challenging life. Sometimes God encourages us by helping us see friends, family and Christian support we have here and now; and sometimes God encourages us by giving us a vision of heaven to come.

This kind of 'vision' is also what helped Jesus keep going in his tough time. We are told in the book of Hebrews, that it was Jesus' vision of the *'joy before him'* (heaven and happiness) that helped him even go through crucifixion. (Hebrews 12:2)

I often get up while it is still dark outside, and spend time talking to the Lord. I do read my bible sometimes during this time, but mostly I just sit in the dark and pray to Jesus. When I close my eyes and just sit

quietly in the presence of the Lord, he takes me on journeys in my spirit and mind. I feel him talking to me – sometimes in words that he brings to my mind, and other times in just ‘visions’ or pictures of peace and hope. These revelations are so important to me, just to keep me trucking on! I have been doing this for 20 years now, and will probably be doing it until I see Jesus face to face!

‘The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn – ever-brighter until the full light of day!’

Proverbs 4:18



#16

Closer Friend

Some friends are closer than other friends, right? This is just natural, and actually a good thing. Sometimes it can go a little wrong, like when people use 'best friends' as a way to cut other people out. But having a special friend, or even 'best friend', is not always a bad thing! God has made everyone very unique, very special, and sometimes certain people just 'click' well, or 'gel' well together. This is OK!

Now, here's the really good news about 'special friends'. You can become a closer friend to Jesus, if you want to! Did you know that? You can actually get closer to Jesus, in the same way you get closer to any friend – spend a little more time with him (prayer), read about him in the bible a little more closely, and trust him a little more. This is how we draw near to Jesus. And in the bible we are told, that if we draw near to him, he will draw near to us. (James 4:8)

And here is a pretty tough thing to do, but it really brings us closer to the Lord: **Wait on the Lord!** A friend once told me, *'The hardest thing in our relationship with God, is waiting on God!'* I agree with this! I like to get things right away, and I find it hard to wait – to wait for stuff, to wait for answers, to wait for occasions... But in the bible we see that the Lord really does honor people who just wait a little longer for him. When you have some time, read this story about a lady who waited a little longer for the Lord, and was given a very special experience:
John 20:1-18

'They that wait on the Lord will renew their strength. They will rise up with wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not be faint.' Isaiah 40:31

#17

'Christ Jesus... is at the right hand of God, and is also interceding for us.' Romans 8:34

'*Interceding*' means 'praying'. So this verse tells us that Jesus is praying for us. Earlier in this same chapter we are told that the Spirit is also praying for us.

When I was a little kid, one thing I loved when I was in bed at night, was to hear my mom and dad busy at work in some other room; for example, if they were talking and laughing and working on some food preparation in the kitchen, or getting something ready for the next day... I loved to see glimpses of the light under the door, and shadows passing back and forth...

We are told in scripture that God watches over us and does not sleep (Psalm 121:4), and that he actually loves to give us sleep (Psalm 127:2).

So today we are seeing that God really flanks us on all sides. Jesus prays for us, and so does the Spirit of God. God himself watches over us – lets us sleep while he continues to work on our behalf. This is a lot of 'ongoing' support – 24/7!

Thank God today, in the name of Jesus, that he watches over you while you sleep, and prays for you even when you are not praying.

'In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.' Romans 8:26-27

#18

JOY!

You know, life is pretty hard! And sometimes even as Christians we can lose our joy. Have you ever met someone – even a Christian – that you feel has lost their joy?

There are a lot of reasons for this. It could be that the tough stuff in life has just become too much! Maybe there has been a death of a friend or family member, or a job has been lost, or there has been a broken marriage or relationship that has caused sadness. The list can go on and on, because we live in a world full of sin. *BUT...*

Jesus does want us to experience joy and happiness! He really does! God knows we live in a hard life right now, but he still does offer us peace and joy here and now! ***So how do we get that joy? And how do we keep that joy?*** Well, it is a journey, really, of walking with Jesus. When he is close, joy is close. So we must *'keep in step with the Spirit.'* (Galatians 5:25). But here are 2 other tips!

1. **Be thankful in all circumstances!**

(I Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Sometimes when I am in a hard situation, and my mind wants to worry, I try to stop and pray. I try to thank God for 10 things – out loud! I might start by saying, *'Thank you, God, that you are a friend to me, and always with me!'* Then I might say, *'Thank you, Jesus, for the good things you have provided for me – food and clothes, warmth and shelter!'* And I go on... This is hard

to do when I have worries, but I find it really breaks up my worry, and keeps joy alive in my soul.

2. **Enjoy the things you enjoy!**

(James 1:17; I Timothy 4:5)

This sounds obvious, right? But actually, sometimes we find it hard to really enjoy something we want to enjoy! We might start feeling bad for other people who can't enjoy it, or might start worrying about something else... God wants us to be like little children, and really enjoy good and fun things that he gives us! Thank God for the fun thing (like, '*Thank you, God, for this ice-cream!*'), and then delight yourself in it!

Heaven has never really been a problem for people. We might not understand it very well, but everyone is quite happy to go there, and believe others go there. Generally. But as a Christian we sometimes get hard questions about hell. Someone might exclaim, '*Are you saying that I am going to hell if I don't believe in Jesus?!*' Let me share some things I've learned over the years...

Jesus does talk about hell, and he does warn people about hell. This is true, and we must all take careful note of Jesus' warnings. (Luke 12:4-5, 8-9). But Jesus does not give *us* a lot of information about hell, and he did not 'preach' about hell. What Jesus preached about was the '**good news**' (Luke 18:4). So here is what I say to people if I am asked about hell, and about someone being sent to hell...

1. ***I Don't Know Enough:*** I say that Jesus does not give us a lot of information about hell in the bible, so I have to be careful what I say – and even think - about hell (*In other words, I don't know much!*)
2. ***I Can't Judge:*** I say that Jesus tells me that I am *not* supposed to be the judge of others, and must leave this to only God (Matthew 7:1-2).
3. ***I Focus On Heaven:*** I say that Jesus *did* say that to be 100% certain about going to heaven, we must believe in him, and give our lives to him. (John 5:24; Mark 16:16)

So in summary, I say ***I don't know much about hell,***

I can't judge who goes there, and I focus on what Jesus says we need to do to be sure of going to heaven.

Some people will still want to argue about hell and God's judgment. I simply repeat in these situations that I don't know enough, and cannot make judgment calls. ***I say I am happy to talk about what Jesus says about going to heaven, but I cannot focus on the 'hell' issue.*** Does this make sense? It keeps me out of a lot of arguments!

Spend a few minutes today going over these points, and ask the Lord to give you wisdom when talking to people.

#20

Destiny!

My 3-year old once looked up at me and said, ‘Dad, do you know what you should be when you grow up?’ (Yes, when I grow up!) I said, ‘What, Anna?’ She said, ‘A train driver!’ That actually sounded like quite a good idea, but unfortunately it is not that easy for me at this point!

In this life we have work to do, in order to survive. That’s just the way it is, and it is not easy. In fact, God said that it would be hard for us, because we sinned against him (Genesis 3:17). Even Jesus had a job as a carpenter, and the apostle Paul had a job as a tent-maker. Jobs are just part of life!

But as Christians we are also given a special set of ‘gifts’ – or talents – by God, which are for the work of building God’s Kingdom. We build our house here on earth by working our earthly job, and we build the Kingdom of God by working our spiritual job!

So what are the types of special talents, or ‘gifts’, that God has given us to help build the church, and support Christians? Well, there are lots of them! The bible names a few of them for us, including the gifts of mercy, faith, preaching, teaching, evangelism (or telling people about Jesus), and others. ***But more specifically, what are the special, spiritual ‘gifts’ that God has given you?***

Here is what I recommend: Look up and read the scriptures I reference below (4 chapters, and one other important verse – you may need to break up

this assignment over a couple days!). Also spend some time today in prayer just asking God to lead you – in his time – to discover your special, spiritual gifts. Then, maybe, when you have a chance, talk to a parent or a trusted person in your church, and ask them how you might grow to understand your spiritual gifts.

Remember this key point, however: The most important thing about your life in Jesus, is not to know or discover exactly what your special, spiritual gifts are. To know your spiritual gifts, does not make you more special to God, nor does it make you a better Christian! The gifts are God's, and he will make known to you what he needs you to know, in his time, and according to his Spirit. So do not worry about this! Only pray, seek, listen and keep on walking in your friendship with Jesus!

Passages to read and consider:

Romans 12

I Corinthians 12-14

I Peter 4:10

Conclusion:

I hope you enjoyed this devotional! I hope you have discovered some new treasures in your relationship with Jesus!

There are some more resources on my website, if you want to visit sometime:

www.1peter1three.weebly.com/

Keep your eyes on the prize (Jesus), and the Lord bless you as you walk with him every day!

'In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.' Colossians 2:3