

Grow Closer to Christ in 30 Days

Daily Challenges Sure to Increase Your Faith

Dr. Michael L. Williams



Christianity Every Day

Grow Closer to Christ in 30 Days

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Introduction

Many of us today are so busy that it seems like just when we get to the end of a week, we must start all over again. Meanwhile, the things that we really want to do keep getting put off with the hope that someday we can get the time to do them. Our stress levels are up and some weeks we feel that if one more thing gets added to our week, we will just lose it. At some point, each of us wonder if there is a better way. The daily grind soon brings an altered state of mind that leaves us numb. Our patience is short, our relationships are strained, and don't even get started on finding the time to go to church. Before long, we start to wonder, is it just me? Does everyone feel so out of touch? Am I the only one who is struggling Spiritually, emotionally, and financially? Sadly, we are so caught up in our experience, we don't even have time to find out if anyone else is having the same problem.

As a Christian, you are not immune to stress and burnout. You go through the same struggles as everyone else. However, as a Christian, you have something else that weighs upon your mind: the conviction of the Holy Spirit. This conviction can do two things, overwhelm you and discourage you or it can motivate you by inspiring you. Most people would agree, they would rather be motivated and inspired. You probably feel the same way but are at a loss about what you should do about it. Jesus provides the answer in Matthew 11:28-30 as follows:

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

These three verses are the outline of what you can do. First, you must draw close to Jesus right now, where you are. Notice He did not say get your life in order, then we can talk. Likewise, He did not say to come to me when you have the time. No, He wants you to come now. He wants you to come in the moment when you are working your hardest and feel like you can never catch a break. When you need Him the most, He wants to give you rest.

Second, you must take His yoke upon you so that you can learn from Him. These verses show us an example of how similar animals are put together for work. There is a simple process used so that they can learn and grow to work together. Less experienced animals are put together with a more experienced one that is the leader. The more experienced one sets the pace, effort, and direction while the less experienced one learns to follow their lead. Before long, the less experienced one knows what to expect and before long, is able to work together as a team to accomplish amazing things.

Jesus wants to teach you step by step how to work together as a team. He does not do this by ruling over you and intimidating you like a drill sergeant. He gently and humbly meets you where you are to help you take your first steps in a new direction. When you are unsure which way to go, He is there to show you the way. When you do not have the strength, He is there to provide the power to make progress. All along the way, He works to motivate you with encouragement as He teaches you how to exercise your faith so that you grow stronger. As this happens, you will grow closer to Christ in ways that you have never experienced before.

Over the next 30 days, you will be challenged to take the yoke of Jesus upon you so that you can learn from Him and find rest for your soul. However, this study is not like most studies. It was designed using the Lord's lesson plan that He provides in Acts 2 of His Word, the Bible. This plan has five main areas of

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focus, each lasting six days. Each area of focus also has a keyword that is the theme for the six-day period as follows:

Days 1-6: The keyword is connecting (Acts 2:14-40). The disciples were in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost and had just received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The event attracted much attention from others who thought they were drunk. However, Peter stood up and preached that what they observed was a fulfillment of prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah. He explained how Jesus was the Messiah and that by placing their faith in Him they would receive forgiveness of their sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. This created a connection that served as a starting point to grow closer to Christ.

Days 7-12: The keyword is committing (Acts 2:41). After preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, many believed and wanted to know what they should do. Peter challenged them to be baptized to demonstrate their commitment to identifying with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and their desire to take steps in a new direction along with other believers. These first steps of commitment put them in company with others and encouraged each other to grow closer to Christ.

Days 13-18: The keyword is continuing (Acts 2:42-43). The believers continued their training in the Word and doctrine. Likewise, they participated with other believers in activities, worship, and prayer. This resulted in many miraculous events that demonstrated the power of God and their faith increased. As they continued together, they developed deep relationships with the Lord and each other that enabled them to grow even closer to Christ.

Days 19-24: The keyword is contributing (Acts 2:44-45). As the believers continued growing in their faith, they developed a deep love and respect for God and one another. They served one another and their contribution to the ministry resulted in a deep desire to sacrificially serve and give beyond their means and without consideration of their own needs. As they sacrificially gave, they were inspired to have a complete change of mind about their purpose and mission as they helped others to grow closer to Christ.

Days 25-30: The keyword is communicating (Acts 2:46-47). The believers were now fully mature in their faith, which led them to see each day as an opportunity to take the life-changing message of Jesus Christ and communicate it to others outside the church in their communities and beyond. Their lives became a living testimony of the Holy Spirit that lived within them and they served as witnesses of the true light that lights the lives of all men and draws them closer to Christ.

Hopefully, you have a pretty good idea of how this study will help you to grow closer to Christ in 30 days. Take time to pray each day that God will help you understand what to do and give you the strength to do it. Read each day's lesson fully and look up all the references provided. Do not mix up the days or take short cuts. Remember, the lessons are designed to help you grow closer to Christ one step at a time. May God bless you as you begin your journey.

Section 1 - Connecting

“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.” Colossians 2:6-7

Every day we make connections in our life. We connect with our family, we connect with our friends, and we connect with others that we meet. We make all kinds of connections. As we seek to draw closer to Christ, we need to establish or reestablish connections that will give us a starting point from which we can move forward.

I remember a time when I was a small boy that my mother bought me a set of pajamas that looked like a baseball uniform. I liked the pajamas so much that I wanted to wear them everywhere. This was because I often saw older boys wearing their baseball uniforms at the local ice cream stand after they had won a game. Of course, my mom gently informed me that I could not wear them outside of the house because they were pajamas. Although I was disappointed, wearing those pajamas established a strong connection for me to baseball that was the starting point to me playing the sport for many years.

In Acts 2:1-21, the disciples were in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Just days earlier, while talking with Jesus after the resurrection, they anticipated that He would reestablish the kingdom and dispense with their Roman oppressors just like God had dispensed with the Egyptian oppressors in the past. However, this was not to be. They had no idea it would be a long time before the reestablishment of a literal kingdom on earth.

Pentecost was one of the holy days, or feasts, in the year when all Jewish men were required to go to Jerusalem. It was first established when Moses received the law on Mt. Sinai after the Israelites escaped from Egypt. Pentecost, also called the Feast of Weeks, was 50 days or seven weeks after the Israelites arrived on the opposite shore of the Red Sea while escaping from Egypt. That day of their arrival marked the establishment of the Feast of Firstfruits, the day the Israelites were the "Firstfruits" out of Egypt. It was celebrated from that day as the day that the first fruits of the year's spring harvest were brought to the Temple in Jerusalem for a thanksgiving offering to the Lord. However, it pointed toward something even more amazing than what had just happened. It pointed toward something that was going to happen.

As Christians, we commonly refer to the Feast of Firstfruits as Resurrection Sunday, or Easter, when believers celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is why the Bible refers to Jesus as the Firstfruits from the dead because He had victory over bondage and death just like the Israelites had victory over bondage and death by the miraculous work of God. Likewise, as Moses was given the law on Mt. Sinai 50 days after the Feast of Firstfruits, the disciples were given the Holy Spirit 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus on the Feast of Firstfruits.

The law established a new start for the Israelites where they could connect with God through the priesthood at the tabernacle and later the temple. In the same way, God gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit to make a new connection with Him and empower us to walk in newness of life through our High Priest, Jesus Christ. With this in mind, we will spend the next 6 days establishing connections for a new beginning towards drawing closer to Christ. May God bless you as you take these first steps toward drawing closer to Christ.

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Day One -Connecting with Christ

One of our primary outreaches at our church is providing Christ-centered counseling to those with all sorts of life issues. During the first meeting I ask questions to learn about those seeking counsel along with the circumstances and impact of their situation on their life. Once I have a clear understanding of the facts, I investigate where they are spiritually in relation to Christ.

Since we provide counseling using the Bible, the majority of the people that come for counseling tell me that they are Christians. However, the word Christian has different meanings depending on who you talk to. For this reason, I ask them detailed questions about their belief and experience when it comes to salvation. I find that over 85% of the people who call themselves a Christian cannot describe what the Bible teaches about salvation, yet they believe they will go to Heaven when they die. Although we cannot really know if another person is saved, you would expect that if they are saved, they should be able to clearly explain how to be saved.

What is the first step to growing closer to Christ?

Therefore, the first step to growing closer to Christ is to connect with Christ. Ask yourself this question, "Do I really know Jesus Christ?" Think about it for a minute. Do you really know who He is? Do you really know why He had to die on the cross? Do you really know what His death on the cross means to you? Now you might say, "Of course I know these things!" Maybe you do know Jesus Christ. Or maybe you did at one time. However, it is important to take the time to make sure.

Think about it for a moment. If a man told you he was married, you would expect that he should be able to answer a few basic questions about his wife. However, what would you think if you asked him where he met his wife and he said he didn't know? What if you asked him where she was from, and he said he didn't know? Or maybe you asked him when they got married and he said he didn't know? By now, you would be wondering how this man can be married and not know anything about his wife!

It is the same way with knowing Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that as believers, we are the church, and the church is the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25-32). It also tells us that He is the bridegroom or husband of the church. Therefore, if we cannot answer basic questions about having a relationship with Jesus Christ, wouldn't it make sense that we should make sure we really do have a relationship with Him? If we are not 100% sure that we do, then before we can grow closer to Christ, we must take a moment to get to know him or reaffirm that we do have a relationship with Him.

Consider this

The Bible says that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). God loved us so much that He gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to be born as a baby, grow up to be a man, and live a life with the same struggles that we have, yet without ever sinning by breaking any of the commandments.

The Bible tells us in Romans 6:23 that the wages of sin is death. Since Jesus never sinned, He did not have to pay the wages of sin. However, because He loved us, He willingly allowed Himself to be wrongfully crucified on the cross to pay for our sins. Therefore, whosoever believeth in Him, meaning if we believe that He died on the cross to pay for our sins, then we should not perish, but have everlasting life.

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The Bible says in 1 John 5:13, “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that you have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.” What did John write? He wrote in 1 John 5:1 that “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. He also wrote in verse four, “...for whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us “...by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.”

Ask yourself, “Have I broken any of the commandments?” If so, then your wages of sin is death. Therefore, you need to trust that a perfect sinless Savior paid for your sins. There is no other way that you can have eternal life, you must place all of your faith and confidence in Jesus Christ for the payment of your sins. Your works, no matter how good they are, are not perfect and you are dead in your sins and destined for Hell when you die.

The good news is if you have trusted Christ as your Savior, then you can be assured that when you take your last breath on this earth you will be absent from your body and present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). If this is the first time that you’ve heard this good news, also called the gospel, then you’ll remember this day for eternity as the day that you heard the truth and trusted Christ as your Savior and receive the gift of everlasting life. Or the day that you rejected the truth and suffered the eternal consequences.

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves connecting with Christ. If you’ve never trusted Christ as your Savior or if maybe you have trusted Christ as your Savior, take a moment right now to think about what Christ did for you by dying on the cross for your sins. Do you believe in your heart of hearts that He died for your sins? If so, then take a moment to affirm or reaffirm your faith in Christ.

Although God already knows what is in your heart as far as your faith in what Christ did for you on the cross, it is good to confess what is in your heart to God. You don’t have to come up with some fancy prayer or go anywhere special. You can thank God for the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ right where you are by praying to Him as if He is standing right in front of you.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you’ve taken the first step toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Day Two -Connecting with the Holy Spirit

A lot of people think that once they become a Christian, life will get easier, and they will always be happy. Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way. We will still have the same challenges and issues. However, we now have the power to make positive change in our lives. This is because the moment that we trusted Christ as our Savior, we received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The question then becomes, how do we use the power of the Holy Spirit to make the positive change?

What is the second step to growing closer to Christ?

The second step to growing closer to Christ is to connect with the Holy Spirit. Remember, on day one we took a moment to get to know Christ or reaffirm that we had a relationship with Him. Likewise, we must take a moment to get to know or reacquaint ourselves with the Holy Spirit. This will enable us to learn and grow in our relationship with Christ.

What can we learn about the Holy Spirit?

The Bible tells us "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word [Son], and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one" (1 John 5:7, KJV, emphasis added). This verse is the primary proof text for the doctrine of the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity comes from the Biblical teaching that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one and the same. This does not mean that there are three gods. Instead, three persons that are a manifestation of one God.

Some have used the comparison of the three forms of water to the doctrine of the Trinity. Water can be in the solid form as ice. It can be in the liquid form as water. And it can be in the gas form as steam. Three different consistencies, but all are the same water. Others have used the comparison of the three parts of an egg to the doctrine of the Trinity. An egg has a shell, yolk, and an egg white. Three different parts, but all the same egg.

Some people believe that the Holy Spirit is a force like something they would see in a science fiction movie. However, Jesus told us that the Holy Spirit is a person by referring to Him as "he" or "him." (John 14:16-17; John 15:26; John 16:7-14). Since the Holy Spirit is a person, He has the same attributes of a person. Likewise, since the Holy Spirit is one with the Father and the Son, He has the same personality, character, and attributes as the Father and the Son. Finally, since the Father and the Son are manifestations of one God, the Holy Spirit is the same God (Acts 5:3-4).

Consider this

You may wonder, how does the Holy Spirit help us with drawing closer to Christ? First, the Bible teaches us that the moment we trusted Christ as our Savior, we were given the Holy Spirit as a non-refundable guarantee on our inheritance in Heaven (Ephesians 1:9-14; 2 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Peter 1:3-5). Likewise, the Holy Spirit seals us until the day of redemption, which is the day we take our last breath on this earth and find ourselves in the presence of God in Heaven (2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 4:30; 2 Timothy 2:19). Finally, the Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit enables us to understand the Bible, discern God's truth, and know the deep things of God (1 Corinthians 2:9-16). Likewise, people who are not saved, called the natural man by the Bible, do not have the Holy Spirit to give them this ability.

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Since we received the Holy Spirit the moment we trusted Christ as our Savior, we possess the power and wisdom to make Jesus the Lord of our life (Micah 3:8; 2 Timothy 1:7; 2 Corinthians 3:18). Without the Holy Spirit we do not have that power (1 Corinthians 12:3). Therefore, since we put our full faith and trust in Jesus Christ to save us, we must put our full faith and trust in the Holy Spirit to change us and help us to draw closer to Christ (James 1:3-8).

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves connecting with the Holy Spirit. Take a few minutes to read 1 Corinthians 2:9-16. Think about what it says about the Holy Spirit and how He has given you the ability to understand the Bible, discern God's truth from error, and know the deep things of God. Think about where you are right now when it comes to these three areas. When you have thought about it, take out a piece of paper and something to write with. Then write down your heart-felt opinion about where you are right now when it comes to understanding the Bible, discerning God's truth from error, and knowing the deep things of God.

When you are done writing what is from your heart, read James 1:5-8. Think or meditate about what these verses are telling you. Reread them over again if you must but really focus on what these verses teach. When you are done, write on your paper your commitment to trust God with your learning and His promise to give you the wisdom to focus your thinking so that you think the way Jesus thinks. Then, sign and date your paper. When you are finished, take your paper, and put it somewhere private where you can get to it at a later date.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you've taken two steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Day Three - Connecting with the Bible

It never ceases to amaze me when people go out of their way to belittle Christians by accusing us of believing in a magic book of fairy tales. Some may not go that far, but they are quick to point out that the Bible is full of errors and contradictions. However, when I have asked them to explain the errors and contradictions, they most often will change the subject. In some cases, if they are brave enough to discuss it, I quickly find out what they say that the Bible teaches isn't even close. This is because they do not have a relationship with Christ, which leaves them without the ability to understand what the Bible teaches.

What is the third step to growing closer to Christ?

The third step to growing closer to Christ is to connect with the Bible. Remember, on day two we learned that the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to understand the Bible, discern God's truth, and know the deep things of God (1 Corinthians 2:9-16)? Likewise, on day two you made a commitment to trust God with your learning and to give you the wisdom to focus your thinking so that you think the way Jesus thinks (James 1:5-8). To do this you must take the time to get to know or reacquaint yourself with the Bible. This will enable you to learn and grow in your relationship with Christ.

Not long after my wife Pamela Rose and I were married, we found ourselves beginning to have problems in our marriage. We found that as many couples will testify, whatever issues you bring into a marriage will often be a source of conflict that can destroy your marriage. Therefore, we decided that maybe we should try going to church because it seemed like people who went to church had good marriages and close families.

We asked our friends and relatives about different churches, but we found that many of the churches had different beliefs that often contradicted each other. Not knowing what to do, we figured that if all these churches claim that they follow the Bible, maybe we should write down our questions and start reading the Bible to find the answers. So, we started doing just that. What we learned changed our lives.

You see, up until this point, we both believed we were pretty good people. We even had attended church earlier in our lives. So, when it came to where we thought we would go when we died, we believed we were good enough to go to Heaven. What we read in the Bible hit us like a ton of bricks.

Not only did we find out that we were not good people, but we also found out that we were headed straight for Hell! This is because we learned that our good works meant nothing when it came to salvation. I will never forget the moment we realized this and looked at each other and said, "Is everyone wrong?" According to the Bible, the answer was a loud and clear, "Yes!"

Praise God! When we read the Word of truth we believed it. So, you can imagine that ever since then we have a strong love for the Word of God that gave us the wisdom of salvation (2 Timothy 3:14-17). However, in our study, we also started learning other things that the Bible taught about some of the issues we were struggling with. This led us to think that if God saved us by the truth of His Word, maybe the Bible has answers to dealing with the issues causing our struggles.

How does the Bible help you grow closer to Christ?

Hopefully by now, you realize that to grow closer to Christ you must be willing to invest the time to learn about Him. This means you must discipline yourself to study what the Bible says about Him. When you do

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this, you will begin to learn who Jesus was, what He taught, and how He handled life situations. Practically speaking, you'll become a student of Jesus.

The Bible says that when you become a student of someone you are their disciple. So, a student of Jesus would be a disciple of Jesus. This explains why the Bible refers to many people as disciples of Jesus. However, the Bible also teaches that Moses had disciples, John the Baptist had disciples, the Pharisees had disciples, and even Satan has disciples (Matthew 9:14; Matthew 11:1-3; Matthew 27:57; John 9:24-33; Acts 19:1-5; Acts 20:27-31).

What is most important to understand is that the more you study under the teaching of someone, the more your thinking is molded to their way of thinking, good, or bad. The more you're thinking is molded to their way of thinking, the more you become like them. Therefore, with time, a disciple becomes more than just a student. They become an imitator and a follower of their teacher.

Consider this

Jesus said that there will come a time when people realize who He really is and that everything that He did was based on what God the Father had taught Him. He said that the Father was with Him and that He always did what pleased the Father. As He spoke these words, many people immediately believed that He was the Messiah. Knowing this, Jesus told those that believed who He was that if they continued in His Word, then they are most certainly His disciples. He added that as His disciples, they would know the truth and the truth would make them free (John 8:28-32).

Jesus communicated a very important principle when He said this. That when we become His disciple, He will make positive change in us that will set us free from all the things that burden us (1 Peter 5:6-7). However, change does not happen overnight and without us doing our part. We must be willing to continue in His Word, diligently seeking to learn from Him by hiding His Words, the Bible, in our heart. When we do this, we please God and He draws us closer to Him (Psalms 119:9-16; Psalms 119:97-105; Hebrews 11:6). This results in unspeakable joy (1 Peter 1:3-9).

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves committing to reading the Bible 10-15 minutes every day. If you have a Bible, that's great. If not, see if you can borrow or buy one. It doesn't have to be an expensive one. It just needs to be one that you can hold in your hands and read.

When you are ready, turn to the book of Proverbs. Proverbs has 31 chapters. Your challenge, starting today, is to read whatever chapter is the same number as the day of the month. For example, if today is the seventh of the month, read Proverbs chapter seven. If the month only has 30 days or less, read Proverbs chapters 30 and 31 on the last of the month. Once you have read the last chapter of Proverbs, start over again in chapter one on the first of the next month.

Repeat this every month and you will find that every day something different will speak to your heart. Every day, a verse will bring to mind something that has happened in your life or challenges your thinking. When this happens, it is the evidence of God the Holy Spirit that is living inside you and seeking to draw you closer (Hebrews 11:1).

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you've taken three steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Day Four - Connecting with prayer

Many people are not familiar with the fact that prayer used to be a common practice in American schools. Courts have since ruled that organized prayer in school is unconstitutional despite the fact that it was established and practiced by those who started the schools and endorsed by America's founders. Sadly, some people have made it their life's mission to make sure that schoolchildren are not led astray because somebody prayed in a classroom. However, as the saying goes, as long as there are tests in schools, there will be prayer, and no one can stop us from praying.

What is the fourth step to growing closer to Christ?

The fourth step to growing closer to Christ is to connect with prayer. Remember on day three we learned about connecting with the Bible? God speaks to us when we read the Bible. If you want to have a relationship with someone, doesn't it make sense that communication should go both ways? To do this, you must consciously establish or reestablish a habit of praying.

When I was younger, I spent a number of years working as an operating room scrub nurse after I finished serving in the Army. For a while, I worked at a Catholic hospital where I became acquainted with some of the priests and sisters (nuns) on staff. One day, I learned that one of the sisters had died and several staff members were sad because of her passing.

When I went to lunch that day, I heard several of the staff members discussing their experiences with the sister who had died. A few of the nurses told of her unusual prayer practice that they witnessed during occasional visits to the hospital chapel. They said they often saw the sister praying in the hospital chapel while kneeling on uncooked grains of rice. At first, I wondered why anyone would kneel on uncooked grains of rice while praying. Then I learned that this particular sister believed that people should suffer when they pray.

Now, I have experienced praying for the suffering but haven't suffered for praying. Unless of course, you count the times when someone decided they wanted to lead a prayer marathon during the blessing of the food at a fellowship dinner. Since then, I've learned many people pray in different ways and in different places for different reasons.

How does prayer help you grow closer to Christ?

Think about this for a moment. What would you think if you spent the entire day with someone you are really close to, and they never said a word? I don't know about you, but I would think that if somebody didn't speak to me all day while they were with me, something must be wrong. Likewise, we learned that the moment that you trust Christ as your Savior, God the Holy Spirit comes to live inside you. Therefore, even when you think that you are alone, God is there. So, doesn't it make sense that if God is with you all the time, shouldn't you talk to Him? If not, you should be willing to consider that something is wrong.

Prayer is the way that we speak to God. Therefore, if you are actively praying and reading the Bible, you have the ability to have a two-way conversation with God. Having a two-way conversation with any one helps us to learn more about each other. However, having a two-way conversation with God will draw you closer to Christ.

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Consider this

Some people are not sure if there is a right or a wrong way to pray. For this reason, they hold varied opinions about when, how, and where people should pray. The first thing to consider about prayer is what the Bible says in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, “Pray without ceasing”. This is the answer to the question of when you should pray. According to this verse, you should always pray (Psalms 55:16-17; Luke 18:1).

Jesus gave us a model prayer in Matthew 6. We will discuss what He said in great depth on another day, but for now, just know that He wants you to pray about everything. This means you should not limit your prayer to asking for a blessing on your food, things that you need, or in times of emergency and uncertainty that bring turmoil.

If you need God’s help with something and do not know what to pray for, you should still pray. This is because the Bible teaches us in Romans 8:26-27 that even when we don’t know what to pray for, the Holy Spirit is already communicating with God the Father and God the Son about what they’re going to do. Remembering this will help you get in the habit of talking to God as soon as possible instead of making decisions without allowing God to provide what you need for the situation. Doing this will also strengthen your belief that God will answer your prayers (Matthew 21:22; Philippians 4:4-9).

The Bible also tells us how you should pray. In addition to praying for yourself, you should pray for others (Matthew 9:35-38; Matthew 19:13-15; James 5:16-20). This includes those who use you or persecute you (Matthew 5:44; Mark 11:25-26). This may be hard to do, but when you do this, it helps you to get in the habit of ministering to others just like Jesus did.

Practically speaking, you do not have to close your eyes or kneel on uncooked grains of rice to make your prayer acceptable to God. In fact, if you happen to be driving, closing your eyes definitely would not be a good thing to do. God just wants you to speak openly and honestly to Him about what’s on your heart without making it a formal practice or canned speech (Luke 18:13-14).

Finally, when it comes to where to pray, it doesn’t matter what any man or any court says. If we are to pray without ceasing then that means you should pray everywhere as long as you do not do it in anger or hesitate to do it out of fear (1 Timothy 2:8).

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves connecting with prayer. Starting today, in addition to praying without ceasing, make it a point to establish or reestablish a habit of praying at two specific times. First, pray before and after your daily reading of the Proverbs that God will clear your mind and help you to understand what you are reading the way that He intended. Second, pray before you eat anything for God’s blessing on the food, God’s provision of the food, and God’s blessing on those who gathered and prepared the food.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you’ve taken four steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Day Five - Connecting with a local church

It is not unusual in America to find houses of worship for just about any religion that you want. As Christians, it is no different in that you can find just about any church that you want. This is not always so in other parts of the world. But this does not change the fact that there are great number of churches available to join. One would think, that with so many churches and so many people who call themselves Christians, why doesn't our culture exhibit the teachings of Christ?

What is the fifth step to growing closer to Christ?

The fifth step to growing closer to Christ is to connect with a local church. On day three, I told you the story of how my wife and I learned the truth of salvation through Jesus Christ by reading the Bible. If you remember, we started reading the Bible because we found that many churches taught different things that contradicted each other.

What I did not tell you is that once we learned the truth of salvation, we started looking near us for a church that taught what we learned. Needless to say, that was a huge task. However, we were determined that if we were going to change our lives for the better, we needed to surround ourselves with people that were like-minded.

How does a local church help you grow closer to Christ?

Remember before when we learned that the more time we spend as a disciple or student under the teaching of someone, with time, we become more like them? This was the reason that you made the commitment to read the Bible every day, to become more like Christ. It is the same way when we commit to connecting with a local church. The more time we spend attending a local church, the more we also become like the other people who attend. Therefore, connecting with the local church and making a commitment to attend requires that we be very selective about where we go.

When the preacher waters down the messages from the podium with cute stories and no word for word teaching from the Bible, it creates a spiritual fog in the pews instead of the clear thinking of Christ. When nearly everyone is hotfooting it to their cars to leave right after the service, it creates a cold kick in the face to visitors looking for a warm welcome. When children are seen as an inconvenience, it creates a place where there is no commitment to helping people grow. By now, I think that you get the picture.

Consider this

The Bible tells us that connecting to a local church is crucial to growing closer to Christ (Hebrews 10:22-25). In this passage, we learn that we should draw near to God with full assurance of our salvation and hold fast to our faith without wavering. In order to do this, we are going to need to be in an environment that provides protection and the right conditions to grow stronger in our faith. This is where a good local church comes in.

This passage also tells us that we must be a participant in the activities of the local church and not just spectators. We will learn more detail about this at a later date, but for now our focus should be to encourage each other to love others and commit to doing good works. The only way we can do this is if we frequently assemble with others to establish the relationships needed to do this.

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Unfortunately, some people think that they don't need to go to church or be around others to have a relationship with Christ. While this is technically true, it is in direct contradiction to the instruction that we should not forsake joining together with others to encourage and strengthen one another, especially as the day of Christ's return draws nearer (Hebrews 10:25). There is a lot of truth in the saying that there is strength in numbers. So, joining together with others on a regular basis is vital to growing closer to Christ.

With this in mind, there are four things that we should look for in a local church. First, does the local church make it its mission to establish the believer in the Word of God? Second, does the local church make it its mission to establish the believer in the fellowship of other believers everywhere? Third, does the local church make it its mission to establish the believer in the fellowship of other believers in the local church? Finally, does the local church make it its mission to establish the believer in the work of the Lord?

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves connecting or reconnecting with a local church. This may prove to be one of your most difficult challenges. Therefore, unless you already have a local church that is committed to establishing the believer in these four areas, this challenge may take a little time to complete. However, this should not stop you from moving forward toward connecting with a local church.

Make a commitment today to faithfully attend at least one weekly service at a local church starting this week. If you need to put it on your calendar, then do so. Do not let anything else prevent you from attending the services unless, of course, you are too sick to do anything. Make sure you take your Bible with you along with something to write with and some paper to take notes during the message.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you've taken five steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Day Six - Connecting with others

Most people have at least one person that they consider to be a close friend. Often, this person may be their spouse or other close relative. Or this person may be someone that they have known for a long time. In any case, a close friend is someone that you can share your heart with. They will celebrate with you when it's time to celebrate and they will mourn with you when it's time to mourn. For this reason, many people believe that it is important to have a close connection with another person. The same applies when it comes to drawing closer to Christ.

What is the sixth step to growing closer to Christ?

The six step to growing closer to Christ is to connect with others. On day five we established a connection to a local church. Although a local church is made up of many people, our focus today is to connect with an individual or individuals with whom we can share our heart. Hopefully, you may already have a person with whom you do this. However, it is important that whomever it is that they would want to draw closer to Christ too so that you can do it together.

How does connecting with others help you grow closer to Christ?

Studies have shown that when people want to start exercising to get into shape or increase their athletic performance, their rates of success and not giving up are much higher when there is someone that exercises with them. In the fitness world, this person would be called your workout partner. A workout partner will encourage you and assist you while you were working out. If you are running, they will encourage you to keep up or make it to the finish line. If you're lifting weights, they will encourage you to push harder and help you during those last repetitions when you are running out of strength. Likewise, when you are a workout partner you will do the same for them.

It is the same way when you have a workout partner for growing closer to Christ, your rate of success and not giving up is much higher. In Christian circles this person is often called an accountability partner. Like a workout partner, they will encourage and assist you while you are working out your faith to draw closer to Christ. If you are running in 5 different directions during the week, they will encourage you to devote time to focus your efforts in the most important direction in your daily race of life (1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Hebrews 12:1-2). If you are overburdened, they will encourage you to look for strength in Christ, through Whom, you can do all things (Philippians 4:13). Likewise, when you are an accountability partner for someone else you would do the same for them.

Consider this

The Bible teaches us about the roles and positions of individuals in the church as they relate to each believer in Ephesians 4. In verses one through six, we are taught as individuals how we should pursue unity, holiness, and love with one another. In verses seven through 11, we are taught that Jesus Christ gave each one of us gifts and positions for the benefit of everyone in the church. In verse 12, we are given three reasons for this: the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry, and for the edifying or strengthening of the body of Christ.

Verse 12 teaches us that this applies to each of us until the day that we stand before Christ in Heaven in a complete state of perfection like Him. In the meantime, according to verses 14 through 19, this interaction

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between individuals will help us mature in our faith, resist false doctrine that leads us astray, identify false teachers, and live a life that models Christ.

All of these help us draw closer to Christ, but this is not something we do alone. In verses 20 through 32, the Bible teaches us that we do this through close interaction with others. Instead of lying to each other, we speak truth using the Bible as our guide. Instead of letting anger divide us, we resolve our differences quickly. Instead of always taking from others, we work so that we have something to give to those in need. Instead of speaking words of discouragement, we speak words that encourage and strengthen others. In doing these things, we avoid grieving the Holy Spirit of God, Who has sealed us until the day of redemption when we stand before the Lord in victory (Ephesians 4:30).

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves connecting with others. Identify an individual or small group of individuals that will agree to be your accountability partner. Having a specific person is often best for sharing what is on your heart. However, if you cannot find an individual, find a small group of individuals that meet often for the specific purpose of studying, sharing, and supporting each other. It is important also that men should seek men for a partner and women should seek women for a partner. An example would be a small group of Christian men or group of Christian women who communicate and meet with each other often for this purpose.

Whomever is chosen, they should also want to grow closer to Christ. They should be available to call whenever there is a need, and they should be able to call you as well. They should be willing to pray with you and seek answers from the Bible for everything. Finally, it is important that they should be willing to keep your discussions private and not engage in gossip about anyone.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you've taken six steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Section 2 - Committing

“Commit thy way unto the LORD; Trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.” Psalm 37:5

When I was a boy in Ohio, my family often took a week in October to go on a fishing trip to Florida. The weather was cooler then and they could get a very good price on a cabin because all the tourists had returned home for the fall. Since I would miss a week of school, my parents made arrangements with my school to give me a list of assignments to complete while we were gone so I would not fall behind.

In those days most people did not fly for family vacations. Instead, they drove, and we were no exception. Our trip from Ohio to Florida usually took about 24 hours in the car as much of our route was through the mountains on two lane roads. So, I made the most of it by doing all of my assignments in the back seat of our car on the way there. That way, I would not have to worry about it when there were unlimited numbers of fish just waiting for me to get there.

Looking back, other than the schoolwork in the back of the car, I do not remember all the planning and work we had to do to make the trips. But what I do remember is my mother keeping a journal of all the stops by mile markers along the way with entries for gas fill ups and good places to eat inexpensively for later reference. And of course, she took lots of pictures to document the trip. In a nutshell, my mom went to great lengths to plan our trips, right down to how much money we needed for daily expenses and of course, a day at one of the local attractions like Marine Land or Kennedy Space Center.

Although you are not on a family fishing trip, you are on a 30-day journey toward drawing closer to Christ. Just like my parents made plans with my school to get my assignments for the week, you must make plans for what you need to accomplish during your journey. But it is not enough just to make a plan. You must be willing to commit yourself to carrying it out. I had to commit myself to completing my assignments in the back seat of the car during the journey or else I could not experience the joy of fishing with my family. Likewise, you must commit yourself to completing your assignments during your journey or else you cannot experience the joy of fishing for men with the Master Fisherman, Jesus Christ.

These next six days you will focus on making commitments. Start each day by praying for God to give you the wisdom and courage to make your commitments and to carry them out. Lord willing, by the end of these six days, you will better understand how making and carrying out commitments will draw you closer to Christ. May God bless you as you begin this next phase of your journey.

Day Seven- Committing your life to Christ

All of us know that to accomplish anything in life you must be committed. This means that you must be willing to make the time and effort needed to accomplish your goal. Unfortunately, as Christians, we often tend to be the least committed to what should be the most important thing in our life. Likewise, lack of commitment is the number one reason for problems in our relationships. Lack of commitment to Christ gives us the same results.

What is the seventh step to growing closer to Christ?

The seventh step to growing closer to Christ is to commit your life to Christ. On day one, you established or reestablished a relationship with Jesus Christ. You did this because you realized that without a relationship, you could have no future with Christ. Therefore, it makes sense that if you're going to have a relationship with Christ you must be willing to start committing your life to Him.

How does committing your life to Christ help you grow closer to Christ?

We certainly would not expect an Olympic athlete to only spend an hour or two a week training at their sport. Likewise, we would not expect the same athlete to get stronger or make progress if they only ate one meal a week. Anyone with common sense would realize that in order for an athlete to make it to the Olympics they must commit their life to training and accomplishing that goal. The sports world has a name for people that are not committed to training in accomplishing the skills needed for a sport. They're called spectators.

Unfortunately, Christians often have the same attitude when it comes to committing their life to training and accomplishing things for Christ. Like the spectator, they may attend the weekly services or catch one on TV. They may even buy shirts or hats that show their support for team Jesus, but when it comes to actually getting in the game, they are left standing on the sidelines. The sad thing about this is that many Christians can tell you more about their favorite athlete or team than they can about their Savior. Ask yourself this: Is there any topic that you know more about than what you know about the Bible and Jesus? If so, that means you have not committed yourself to making Jesus Christ the top priority in your life.

Consider this

The book of Joshua tells the story of how Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land after the death of Moses. In chapter 24, Joshua gathered all the Israelites together to speak to them about how they should live in the land that God had given them. In verses 14 and 15, he challenged them to fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and in truth and to put away the gods and false idols that they had served before. He continued by challenging them to choose that day whom they would serve, the gods which they served before, the gods of those living around them, or the one true God. Joshua concluded by saying, "...but as for me in my house, we will serve the Lord."

After saying these words, Joshua pressed his challenge to the people to make a commitment to the Lord. They responded by saying they would not forsake the Lord to serve other gods, they would only serve the Lord, and they would obey His voice. Upon hearing this, Joshua wrote their words in the book of the Law of God and built a great stone monument under an oak tree as the testimony of what the people had said.

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Unfortunately, when you read on into the book of Judges, you find that not only did the Israelites forsake the Lord, but they also intermarried with those who served other gods and adopted their practices. Their abandonment of God was so bad that an angel of the Lord rebuked them for what they had done. After hearing this, the people wept loudly and made sacrifices to the Lord. When they returned home after this, they continued to serve the Lord.

Joshua died several years later. Likewise, all of those that were alive who had made the commitment to serve the Lord also died. However, the next generation grew up and came to power not knowing anything about serving the Lord or the works he had done for Israel. This generation was not committed to serving God. Instead, they followed and served other gods and openly rebelled against the one true God. For this reason, God allowed them to be taken captive by their enemies and sold into slavery.

It is clear from this account, that it is not enough just to say that you will commit your life to the Lord. You must follow through with your commitment. The Israelites in this case, did commit to serving the Lord once they were rebuked by the angel. However, they did not teach this same commitment to their children or others. For this reason, their commitment died along with them and the result was catastrophic.

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves committing your life to Christ. Get an inexpensive composition notebook. This notebook will serve as your discipleship journal. Read Joshua 24 through Judges 2:23 and pray about what you read. Then write in your journal as follows:

1. Write your decision to commit your life to Christ from this day forward
2. Write the top three things that you believe are getting in the way of your commitment to Christ
3. Write your decision put Christ above these three things
4. Sign and date your entry
5. Write the text of Joshua 24:15 on a notecard or paper. Memorize the verse and place the card in a place that you will see it every day like your mirror, car dashboard, or inside your front door.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you've taken seven steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Day Eight - Committing to living a holy life

Throughout history, the compassionate acts of Christians have influenced many people to accept Christ as their Savior. On the other hand, throughout history, the cruel acts of Christians have influenced many people to reject Christ as their Savior. If being a Christian means being like Christ, then what kind of message are Christians sending when they do not behave in a Christ-like manner? Likewise, if Christ was holy wouldn't it make sense that His followers would also be holy?

What is the eighth step to growing closer to Christ?

The eighth step to growing closer to Christ is committing to living a holy life. Remember, on day three you connected with the Bible and became a disciple or student of Christ? Hopefully, by now your daily reading of Proverbs has resulted in the Holy Spirit speaking to your heart. With time, you will find that the Holy Spirit will convict you more and more about living a life that is like how Christ lived His life. Therefore, if Christ was holy, it should be no surprise when you grow closer to Christ, that you would be holy.

How does committing to living a holy life help you grow closer to Christ?

Yesterday you made a decision to commit your life to Christ. If you were serious about committing your life to Christ, then you should be just as serious about taking the steps to be holy like Christ. You must make choices to eliminate or separate yourself from things in your life that lead you away from Christ and His holiness. Like the vacations I experienced as a young boy, there must be commitment to do things to make it happen. We didn't just get up one morning and find ourselves sitting in a boat catching fish. We had to make a plan and put it into action. We made choices that made it possible for the trip to happen. Likewise, we also made choices to avoid the things that would hinder us from taking the trip or catching fish. Putting those choices into action resulted in all of us having some great vacations.

Consider this

The Bible teaches in Ephesians 5:25-32 that husbands should love their wives like Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. It makes the comparison of how an earthly marriage should model the relationship between Christ and the church. Of particular note is in verse 27 where we are told that Christ sanctifies and cleanses the church using the Word of God, the Bible. He does this so that He might present the church to Himself as a glorious church, without filthiness, but instead, holy and unmarked by sin.

In light of this truth, this passage in Ephesians teaches us that Christ wants us to be holy and unmarked by sin (See also 1 Thessalonians 5:11-28 and Ephesians 1:4-11). This is further explained in 1 Peter 1:13-25 where we are challenged to seriously commit to be holy because God is holy. It describes this commitment in a way that teaches us that we must do more than just write down on a piece of paper the top three things that prevent us from committing to Christ. We must take action to make it happen.

Remember on day five when you made a commitment to connect with a local church? The term, local church, describes the place where believers assemble together. However, there is a difference between a local church and the church. The Bible teaches that the believers are the church, not the building or organization. This is why the term, local church, is used to refer to the building or organization so that it is not confused with the people that are believers.

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The term church comes from the Greek word *Ecclesia*, meaning “a called out assembly,” which refers to the people. Paul referred to this when he told how he persecuted the church of God and wasted it. He specifically referred to Christians, whom he persecuted in his activities as a Pharisee when taking them to prison and causing their deaths (Acts 7:57-8:3; Acts 9:1-5).

Remember how we become like our teacher when we become a disciple? It is the same with unholy teachers. Therefore, you should start separating yourself from the unholy influences in your life. Then you will become less like the unholy and more like the holy. God will then allow you to have a relationship that is very close, and He will provide more for your physical, emotional, and spiritual needs in ways you have never experienced (See 2 Corinthians 6:11-18).

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves committing to separating yourself from the unholy things in your life. Read Galatians 5:14-21 and note in particular the works of the flesh that are listed. Then look at your list that you made yesterday of the top three things that you believe are getting in the way of your commitment to Christ. Pick out one of those things on your list that you think might be relatively easy to eliminate. For example, perhaps you watch television shows that contain a lot of works of the flesh. Or maybe you spend more time on your computer or social media websites than you do reading your Bible.

On the next page of your discipleship journal write the bad influence you chose and the specific things you will do to eliminate it. If it is television shows, write down what you are going to do to eliminate these shows and replace them with something that is a positive influence on you or others. If it is too much social media, then stay away from social media and use that time for things that are a positive influence. Set goals for when this influence will be eliminated and carry out your plan. Then, when the influence is eliminated and you no longer desire to be involved with it, write in your journal the date that you accomplish this task and your thoughts about how eliminating it has changed your life.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you’ve taken eight steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Day Nine - Committing to righting past wrongs

None of us are immune to disagreements with other people. Usually, we work them out and move on. Other times they gradually work out on their own. However, sometimes they never get resolved and we remain angry to the point of getting bitter. With time, this bitterness eats away at us to the point where it interferes with our life. Therefore, it is important to consider doing what is necessary to make things right with the other person.

What is the ninth step to growing closer to Christ?

The ninth step to growing closer to Christ is committing to righting past wrongs. Over the past two days you have been making commitments and taking steps to fulfill those commitments. Today is no different. However, this day your commitment to righting past wrongs will have a significant impact on your ability to grow closer to Christ. This is because God sees forgiveness and reconciliation as very important between you and Him as well as you and others.

How does committing to righting past wrongs help you grow closer to Christ?

Since everyone has had a disagreement with someone, we all know how it feels when it's not resolved. In some cases, it may just be a thought that continues to run through your mind that gradually goes away with time. In others, there may be uneasiness and bitterness when the other person is around. In any case, your ability to have a close relationship with the person is hindered. Unfortunately, when this happens it is not just a relationship with the other person that suffers, your relationship with Christ suffers. This is because unresolved strife and disagreements with other people results in unresolved strife and disagreement with God. Therefore, you must commit to resolving these issues to grow closer to Christ.

Consider this

As Christians, God wants us to be at peace with all men (Romans 12:16-21). Jesus said that the way we demonstrate to the world we are Christians is by loving one another (John 13:34-35; John 15:9-13). As we learned over the past two days, making a commitment requires that we take action. In this case, righting past wrongs demonstrates a principle that is very important to God. Jesus mentioned this principle while having dinner at Matthew's house (Matthew 9:9-13). Matthew, a tax collector, invited other tax collectors and sinners to the dinner and the Pharisees started asking questions. When Jesus heard their questions about why He was eating with tax collectors and sinners, He said, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what *that* meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

The phrase "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice" was a quote from Hosea 6:6 where God rebuked the Israelites and more specifically the priests for emphasizing religious practices at the expense of relationships (Hosea 6). Sadly, many people in churches today do the same thing. However, Jesus warned us when He taught us to pray that when we forgive others, God will also forgive us. He also said that if we will not forgive others, neither will God forgive us (Matthew 6:9-15).

After saying this, Peter came to Jesus and asked Him how many times he should forgive his brother when his brother sins against him (Matthew 18:21-35). He followed by asking if he should forgive his brother seven times. Jesus responded by saying not seven times, but 70 times seven times. Jesus didn't mean for Peter to forgive his brother 490 times. He stressed that as often as his brother came to him and asked for

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forgiveness, Peter should forgive him. Jesus continued by telling a parable of a man who was forgiven of a great debt by the king after pleading for forgiveness. Later, after he was forgiven, the man went home and confronted someone who owed him money. Instead of forgiving the man who owed him money, he had him thrown in jail. When the king found out what the man he had forgiven did, he threw him into jail also and reinstituted his debt.

The Scriptures teach us that when we do not forgive others, God does not forgive us. Therefore, committing to righting past wrongs is crucial when it comes to our relationship with Christ.

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves committing to righting past wrongs. Hopefully, over the past eight days the steps you have taken to draw closer to Christ have made you more aware of God's will for your life. Today, study Matthew 5:21-24 and Matthew 18:15-35. When you are done, think of a situation when something happened between you and someone else where you were wrong and never asked for forgiveness. Then pray to God to give you an attitude of humbleness and wisdom to approach the other person about the situation given what you have just studied.

Once you have completed these things, arrange to meet with the other person. When you meet, humble yourself and confess what you did that was wrong. Then, explain to the other person that you believe that it is important to ask for their forgiveness for what you have done. If necessary, explain to them what you have learned about forgiveness. Hopefully, they will forgive you and you can discuss what can be done to improve your relationship. Likewise, if they ask for forgiveness for what they have done, then grant it.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you've taken nine steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Day Ten -Committing to stewardship of time

It seems like people everywhere never seem to have enough time. Whether it is work, family obligations, or other things that rob us of our time, having time to do the things that are important to us is often next to impossible. At some point, most people just try to get by the best they can and hope that everything works out. Unfortunately, many do not realize how precious time is until we reach the end of our life.

What is the tenth step to growing closer to Christ?

The tenth step to growing closer to Christ is committing to stewardship of time. We will look at where you spend your time so that you can better prioritize and manage your time. This is important because when it comes to growing closer to Christ, we learned that we have to invest the time to get to know Him. However, the age of people living in monasteries and spending all of their time studying the Bible without using what they have learned to influence others in the world is long gone. On the other hand, most of us spend time doing things that could be better redirected to serving the Lord. Therefore, stewardship of your time will open up real opportunities to do things that matter to God.

How does committing to stewardship of time help you grow closer to Christ?

We can never get back the time that has already passed. Therefore, it is important that we plan and use our time wisely to accomplish what God wants done. Years ago, I taught nursing at the U.S Army Academy of Health Sciences. Every time a new class started; I talked to the class about managing their time. We gave them a calendar that listed every quiz, test, and clinical rotation that they would have during the program. I then stressed to the students that there was an average of three tests or quizzes each week and how important it was to schedule study time more than just the night before each test or quiz. I explained that they may pass the test by only studying the night before, but they would not retain the information they need to pass clinical rotations. I also stressed the importance of taking a scheduled day off. Like clockwork, every class that moved to the clinical phase had several students who failed their first clinical rotation. Their unwise time management led to inadequate preparation for the tests but left them short of accomplishing the highly important clinical rotations to pass the course.

As Christians, we have a timeless eternity to look forward to with Christ. However, God has given us a limited amount of time on this earth. He wants us to use that time doing things that will contribute to His plan for humanity. Unfortunately, too many Christians do not see urgency in using their time wisely. Because of this, they miss out on many blessings and experiences in doing the Lord's work that draws them closer to Christ along with their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Consider this

Stewardship is what we do to manage and care for something that is under our responsibility. The Bible refers to someone who does this as a steward. Abraham, then known as Abram, referred to Eliezer of Damascus as the steward of his house (Genesis 15:2). Joseph's steward carried out his commands when Joseph tested his brothers to see if they would deceive their father again as they did when they sold Joseph into slavery (Genesis 43:19-44). David called a great assembly that included the stewards "over all the substance and possession of the king, and of his sons" (1 Chronicles 28:1). These passages show us that stewards were entrusted by their masters with all that they had, even their own families. Therefore, the steward had great responsibility to manage and care for the things that were important to their master.

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Jesus used the example of an unfaithful steward in Luke 16:1-13. In the parable, a steward wasted his master's goods. When the master heard about it he called for the steward to give an account for his actions. The steward realized he would be fired so he called the king's debtors and asked each one how much they owed the king. When they gave an amount, he told them to write down a smaller number than the full amount. In doing this, he cheated his master so that he could make friends with his master's debtors, hoping that they would help him when he was out of a job. When his master learned about it, he told the unfaithful steward that his scheme was good, but now all his new friends know that he will cheat his master for personal gain. He then asked him why would they hire him and entrust him with their riches? Jesus concluded the parable by making the comparison to how God sees what's really important to people who say they are servants of God, but how they waste what God has entrusted to them.

The Apostle Paul spoke of the importance of time stewardship in Ephesians 5:1-16. He said that as God's children, our deeds and the time we spend doing them should show the importance of the message of Christ to others. He challenges us to "...walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil." His challenge was to take great consideration on how we spend the time we have to share the light of the gospel to a dark world before it is too late.

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves committing to stewardship of time. Starting today, write down a very detailed list of everything you do each day for the next week. After the week is over, total your time for each activity. For example: work 40 hours; sleep 35 hours; television 15 hours; church 1 hour; etc. Then when the week is over look and see where you can take time and make it available for the Lord. On day 20, we will take this information and use it to redirect your time as a faithful steward.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you've taken ten steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Day Eleven - Committing to stewardship of your talents

One of the things I enjoy immensely is hearing the life story of people who have lived a long time. I have found in every case that everyone has a particular talent or experience that they were known for. For some, it may be a role they played in historical events. For others, it may be their ability to do things that benefitted others. I have often said that if you looked at every name etched in stone in a cemetery, you could write a book or create a movie about their life. Each of us have talents that we have been blessed with. The question then, is what do we do with them?

What is the eleventh step to growing closer to Christ?

The eleventh step to growing closer to Christ is committing to stewardship of your talents. God has blessed each one of us with gifts and talents that can be used for the Lord's work and benefit of others. Unfortunately, we often measure ourselves against others who seem to be more talented or more popular than us. When we do this, we naturally assume that we could never do anything that will amount to any importance. What people do not realize is that this type of thinking leads to a defeated attitude that limits our ability to fully exercise the gifts and talents that we have. When this happens, it also robs us of the joy of sharing our talents with others and growing in our faith to take on bigger challenges for God's glory.

How does committing to stewardship of your talents help you grow closer to Christ?

Throughout my life, I have seen many people die. Some in horrible circumstances, others after long illnesses. In each case, I never witnessed someone on their deathbed who said they wish they worked harder, spent more time away from loved ones, or hoped people would forget about them. If anything, those who said anything about their life all expressed a desire to have more time with their loved ones, fix broken relationships, or leave behind a legacy or some final words that inspire people to love and serve others. This being said, I have been involved in literally hundreds of funerals and have never seen a family request to tow a U-Haul trailer with their loved ones belongings behind the hearse to the cemetery.

Our time on this earth is only temporary. Every time I hear of someone's passing, I can't help, but think of how they did or did not affect the world for Christ. At the same time, many of those who have done great things for Christ have served as an inspiration of what is possible with simple faith. However, their passing also serves as a grim reminder that until the Lord calls us up at the resurrection there is much work for Him that needs to be done and few hands to do it. Some may think that working for God's glory is a waste of time and there is no joy in it, but those who have committed to faithful stewardship of their talents for the Lord will tell you that it is one sure way that will draw you closer to Christ.

Consider this

If you look at many characters in the Bible, you find most were just ordinary people who did extraordinary things through the power that comes by faith in God. In fact, the entire chapter of Hebrews 11 is a running account of many of these people. Likewise, 1 Peter 4:1-11 personally challenges us to consider many things when it comes to stewardship of our talents and how it relates to sharing the grace of God. Of particular note is the new mindset and attitude we should have toward living our lives with purpose.

In addition to this, we are challenged to think about who it is that we should be trying to please. With this change in attitude will come criticism from those who may not agree with your new focus on what is really important. However, as mentioned previously, we only have so much time on this earth to use the gifts and

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talents that God has given us for the benefit of others and His praise and glory. In any case, there is a lot to think about when it comes to committing to serious stewardship of your talents.

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves committing to stewardship of your talents. In order to commit to stewardship of your talents, you need to first identify a few things about how to share your gifts and talents. Set aside some time today to read Romans 12:1-16 in your Bible. When you are finished, write your thoughts in your discipleship journal about the questions listed as they relate to the following verses:

Romans 12:1 ~ What is a living sacrifice and why is it reasonable?

Romans 12:2 ~ How can you prove what is the will of God for your life?

Romans 12:3 ~ How serious should you be about committing to stewardship of your talents?

Romans 12:4-5 ~ Where should you go to find out what you can do to share your talents?

Romans 12:6-8 ~ What role does your faith have in your plan to share your talents?

Romans 12:9-10 ~ How do you decide who should benefit from your talents?

Romans 12:11 ~ Who should you ultimately try to please and glorify whenever you share your talents?

Romans 12:12-13 ~ What role does hope, patience, prayer, and hospitality have when sharing your talents?

Romans 12:14 ~ How should you respond to those who criticize your work for the Lord?

Romans 12:15-16 ~ What kind of emotional investment should you make in sharing your talents?

When you have completed writing your thoughts, keep in mind where you have written them in your discipleship journal as you will come back to them on day 20.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you've taken eleven steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Day Twelve - Committing to stewardship of your treasure

One thing that you constantly hear in the news media are stories about income and unemployment. A comment we often hear is how some people work two or three jobs to make ends meet. However, when comparing the lifestyle of those in poverty in most developed nations with those in poverty in other parts of the world, there is a stark difference. When you look at those differences, you will find that being poor in most developed nations would be considered to be rich and other parts of the world. The question then is how we define who is rich and what is the proper attitude when it comes to wealth.

What is the twelfth step to growing closer to Christ?

The twelfth step to growing closer to Christ is committing to stewardship of your treasure. Over the past two days you have been making commitments to stewardship of your time and talents. Likewise, you learned that stewardship of your time and talents reflects your love for God and others. In the same way, committing to stewardship of your treasure reflects the same values and will help you draw closer to Christ.

How does committing to stewardship of your treasure help you grow closer to Christ?

One Saturday, several of our church members gathered together to go door knocking. Door knocking is when you walk through a neighborhood and share the gospel door to door with others. I knocked at one particular door and a few seconds later someone opened the door. After some initial introductions, I invited the person to come to our church. They responded by saying that they stopped going to church because all the church wanted was their money. I replied by saying, “God doesn’t need your money.” The look on the homeowners face told me that he was surprised to hear someone from a church say this.

I went on to explain that the purpose of donating money to the church is not because God needs the money. But, that because of what Jesus did for me, I give money so that others can hear about what He did and to help others in need. The homeowner hesitated for a moment and then asked if I had to give money to go to Heaven. I replied that there was nothing I could give or do to earn my way to Heaven. At this point, the homeowner began to ask many more questions. With each question, I gave him the answers reading directly from the Bible. I could tell that the homeowner really understood the motivation behind giving money to the church. However, he was not sure how he could receive the gift of salvation. I proceeded to explain to him the clear gospel of salvation. Before long, he trusted Christ as his Savior. I encouraged him to come visit our church and took down some information for a follow up visit with him.

Consider this

My wife and I have learned over the years that when it is God’s will for something to happen, He makes a way without help from anyone else. Likewise, I’ve often said that God did not need to take out a mortgage when He created the heavens and the earth. Understanding the reality of God to make provision for the accomplishment of His will teaches us that He is the ultimate source of wealth and treasure. However, we must keep this in mind to have a proper understanding of how stewardship of our treasure helps us to grow closer to Christ.

The Bible teaches about Spirit-led giving in 2 Corinthians 9. In verses one through five Paul wrote to the Corinthian church and recounted their history of donating generously to his missionary ministry. In verses six and seven, he explained the principle of giving. He said that the amount we give should come from our heart and not influenced by the pressuring of others or from the idea that we are required to give. Instead,

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we should give cheerfully because God loves it when we give willingly. Paul continued in verses eight through 11 by explaining that when we give sacrificially to provide for the needs of others without thinking about the cost to ourselves, God makes up the difference in providing for our needs. He adds in verses 12 through 15 that our motivation to give should be a demonstration of our thanksgiving to God for His unspeakable gift of salvation to us. Nowhere in scripture do we find that giving should be motivated by what we will receive in return. Therefore, exercising faithful stewardship over our treasures demonstrates our love for God and our neighbor.

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves committing to stewardship of your treasure. Write in your discipleship journal the average amount of income that you receive each month. Then, on a separate page, make a list of monthly bills or things that you routinely spend money on in a month like rent, utilities, tithes, cable TV, offerings, donations, gasoline, car, etc. Over the next week, diligently write down on a third page every time you spend money on things like eating out, entertainment, coffee shops, or any other things that you do not absolutely have to have to survive. Be very detailed, even if it is only a dollar or two. Remember, stewardship requires that you oversee everything. When you complete this challenge, save the information for use on day 19 when you will review your records.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you've taken twelve steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Section 3 – Continuing

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.” Acts 2:42-32

When I was in the army, I was charged with creating an advanced fitness group. This was because many soldiers going to airborne or special operations schooling could not pass the advanced physical qualification tests or the demanding physical requirements of their training. These candidates were sent to me for several months to be coached to achieve the advanced levels of fitness needed for success. The program proved to be so successful that a decision was made to send soldiers to the program that were overweight or unable to pass the basic physical training (PT) test. However, the decision makers failed to consider that there was no way these soldiers were going to be able to keep up for more than a few minutes with the advanced group.

This led me to make some serious changes in the program. For those in the advanced fitness group, I had the ones who had been with the group the longest lead the group during their four mile run. For the new people, I had to come up with a plan to motivate them to exercise and eat healthier. This was because many were only there because they were ordered to be there, not because they wanted to be there. The plan I created started with a routine that was so easy that everyone in the group could complete it without even getting tired during the exercises or out of breath during the run. However, each day I increased the intensity ever so slightly. I made sure that they received lots of encouragement during the hardest times and cheered them on for every victory no matter how small. Before long, they were running in boots with empty rucksacks, but later we added 2-liter bottles of water each week as they advanced.

One morning when the time was right and without warning, I had them take off their rucksacks and boots and put on running shoes for their morning run. That morning, we ran at a pace that was faster than usual. While running, I stressed to them how easy it was to run without the packs. Near the end of the run, I yelled for everyone to sprint the last quarter of a mile. To my delight, they ran like a bunch of gazelles being chased by a cheetah. When we finished the run as everyone caught their breath, I huddled them together and said, "Congratulations, you just ran your 2-mile run in a time that was below the time you need to pass the PT test for the youngest age group." When they heard this, they broke out in cheering and celebration.

When the cheering died down, I challenged them that they had a choice to make. They could continue to advance to even greater accomplishments or they could quit and fall back to where they were before they joined our group. Thankfully as this group of soldiers went back to their units, very few ever had to come back because they had fallen back. However, many others did return to participate in the advanced fitness group in preparation for special training.

Like these soldiers, without a well thought out and consistent training routine to become self-disciplined, you will never progress beyond being Spiritually immature or out of shape (see Ephesians 4:8-19). Over the last 12 days you have been laying the groundwork for becoming Spiritually fit. Now, more than ever, you must be committed to continuing to make these new routines a habit. However, you must realize that you will not be alone in your daily Spiritual workout. Jesus, the Master Spiritual Fitness Trainer, will be right along with you every step of the way. May God bless you as you focus on continuing your journey toward growing closer to Christ.

Day Thirteen - Continuing in Christ

Everyone knows someone who is a big talker. You know, the kind of person who constantly tells everyone what they're going to be or what they're going to do. The kind of person who will tell you all about their plans, but somehow their plans never seem to pan out. Then, before you know it, they are on to their next grand scheme that also never comes to be. Many people who do this fail to consider that they can make plans and even start toward their goal, but at some point they have to continue to do the hard work and struggle through the drudgery needed to be successful. Likewise, growing closer to Christ requires us to continue in doing our part even when the newness of our quest wears off.

What is the thirteenth step to growing closer to Christ?

The thirteenth step to growing closer to Christ is continuing in Christ. Over nearly the last two weeks you have been making connections and commitments toward growing closer to Christ. Until now, your daily challenges have been relatively simple. However, from this point forward, your plans and commitments will be put into action, which will demonstrate the sincerity of your desire to grow closer to Christ.

How does continuing in Christ help you grow closer to Christ?

On day one of your journey you made a connection with Jesus Christ. On day seven, you made a decision to commit your life to Christ. Your daily challenge on day seven involved writing down the top three things that you believe were getting in the way of committing your life to Christ. Also, you wrote down your decision to put Christ above these things and you signed and dated your commitment. Now, it is time to turn your commitment into action and prove that you are not just a big talker.

The first step of putting your commitment into action is to communicate to others that you are serious about committing your life to Christ. I am not talking about just saying that you commit your life to Christ, but demonstrating it. The Bible teaches that the first act of obedience after you have trusted Christ as your Savior is to be baptized publicly. Earlier, I told you the story of how my wife and I were saved by trusting Christ as our Savior. At the same time, we learned what the Bible teaches about baptism and what it represents. Therefore, when we started attending a church it was important to us to be baptized. The day of our baptism was a wonderful day. It was our opportunity to publicly profess our faith in Christ to others and our identification with Him. Likewise, it was a day that served as a starting line for what would become our walk in obedience to Him. Much has happened since that day, but one thing is certain. Being publicly baptized encouraged us to continue toward committing our lives to Christ because we announced before every one that that was our intention.

Consider this

Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 28:19-20 (KJV) to go out and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. He continued by telling them to teach others to observe all the things that He commanded and that He would be with them until the end of the world. Not long after this, Jesus ascended into Heaven. However, the practice of baptism, commonly known as "believer's baptism," remains to this day.

Baptism demonstrates three things about our commitment. First, baptism demonstrates an identification with Jesus Christ. In Matthew 3:13-17 when Jesus was baptized, He went out into the water and was immersed under the water and raised up again out of the water by John the Baptist. Likewise, the same

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occurred when the Apostle Phillip baptized an Ethiopian man in Acts 8:36-38. The act of going under the water identifies with the death and burial of Christ. The act of coming up out of the water identifies with the resurrection of Christ.

Second, baptism demonstrates obedience to Christ. The Apostle Phillip shared the gospel of salvation with the Ethiopian man. After hearing it, the man asked Phillip what would stop him from being baptized in some nearby water. Phillip replied that if he believed with all of his heart what he just learned, he could be baptized. The man replied, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." After the man said this, Phillip took him down into the water and baptized him. This man knew that he should immediately be baptized.

Finally, baptism demonstrates association with the church, consisting of believers. When you are publicly baptized you demonstrate to other believers your willingness to identify with Christ and His church. Other references to baptism to study are as follows: John 3:1-7; Acts 2:41; Acts 10:44-48; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5-6; 1 Peter 3:21.

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves continuing in Christ. If you have not been baptized Scripturally, make arrangements as soon as possible to be baptized. Talk with your pastor or a minister of the local church you attend about being baptized. When arrangements have been made, invite as many people as you can so that they can be witnesses to your decision to continue to commit your life to Christ. If you have been previously baptized and maybe you have not been living your life in a way that would be pleasing to Christ, talk with the pastor or minister about the possibility of being rebaptized. On the other hand, if you have been previously baptized, you could arrange with your pastor or minister to share with the congregation your journey toward growing closer to Christ in 30 days. Another possibility would be to share the same with a group of others that you know outside of your church.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you've taken thirteen steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Day Fourteen- Continuing in the Bible

There are literally thousands of choices when it comes to buying a Bible. They vary in size, font style, cover, references, languages, and even versions. Sadly, some translations are so different that if you compare them with another translation, you would wonder if the translators were even translating from the same book. However, one thing is certain. Many people in the world own Bibles, but fewer people know what is in a Bible.

What is the fourteenth step to growing closer to Christ?

The fourteenth step to growing closer to Christ is continuing in the Bible. On day three, you made a connection with the Bible. Since then, you have been reading a chapter of Proverbs every day. Hopefully, you have read things that spoke to your heart. Likewise, if you remember, you learned about how reading your Bible daily and consistently enables you to be a disciple of Jesus. Therefore, it is important that if you want to draw closer to Christ you must consistently continue investing time to read your Bible.

How does continuing in the Bible help you grow closer to Christ?

When I was in high school, I had a math teacher that went to great lengths to teach math in a creative way. He would take subjects like geometry, trigonometry, and calculus and come up with practical ways to use what we were learning. Now of course, some of the things that he taught were commonly taught in many schools. For example, he gave us a project assignment to create a device that we could put an egg into and drop off the top of the school building from a height of three stories. In that exercise, we learned how to calculate the speed, forces, and other important details needed to prevent our eggs from being scrambled when they hit the ground. On the other hand, he also would make up the most ridiculous problems that anyone could imagine. One such example would be calculating where you would have to drop a water balloon out of an airplane traveling in a certain speed and altitude so that the balloon would land on top of your neighbor in his backyard.

Some of these problems were very complex, but to solve them we had to use some of the simple things we learned years earlier when we were small children. If you think back on when you first went to school and the things that you were taught, you cannot help but think how simple those things were that you learned compared to what you know today. Likewise, you can imagine that if all you ever did was continued doing the same things over and over in school, you would get bored real fast. However, as you progressed through school you were taught more things, building on the knowledge of what you learned before. It is the same way with the Bible. It is a good practice to read the chapter in Proverbs every day, but in order to really grow closer to Christ you must mature in your knowledge and understanding of His Word.

Consider this

In 2 Timothy 3, Paul wrote to his disciple Timothy about what to expect from a world full of people that hate God and God's children. However, he made it a point in verse 15 to bring to mind the fact that Timothy was trained in the Bible from the days when he was a young child and that his training gave him the wisdom to be saved through faith in Jesus Christ. He continued in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 by saying, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." These two verses spoken by the Apostle Paul teach us a great deal about why continuing in the Bible is so important.

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First, we learn that all scripture is given by inspiration of God. This means that every single word was literally breathed by God as He spoke to them. Second, we learn that the Scriptures are profitable for us in four ways. They are profitable for doctrine, which shows us what God says about everything. They are profitable for reproof, which shows us where we do not measure up to what God says. They are profitable for correction, which shows us what God wants us to change in our life. They are profitable for instruction in righteousness, which shows us how to do what God says needs to be done. Finally, we learn in verse 17 that the goal of continuing in the Bible is that we may be perfect in the eyes of God and thoroughly prepared for all that he wants us to be and do. Thoroughly prepared means we are prepared on the inside and outside.

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves continuing in the Bible. On day seven, you wrote the text of Joshua 24:15 on a notecard or paper. You were also challenged to memorize the verse and put it in a place that you will see every day. It has been seven days since the challenge and by now you should be able to recite that verse from memory. Today you will expand your memorization of the Bible by learning a new memory verse every week. Take another notecard or piece of paper and write down a new memory verse of your choosing. This time when you write it down, write the words of the verse until you write the first punctuation mark. Then, continue the verse on the next line, starting new lines at each mark until the end of the verse. Once you have done this, memorize this verse over the next week and start a new one every new week. This will help you to memorize larger verses and longer passages of Scripture. An example is John 3:16 as follows:

(Line 1) John 3:16
(Line 2) For God so loved the world,
(Line 3) that he gave his only begotten Son,
(Line 4) that whosoever believeth in him should not perish,
(Line 5) but have everlasting life.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you've taken fourteen steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Day Fifteen - Continuing in fellowship

Most people are familiar with the song, “For he’s a jolly good fellow”, or “For she’s a jolly good fellow.” The song is one of the most popular songs in many countries and languages. Except for slight variations in the lyrics, the intent behind singing the song is to offer congratulations to someone for a special event or accomplishment. Most people think that the use of the term fellow refers to a man, but the term fellow can refer to anyone.

What is the fifteenth step to growing closer to Christ?

The fifteenth step to growing closer to Christ is continuing in fellowship. On day five you connected with a local church and on day six you connected with an individual or small group of people for the purpose of having an accountability partner. Fellowship expands your relationship with others based on things that you have in common. It is important to become more involved with other Christians to grow closer to Christ.

How does continuing in fellowship help you grow closer to Christ?

If you ask most Christians to describe fellowship, they will usually refer to dinners or some sort of social activity with others. However, fellowship is more than just getting together for a good time and good food. Historically the term fellow refers to a person who joins together with others for a common cause with an expectation that they would contribute their finances and expertise to the cause so that each partner would become successful. In light of this, how does Christian fellowship contribute to a cause so that everyone becomes successful beyond just having a good time and filling their bellies? To answer this, you must think about what makes everyone successful when it comes to Christian fellowship? The answer to this question will help you understand how continuing in fellowship will help you grow closer to Christ.

Before I was a pastor, I took a mission trip to India to help start a Bible institute to train local pastors. While I was there, I was surprised to see other missionaries from different religious organizations. It was my understanding that the ultimate purpose of a missionary was to share the gospel with people so that they would trust Christ for their salvation. Then, a missionary would start a Bible study where they gather together to learn. As more joined their fellowship, then they would start a church and expand the training of the local believers so that one of them could one day lead the church as their pastor.

While I was there and since then, I have met missionaries from other religious organizations. I learned that many of them had been missionaries for many years. However, I was shocked to learn that most of them were not sharing the gospel, nor were they doing any training or anything to help in the spiritual growth of anyone. Some worked in healthcare or social services ministries, but they do not share the gospel with anyone! I asked one missionary why they do not share the gospel. His answer blew me away. He said they were there to work in the ministry and did not want to offend anyone by pushing the Bible on them. Sadly, the only thing they accomplished was to feed and care for many people who were lost in their sins, still on their way to Hell because they were never told about Jesus Christ as the Savior.

Consider this

The Bible teaches about fellowship in Philippians 2:1-11. In verses one and two we are taught that as Christians our fellowship should be based on love, mercy, and like-mindedness, working together for a common cause. In verse three, we are taught not to do anything through strife or selfish pride, but instead to humble ourselves and seek to esteem others better than ourselves. Verse four tells us to be more

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concerned about the welfare of others than our own welfare as was demonstrated by Jesus Christ. In verses five through eight, we are told that Jesus, although He was the Son of God, made Himself of no reputation and took the role of a servant in human flesh, continuing in this role to the point of dying on the cross for us. Finally, we are told that because of what Jesus did, our fellowship should bring us together to encourage one another to humble ourselves as servants like Jesus did, keeping in mind that our common purpose is to exalt Him and confess Him before others so that they too can know Him like we know Him.

In 1 Corinthians 1:9-17 we're also taught that God called us into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ. We are also called Christians after the name of our Lord Jesus Christ so that we should have no divisions amongst us and be perfectly joined together with the mind of Christ. The Apostle Paul described a situation where Christians were following different leaders because of contentious divisions between them. The Christians were identifying themselves under the names of their leaders. Paul strongly confronted them saying that fellowship should be based on the name of Jesus Christ and no one else. Sadly, this continues today with believers identifying with the name of their denominations, instead of Christ. The word denomination is rooted in the idea of being of another name. (See also 1 John 1:1-10)

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves continuing in fellowship. Plan a fellowship event at your home or somewhere else with others. Plan a dinner, barbecue, games, or something else that people can come to do together for not too long of the time. Then arrange for someone afterwards to lead in a few songs or hymns for everyone to sing together. After the singing, have everyone share passages from the Bible that apply to things that happened to them or inspired them during the week. Finally, before everyone leaves, schedule your next small group fellowship and encourage everyone to bring someone else next time.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you've taken fifteen steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Day Sixteen Continuing in prayer

One of the things that most Christians will confess to me is the fact that they do not have a robust prayer life or that their prayer life has become stale and mechanical. Sadly, when I suggest to them that they need to schedule time to pray so that they can establish the habit of praying, many will look at me as if I just told them that they need to run a 4-minute mile while they pray. Why is it that praying seems to be an afterthought or just a matter of rattling off the same words in routine situations to most Christians?

What is the sixteenth step to growing closer to Christ?

The sixteenth step to growing closer to Christ is continuing in prayer. On day four you connected with prayer. Your challenge was to establish or reestablish a habit of praying by praying before and after your daily reading of Proverbs and before eating anything. Hopefully, your prayers have been more than just the same words at these specific times. Therefore, it is important to expand your prayer focus and habits.

How does continuing in prayer help you grow closer to Christ?

As you learned before, prayer is the way that you speak to God as part of a two-way conversation along with reading your Bible. Like any other relationship, the conversation should develop on a deeper level with time. Remember the example on day four about spending the entire day with someone you are really close to without ever saying a word? How much better do you think it would be if you spent the entire day with someone that you're really close to and only said the same thing over and over each day? I think you get the picture.

It is easy to understand how, with time, you may think that you have run out of things to say. When this happens it is a sign of a deeper problem. The problem is that we need to change our focus to praying less about things that benefit us and more about things that concern God and others. This is not to say that we should not pray in times of turmoil or need, but we should expand our prayer in context to God's will being done for everyone and everything. When we make it a point to minister out of concern to others through prayer, God enables us to grow closer to Him because we are becoming more like His Son.

Consider this

On day four, we touched upon the fact that Jesus gave us a model prayer in Matthew 6. When you look at Matthew 6 you find not only the model prayer, but also commentary throughout the chapter on each part of the prayer. We learn in verses nine through 13 the outline of the prayer, which is very familiar to most people as the Lord's Prayer as follows:

“Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.”

The prayer starts in verse nine with the words, “Our father which art in heaven”, which reminds us of Genesis 1:1 which says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” This teaches us that when we start to pray, we should put everything else out of our mind and our focus should be totally on God. Continuing on it reads, “Hallowed be thy name,” which brings to mind the holiness of God that should be considered when we pray. Matthew 6:1-4 explains how we should consider the holiness of God in our

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giving or charitable work. Matthew 6:5-8 explains how we should consider the holiness of God in how we pray. Matthew 6:16-18 explains how we should consider the holiness of God when we fast.

The prayer continues in verse 10 with the words, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven,” which brings to mind how everything is subject to God’s plan for establishing His kingdom on earth. Matthew 6:19-21 explains how we should consider the bigger picture of God’s will being done for His kingdom instead of our own (See also Revelation 11:15). In verse 11 the prayer continues with, “Give us this day our daily bread,” which brings to mind God’s provision for us. Matthew 6:25-34 explains how our focus should be on God and His kingdom, and He will provide for all of our needs. In verse 12 the prayer continues with, “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” Matthew 6:14-15 explains how we need to forgive others of what they owe us if we expect God to forgive us of what we owe Him (See also Day Nine, Committing to righting past wrongs).

Verse 13 continues with, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” Matthew 6:22-24 explains how every choice we make is an act of worship and that we must do our part to stay away from those things that tempt us to sin and not to honor God (See also James 1:12-15). The prayer ends in verse 13 with the words, “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.” This teaches us that our prayer should always leave us with the thought that God’s kingdom, power, and glory is the only thing that we can count on forever and should be the subject of our daily thoughts.

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves continuing in prayer. Open your discipleship journal to a new page. Write today’s date at the top of the page. Draw a dividing line down the middle of the page. On the left side of the line make a list of things and people that come to mind to pray for. Then, when you pray after your daily reading of Proverbs, include the things on your list in your prayer. Tomorrow, write the date at the top of the next page and do the same thing that you did today, but include yesterday’s list. If there was something from yesterday’s list that God has resolved, write on the right side of the line in a few brief words what God did to resolve it and do not include it in the next day’s list. For those things that have yet to be resolved write on the right side of the line the words, “Continue in prayer.” Continue to do this every day.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you’ve taken sixteen steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Day Seventeen - Continuing in worship

It is no secret that no matter what church you go to that they all have their own style of worship. Some churches have a style of worship that would lead you to think that you stepped back in time to the early 1800s. On the other hand, many churches have a blend of old hymns with modern praise music. Others have a style of worship that would lead you to think you are not in a church, but at a heavy metal concert. However, they all have one thing in common and that is music.

What is the seventeenth step to growing closer to Christ?

The seventeenth step to growing closer to Christ is continuing in worship. You may ask, “When did I make a connection or commitment to worship?” The answer is simple, when you made a connection with the church and committed your life to Christ. You should have noticed the time of worship at your local church services. Usually, it will include singing by the congregation or special music performed by specific individuals. In any case, worship is your opportunity to honor God and express to Him your thanks for what He’s done for you. When you actively participate in worship it helps to draw you closer to Christ.

How does continuing in worship help you grow closer to Christ?

Before I became a believer, I was the type of person that if I went to a concert or listened to the music of a popular artist, I was not the one dancing to the beat or shouting out the lyrics of a song. In fact, I got rather annoyed when I paid good money to hear an artist perform and all I could hear was the people around me doing a bad, out of tune rendition of the song or standing up and dancing so that I could not see. This is not to say that I could do any better, just that I tend to be a lot more reserved when it comes to music and still am to this day.

Historically, there was a time in church history that it was considered to be sinful to sing during the weekly service. However, music and singing is mentioned many times in the Bible as being part of worship (Psalms 66:1, Psalms 81:1; Psalms 98:6). With this in mind, I’ve spoken with people trained in sacred music to find out their perspective on music’s role in worship. I learned that the purpose of music in a worship service was not only to worship God, but to prepare the hearts of the people to receive the Word of God.

Sadly, many people today believe that worship has to fit a certain style or lyrical pattern to be good. I remember one time while I was in India helping to start a Bible institute that we went to a small jungle village to start a new church for the believers who had been commuting many hours to our church each week. At that time, I believed that any sort of device that was used to keep the tempo of a song was wrong for all sorts of demonic reasons. However, when I witnessed these new believers in a jungle village singing their hearts out to the Lord and keeping the tempo of the song by tapping a stick on a log, I had to ask myself, who was I to tell these believers that tapping a stick on a log was wrong? Who was I to tell these believers you cannot worship this way unless you have a piano or acoustic instrument? I realized that my attitude about worship was humanistic and sinful. It was hypocritical too in light of the fact that a piano is a percussion instrument that uses hammers to strike strings and is often played in a way to keep the tempo.

Consider this

In John 4:1-20, Jesus had a discussion with a woman at a well while traveling through Samaria. When He first saw the woman drawing water from the well, He told her He would like some water to drink. The woman responded by asking Him how He, a Jew could ask her, a Samaritan, for a drink when Jews have

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nothing to do with Samaritans. The conversation continued with Him telling her how He could provide living water, which confused her. After clarifying what He meant, she asked Him for living water. Jesus told her to get her husband and have Him come there. She said that she had no husband, to which Jesus replied that she has had five husbands.

At this point the woman perceived that Jesus was a prophet. She went on to say that her ancestors worshipped in the mountain there, but that Jews say that Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus replied by saying that the hour is coming when they will not worship in the mountain or Jerusalem. He added that they do not know what they are worshipping, but the hour has come when true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth because that is what the Father wants. Jesus explained that God is a Spirit and that those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Jesus gave us guidance with these words on how we should worship. Our worship must be in spirit and in truth. To worship in spirit means that our worship is inspired by the Holy Spirit and should demonstrate the fruit of the spirit in its performance and style as found in Galatians 5:22-23. To worship in truth means that our worship should demonstrate the truth of God's Word in doctrine (John 17:17). Together, our worship should be such that is doctrinally correct in its lyrics while keeping with the fruit of the Spirit in practice. With this in mind, we can discern what is pleasing to God when it comes to our worship.

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves continuing in worship. Today, your challenge is to learn a song that you can sing in worship to God that is in Spirit and in truth. It may be a song from your hymnal, the radio, or any other source. However, the important thing is that you learn all the parts of the song so that you can sing it from memory. With this in mind, do not worry about how well you sing the song. Just sing it from your heart to God for His pleasure because that is what matters when you worship.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you've taken seventeen steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Day Eighteen - Continuing in living a holy life

It is pretty clear that our culture has gone from drifting away from living a holy life, to rejecting it and outright running away from it. Because of this, people who desire to live a holy life are quickly identified as those who are different or belonging to some sort of cult. Likewise, those who desire to live a holy life are labeled as ignorant rubes who need to get with the times. Sadly, the same people who make these sorts of comments cannot see the results all around them of a world that insists on making unholy choices.

What is the eighteenth step to growing closer to Christ?

The eighteenth step to growing closer to Christ is continuing in living a holy life. On day eight you committed to living a holy life. Your daily challenge was to take one of the things you identified as getting in the way of your commitment to Christ on day seven and creating and carrying out a plan to eliminate it. Hopefully you were able to successfully eliminate the influence that you identified. However, you probably noticed that eliminating an influence is more difficult than identifying it and creating a plan. For this reason, a continued focus to remain victorious will help you to grow closer to Christ.

How does continuing in living a holy life help you grow closer to Christ?

Several years ago, I was having a discussion with one of my deacons and he asked me, “Pastor, why do they call it a retreat? We should not be retreating; we should be pressing on to have victory over the devil.” As someone who appreciates the meaning and intent of words, I understood exactly where he was coming from in that the idea of a retreat can bring to mind two different things. His point also made me realize that there are two ways that people approach living in victory over sin. There are those who retreat and hide in defeat when things get tough because they believe they are powerless over the devil and the temptations that lead to sin. On the other hand, there are those who retreat only to refresh, strengthen, and prepare to continue on in the battle. This simple truth has wide-ranging effects.

When you have bad theology as a basis to how you do anything, it creates bad practice and results. I was once at a community meeting where a discussion was taking place about how to handle the fact that high school students were meeting with members of the opposite sex in their cars in the school parking lot to be alone. Many ideas were presented from hiring a guard, to having someone come in and teach the students how to have intimacy safely. When it was finally my turn to speak, I said, “Maybe we should tell them it is wrong and even if they were married, behaving like that in the school parking lot is inappropriate.”

At that point a very prominent pastor in the community loudly said to me, “You must be one of those pastors that believe that the Bible has an answer for everything.” I replied, “If it doesn’t then we are in a heap of trouble because if the Bible doesn’t have an answer for everything, then Jesus doesn’t have an answer for everything. And if Jesus doesn’t have an answer for everything, then our ministries are a fraud, and we should find a new line of work.” It got very quiet in the room and eventually they decided to hire a guard, but I was contacted by the school superintendent who wanted to meet with me about other issues. The experience opened my eyes to how many view the Bible, but it also gave me renewed strength to stand on the Word of God. When you make a deep commitment to living a holy life, it will draw you closer to Christ.

Consider this

In 1 Peter 1:13-25, we are given clear instructions about having victory over sin and living in holiness. It begins with an attitude of the mind, then an acknowledgment of what Christ did for us, a focusing of our

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faith and hope in Him, and relying on His everlasting, living Word to give us victory. Living in holiness is a battle that takes place in our mind. Because living a holy life starts with having a changed mind, we must take the steps necessary to focus our thinking where it needs to be and exclude the other things that distract our thinking. The Bible gives us guidance for fasting and praying for this very purpose.

In 2 Chronicles 7:14 we are told, “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.” This verse gives us the approach we should take as we fast and pray. In Matthew 6:16-18 the Bible teaches us:

“Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance [face]: for they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.”

These verses give us the practice we should use when we fast and pray.

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves continuing in living a holy life. Today, your challenge is to plan and prepare for a short daytime fast. Look up verses in the Bible related to fasting using a concordance or an online or electronic Bible. Speak with the pastor, other leaders in your church, or other spiritually mature believers about fasting. Make sure that any plan to fast is approved by a health care provider especially if you take medications or have any medical ailments. When you are ready, fast during the daylight hours for one day. During this time, sing the worship song you chose in yesterday’s challenge. Read and meditate on God’s Word. Pray that God will convict and empower you to live a holy life. Pray that God will show you what He wants for your life and how you can be part of His plan. Use the time as a time to really draw close to God and seek Him in deep prayer and devotion.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you’ve taken eighteen steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Section 4 - Contributing

“And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.” Acts 2:44-45

George Muller (1) was not like most other boys his age growing up in Prussia in the early 1800s. By age 10 he was stealing government money from his father who was a tax collector. At age 14, while his mother was dying, he was playing cards and drinking with his friends. In an effort to get his son on the right path and give him a career that would provide for his needs, George's father decided to give George a religious education, so he enrolled him at the University of Halle in Germany to study divinity.

George met a student that invited him to a prayer meeting. The group welcomed George, and he soon found himself reading the Bible and taking part in discussions with the group. After seeing a man praying on his knees, George was convicted that he needed to be saved. When he got home that evening, he knelt down by his bed and prayed that God would forgive him of his sins and help him in his life and bless him wherever he would go. He immediately stopped drinking, lying, and stealing and set out to become a missionary.

George's experience made him a great believer in the power of prayer. Years later, George started an orphanage in Bristol, England. Not long after, there were over 900 orphans in his care and their needs were great. George never solicited for funds, but time and time again, he prayed that God would provide for their needs and God did just that. One such time, which was well documented, George was informed that there was no food for breakfast. This did not stop him from having all the children go to the dining room where he led them in prayer for their food. At that moment, a local baker showed up and told him that he was convicted the evening before to bake several batches of bread for the orphanage. Just when it looked like there would only be bread and water for breakfast, the local milkman arrived and advised that his cart had broken down in front of the orphanage and he would like to donate all his milk because it was just going to spoil anyway.

Miracles of prayer like this happened all the time and before long, the word spread about this ministry funded by faith. George kept meticulous records of donations and over the years, it was determined that they received about 1.3 million pounds, worth about 90 million pounds or 141 million dollars today. While we focus on George's incredible faith for provision, we must also remember the faith and commitment of so many people that God also inspired to contribute to the work of the ministry.

George Muller went home to be with the Lord on March 10, 1898, but there are many more George Mullers that continue to trust the Lord to provide for the needs of His work. I have often said that if something is the Lord's will, He will make a way. It is important that as you draw closer to Christ, that you commit to providing for the Lord's work by contributing in more ways than just finances. You will learn about these ways over the next six days. May God bless you as you take the next steps toward drawing closer to Christ (2 Corinthians 9:6-15).

(1) George Müller. (n.d.). Retrieved June 30, 2015, from https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Müller;

Day Nineteen - Contributing your treasure

Hopefully, by now, the Lord is making you aware of many things in your life and maturing you in your faith. Sadly, some Christians may have given up on growing closer to Christ and haven't reached this day. However, today, you should be congratulated for making it to this day and the Lord should be praised for getting you to this day. Today, you will be advancing your stewardship of your treasure as you now take the step of contributing your treasure.

What is the nineteenth step to growing closer to Christ?

The nineteenth step to growing closer to Christ is contributing your treasure. On day 12, you committed to stewardship of your treasure. Since day 12, you have been documenting your spending. If you have been detailed about it, you may have noticed that you spend money on things that you did not think about. The results may surprise you as you can see in detail where you may or may not be spending money. With this knowledge, you can now make better decisions on how you can contribute some of your treasure toward the Lord's work, which will help you grow closer to Christ.

How does contributing your treasure help you grow closer to Christ?

When I was 19 and, in the army, I was sent with my unit to Panama for political security reasons in the Canal Zone as well as for jungle training. It was my first trip outside the United States and my first major test in an operational environment as an infantry medic. It took some adjustment to get used to the environment, but before long, I found myself on patrols in the jungle. In those days, the army still had meals that came in cans. The average meal was tolerable, but there were just some things that most people did not like. One of them was a pork steak ration that came with a small can of meat that was maybe 4-6 ounces in weight. How it was called a steak is beyond me because it was packed with hard chunks of grease and was barely tolerable hot, much less cold.

One day, a man came paddling up to our position on an island in a very small dugout canoe that was full of tropical fruits. He wanted to trade for meat from some of our rations. I had a leftover can of pork steak that I was saving for a rainy day to trade for something else (it was rainy season). So, I offered to trade the can to the man for some tropical fruit. The man looked at the can and his eyes lit up. He immediately offered everything that was in his canoe for the can of meat. Needless to say, I jumped at his offer and a few minutes later I was enjoying tropical fruit with my buddies as the man paddled off. Throughout my stay, I saw what real poverty looked like. I saw people who lived in huts on stilts with no running water or bathrooms. I saw others who wanted to trade for canned meat. It opened my eyes as a 19-year-old man how blessed we were to live in America.

Since then, when traveling outside of the United States in the military and for ministry, I have been reminded of how things that we consider to be insignificant in quality or price is of great value to many people in the world. I have learned that many people spend their entire day trying to come up with the means for that day's food for them and their family. When you consider, how rich we are, contributing our treasure to those in need is another great way to draw closer to Christ.

Consider this

In James 1:27-2:9 we are taught many things about contributing our treasure. Verse 27 of Chapter 1 tells us that true religion before God and the Father is to put our faith in action and live a holy life. In Chapter

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2:1-4, we are told that we should not show partiality or preference to people of wealth and means over poor people without wealth and means. In verses five and six we are told that God has chosen the poor of the world, rich in faith and heirs to His kingdom, but that we have despised them. In verses six and seven, we are asked if the rich oppress, persecute, and blaspheme against the poor and their faith. Finally, we are told in verses eight and nine that we sin if we give preference and respect toward someone because of their position and financial status.

Throughout the Bible the underlying theme concerning our treasure is our attitude toward it and what we do with it. Although Jesus said that the poor will always be with us, He challenged us by His example and His Words what we should do with our treasure (Matthew 26:11; Luke 14:12-21; Revelation 3:17).

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves contributing your treasure. Today, your challenge is to look at your time documentation from day 12. Once you have done this, go through your spending list, and see how much money you give to the church or to any charity. Write the total given on a fourth page. Then, go back through your spending lists and note any spending that you do on things that you do not absolutely need to survive. Write the total on the same page as the spending you listed for the church or charity. Now, compare the spending on the church and charity with the spending for things that you do not absolutely need to survive. Next, take some time to pray about what you see. Ask God to convict you of ways and areas that you can cut so that you can increase your giving to the church or charity. Earnestly pray that God will convict you of what you can sacrificially give, then commit yourself to giving the amount that God has purposed in your heart.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you've taken nineteen steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Day Twenty - Contributing your time

So far in this study we have addressed the aspect of time at least twice in your journey to draw closer to Christ. As we learned before, we never seem to have enough time in our lives for the things that really matter. Therefore, up until now, you have been working toward identifying where you spend your time and managing it. We will continue in this process as we now address the idea of contributing your time.

What is the twentieth step to growing closer to Christ?

The twentieth step to growing closer to Christ is contributing your time. On day eight, you committed to living a holy life. Your challenge was to eliminate one of three things you identified on day seven that you believed were getting in your way to committing your life to Christ. What you eliminated impacted your time in some way. On day 10, you committed to stewardship of your time. Your challenge for that day was to document your time for a week. On day 11, you committed to stewardship of your talents. Your challenge was to read Romans 12:1-16 and write your thoughts in your journal concerning questions about the verses. Today, we will use the information you documented about your time and talents and see what can be done to free up and contribute some of the time to the Lord's work, which will help you grow closer to Christ.

How does contributing your time help you grow closer to Christ?

You are probably noticing by now that drawing closer to Christ seems to take up more and more of your time. This is because when you draw closer to Christ, He changes your heart. When He changes your heart, it changes your desires about where you spend your time. Many things that interest you will become less interesting when considered in light of your increased closeness to Christ. Likewise, you will start questioning how your time could have been better spent elsewhere.

I once worked with a young man in Orlando, Florida in the late 1990's that had just graduated from college. Not long after he started, our company had a golf tournament outing and we were both assigned to play in the same foursome. During our play, three of us struggled as many people do, just to finish with scores less than 90. However, this man, played like a pro. We watched in amazement as he made shots that defied belief. By the end of the match, he finished with a score that was about five over par for 18 holes. Even more amazing was that he told us that he should have done better but made some bad shots.

After we finished playing, we went to eat at the picnic that was set up at the golf course. Since he and I worked together on the same team, we sat together. I asked him about how he got to be so good at golf. I learned that he had played for years and had competed nationally even in college. He had won many championships and even competed head-to-head with Tiger Woods for the National Junior Amateur Golf Championship once. I asked him why he quit playing since he was so good. He told me that he got engaged before he graduated from college and realized that he had to practice many hours each day and hit buckets of balls until his hands bled just to compete at that level. He followed by saying that since he was going to get married, he didn't want to spend all his time traveling and practicing away from his wife. Instead, he chose to give up competing in golf and get a good job to support her. His words impressed me and made me think about how things that are important to us can change our desires.

Consider this

Ephesians 5:13-17 gives us a good idea of how we should manage our time. In verses 13 and 14, we are told that all things are shown to us by the light, referring to the Holy Spirit that is given to us by Christ. In

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verse 15, we are told to walk circumspectly (KJV), not as fools, but as wise. Walking circumspectly means that we examine our Christian walk from all angles or directions in light of the wisdom of God's Word provided by the Holy Spirit. In verse 16, we are told to redeem the time, because the time we have in a day does not last and is soon over. Finally, in verse 17, we are challenged not to be unwise when it comes to how we spend our time, meaning that we should evaluate how we spend our time in light of God's will. (See also Psalms 111:10; Proverbs 14:8; 1 Corinthians 2:9-16, Colossians 4:5).

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves contributing your time. Today, your challenge is to look at your time documentation from day 10 and review what you wrote about your talents on day 11 in light of what you just learned in Ephesians 5:13-17. Then, determine how your time can be better spent serving the Lord. Do you have blocks of wasted time? Could you rearrange your schedule to use the wasted time for the Lord's work? For example, is there work that can be done at your church? Is there a group that ministers to the poor or homeless where you can volunteer your time? Is there a person that has difficulty getting out of their home that would be blessed by weekly visits? What talents do you have that would be a benefit to others?

If you need some ideas, ask your pastor or others in your church. The important thing is that you free up some time and contribute it to an activity that will have eternal benefit in light of God's Word to someone. When you have identified the amount of time you can contribute, then make arrangements to redeem the time by spending it doing the activity that God has convicted and gifted you to do. When you have done this, write your decision about the time you have committed to redeeming in your discipleship journal and sign it. Then, put your decision into action.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you've taken twenty steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Day Twenty-one - Contributing your things

It is hard to find any town anywhere in America that does not have a place where you can rent storage. Whether it is a small storage, medium storage, or an entire warehouse, people need space to store their stuff. In fact, there are shows on television about people who hoard things to the point where you cannot even walk through their house without tripping over something. At some point, you almost have to ask, “What are they going to do with all that stuff?”

What is the twenty-first step to growing closer to Christ?

The twenty-first step to growing closer to Christ is contributing your things. You may have noticed as you have progressed through each day, your daily challenges have become more challenging. This is because as you grow closer to Christ, if your faith is not challenged then you will stagnate and not grow. In fact, if you're not challenged to grow in your faith, you will grow apart from Christ. For this reason, taking a serious look at the things that you have in light of God's plan to provide for us is a big step toward growing closer to Christ.

How does contributing your things help you grow closer to Christ?

Throughout my life, I have moved more times than I can count. Growing up, it was not unusual for my parents to buy a house and fix it up only to sell it one to two years later. Today they would be labeled as house flippers. Typically, my parents would take the profits from the house that they sold and use it to buy a bigger house to fix up. It wasn't until I was in high school that I lived in one place for more than 2 to 3 years. When I graduated from high school, I joined the army and over the next 13 years I also moved many times. After I left the army and eventually became a pastor, I still managed to move several times. One thing that I noticed is that there was a group of boxes that seemed to never get opened. Whenever we moved to a new location those same boxes got stored away somewhere. Not long ago, my wife and I had nowhere to live for a couple of years. We made the decision to sell or give away most of the things that we had been dragging around from house to house. I was shocked at how much stuff that we had that we did not need. Since that time, the number of things that we have in boxes consumes a very small space and is mostly things like pictures, photos, and memorabilia from the past.

It is amazing how you can drive around the average neighborhood and people will have their cars or trucks parked in their driveway or on the street because their garage is full of stuff. Today, when we drive through a neighborhood and see garage doors open and their garages packed full of their stuff, we laugh and realize that we too once had too much stuff. It is interesting how we associate the word stuff with stuffing. Whether it is a Thanksgiving turkey, or our stomachs after Thanksgiving dinner, all of us know what it is like to stuff something and to be stuffed. The question is how much stuff do we need to stuff into a small space that eventually looks like it was stuffed. At some point, we have to ask ourselves do we really need all of our stuff and if not, who else would have a need for our stuff? Likewise, it is also amazing how you can take something that you have no need of, and it can bring you great joy when you give it to someone who is in need.

Consider this

In Acts 2:41-45 we see that Peter had just preached the gospel on the day of Pentecost and the new believers were baptized, trained to be disciples, and shared their lives and possessions with one another. In verses 44 and 45 we are told that the believers sold some of their extra things they had and gave their things to one

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another as they had a need. For example, if five men all had axes, then some of the axes were sold and the remaining axes were shared with one another as they had need. These believers looked at their own things as something that they could share with others because they genuinely cared about each other. Jesus made mention of this idea in Matthew 19:16-26 when a man came to Jesus and asked Him what he needed to do to have eternal life. Jesus replied by first pointing out that no one is good except for God and that if he wanted eternal life, he needed to keep the commandments perfectly. The man replied that he had kept the commandments ever since he was young. Then Jesus told the man that if he was really perfect, he would sell all that he had and give it to the poor. When the man heard this, he walked away with sadness because he had many possessions. Jesus then said to the disciples that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

What Jesus demonstrated was not that you had to sell all your goods and give them to the poor to go to Heaven. He pointed out that selling all of your goods and giving to the poor demonstrates a changed heart motivated by your love for God and your neighbor. Jesus exposed the man by the fact that he did not have a changed heart that comes from salvation by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 John 4:19). Giving your things to others joyfully and willingly demonstrates a changed heart and draws you closer to Christ. (See also Matthew 6:19-21).

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves contributing your things. Today, pray and meditate on what God has done for you. Then, ask Him to inspire you as you go through your possessions and pick out things that you can donate to someone in need. Once you find the things, let people at church, or elsewhere, know that you would like to give them to whomever needs them. If you cannot find someone, take the things to a ministry that distributes goods to the poor. The important thing is that you do this to demonstrate to God that you love Him for what He did for you.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you've taken twenty-one steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Day Twenty-two -Contributing your food

It is no secret that in many parts of the world a lot of food is wasted. Likewise, in the same areas, obesity adversely affects the health of a large percentage of the population. Although many people struggle with obesity because of medical problems, many people also struggle with obesity because of their overconsumption of food. In the meantime, there are areas of the world where people spend most of their day trying to find their next meal. Therefore, feeding the hungry continues to be a need today as it was in the time of Christ.

What is the twenty-second step to growing closer to Christ?

The twenty-second step to growing closer to Christ is contributing your food. Since day 19 you have been focusing your efforts to draw closer to Christ by contributing what you have to others. Whether it is your treasure, or your time, or things that you have, few things are as important to those in need as food. Not only is this true for nutrition but also is an important part of building relationships in most cultures. When you make a willing and cheerful effort to contribute your food to someone that is hungry, it demonstrates your love for Christ in a deeper way than the other things that you have contributed to this point.

How does contributing your food help you grow closer to Christ?

All of us have seen some one on the street corner or outside of places of business holding signs that proclaim that they are hungry and/or willing to work for food. Likewise, many of us know people who have made poor decisions when it comes to how they spend their money that result in them not being able to buy food for their children. Regardless of how they got into the situation, we have the opportunity to minister to them with physical food as well as spiritual food.

Remember on day 19 the man in the dugout canoe that I met in Panama? Remember how he wanted to trade so many things for a simple can of meat that many of us considered to be the last thing that we would ever eat willingly. This man was able to at least work to obtain what he needed to trade for the meat. Many people are not that fortunate. Some may say that there are programs for people who are hungry. However, what most people do not realize is that getting the food or in some cases qualifying for the benefits is not always easy. This is especially true with those who are disabled or elderly that find it difficult just to get transportation to go anywhere. Finally, who said that the church should stop directly helping people in need? Do we really believe a government program is going to communicate the love of Christ to someone in need? Being directly involved will help you draw closer to Christ.

Consider this

In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus described events that would take place in the last days. He talked about how there would come a time when He would gather all the nations together and divide them like a shepherd separates the sheep from his goats. He said that there would be those who would inherit the kingdom of Heaven that would be recognized for what they did as believers motivated by a love of God and love of their neighbor (See 1 Corinthians 3:9-15). Of particular note, in verse 35, He commented that when He was hungry, they gave Him meat, when He was thirsty, they gave Him something to drink, when He was a stranger, they took Him in. He went on to describe many other things that they did for Him. He continued by describing how the righteous would ask Him when they saw Him in these circumstances. He answered and said that when you have done this for the least of His brethren, you have done it for Him.

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We learned yesterday about our motivation to contribute our things to others. It is the same way with food. Many of us have no problem donating to a food bank or a ministry that feeds the poor. However, how many times have you physically helped to provide that food? Too often we donate to these causes and rely upon others to carry out the mission. Notice, that Jesus said that you did these things for me, not that you arranged for someone else to do these things for me. This teaches us that we need to be up close and personal when it comes to ministering to others. Remember, we have learned before establishing relationships is more important than religion. Therefore, we must take a step of faith to personally reach out to those in need.

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves contributing your food. Today, your daily challenge can be accomplished in several ways of your choosing. The first way that you can take on your daily challenge is to go to a local store or local restaurant and purchase food that you can take to those that are in need. It may be sandwiches, or fruit, or any other type of food that you decide would be nutritious, convenient, and good tasting for those who receive it. Likewise, you could get the food and prepare it yourself for distribution. Once you have obtained the food then make arrangements to go to areas where you know there are people living on the streets that are in need. When you get there, hand out the food as you see the need. One note of safety is that when you do this you should not go alone.

The second way you can take on your daily challenge is to invite someone in need to your home to eat a meal. While this may take much more preparation, it will provide you with an opportunity to share your meal with a person in need. Again, when you do this, you should have someone with you. In either case, the important thing is that you take time to interact with the person, with whom you are sharing your food. Hopefully, this experience will open up opportunities to share your faith and love for Christ.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you've taken twenty-two steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Day Twenty-three - Contributing your prayers

One thing that even most non-believers will allow is for someone to pray for them. For some reason in many of their minds, they have this impression that if someone prays for them to whatever God the person praying believes in, it can't hurt and might actually help. Likewise, when a large number of people are killed in a natural disaster or violent act, people come out of the woodwork to pray, while most vocal opponents of God remain silent. This tells us that praying for others is something that we can do that will provide opportunities to minister to them and share Christ.

What is the twenty-third step to growing closer to Christ?

The twenty-third step to growing closer to Christ is contributing your prayers. On day four you connected with prayer. On day 16, you continued in prayer by creating and maintaining a prayer list in your discipleship journal. As you continue to use what you learn while growing closer to Christ, the next step is to contribute your prayers to others.

How does contributing your prayers help you grow closer to Christ?

Many times, I have shared my faith with others that resulted in polite conversation, but no willingness by the other person to trust Christ as their Savior. However, as I got to know the person over time, there eventually came a time when the person told me that they or someone they knew and cared about was going through a great struggle with something. I usually respond by asking many questions about what is happening and offer my sympathies. Since I do Biblical counseling, I have even taken to offering to meet with whomever is going through the tough time to help.

Before departing from the person who is sharing the issue, I always offer to pray for them. If they are the person going through the issue, I pray for God's strength and wisdom as they deal with the issue. If they are the person who knows the person who is having difficulty, I pray for God's strength and wisdom not only for the person going through the issue, but also for the person who shared the situation with me. I pray that they might be a good friend or loved one to provide help to the person in need. In either case, praying for the person who shared the issue with you opens an opportunity to minister to them.

It is amazing how when you take the time to pray with someone, it opens up doors to conversations that enable you to lay the groundwork to share the gospel. For example, for a while I worked for a funeral home chain as a funeral assistant and later directing and arranging funerals. There were many times I traveled several hours out into the desert on Native American lands with another staff member. Between the travel and the funeral, it often took all day.

After several trips, you got to know a lot about each other. Invariably, the other person would share what is going on in their life. As they got to know me more, the conversation always ended up with a discussion about what the Bible says about their issues. In essence, it became a traveling Biblical counseling and teaching session. However, at the end of the trip, I always prayed for the person. This opened up many opportunities to share the gospel with others that sometimes resulted in their trusting Christ or reaffirming their relationship with Him. To this day, many are still attending a church. When it is all said and done, when you take the time to pray and share your faith with someone, it brings joy and draws you closer to Christ.

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Consider this

In James 5:13-16 we are told about praying for others. In verse 13, we are told that if anyone is afflicted, let him pray. The word afflicted here comes from the same root word for affliction in James 5:10. Both bring to mind an evil oppression against a person. Praying in these situations was what Jesus told the disciples to do when they could not cast out demons in Matthew 17:14-21 and Mark 9:14-29. We are also told in James 5:13 to sing Psalms if we are merry. In verse 14, we are told that if anyone is sick, to call for the elders of the church to pray over the person and anoint the person with oil.

When these things are done, we are told in verse 15 that the prayer of faith shall save the sick and the Lord shall raise him up and forgive his sins. Finally, in verse 16 we are told to confess our faults to one another so that we may be healed. It concludes by saying “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” This means that when we share our struggles with someone, like an accountability partner, and we pray for each other it has amazing results. This praying for someone is called intercessory prayer and it is very effective. Therefore, God calls us to pray for others not only for their issues, but so that they might see that they need a closer relationship with Christ in their life.

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves contributing your prayers. Today, your challenge is to pray for someone. You can use your prayer list or choose someone that you know that may be struggling with something that they have shared with you. Meet with them in person and ask them if you can pray for them. If they give their approval, (I rarely have had anyone disapprove), pray for them. While you are praying for them, if they are okay with it, hold their hand with your hands or put your hand on their shoulder. Pray earnestly from your heart for them as you have learned on previous days. When you are done, arrange to follow-up at a later time about their situation and tell them you will also add to or keep them on your prayer list. If you attend a prayer group, ask the person if you can pray with others for them.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you’ve taken twenty-three steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Day Twenty-four - Contributing your worship

There is no shortage of Christian music on the radio. Likewise, the Christian music on the radio comes in just about any style or arrangement that you can imagine. It is no wonder then that many people are drawn to Christian music not only for the lyrics, but also the music. This is because music has a profound effect on people. Depending on the music, the mood of the person can be influenced for either good or bad. Therefore, since music is part of worship, contributing your worship to others can be a blessing.

What is the twenty-fourth step to growing closer to Christ?

The twenty-fourth step to growing closer to Christ is contributing your worship. On day five, you connected with a local church. By now you should be well aware of how music is used for worship. Likewise, on day 17 you continued in your worship by learning a new song that you can sing from memory. By now, you should be pretty confident in being able to sing the song, which will help you draw closer to Christ when you share it with others.

How does contributing your worship help you grow closer to Christ?

It is pretty clear that worship of God can be profoundly personal. Likewise, you've probably noticed that when you worship with a group at church there is a spirit in the room that brings joy and unity to the group. As we discussed before, worship helps to prepare the hearts of the people to receive the Word of God given in the message during the service. Likewise, you most certainly have noticed that not everyone can sing well or carry a tune. However, the point is not that we're able to sing with the same accomplishment and delivery as those that we may hear on the radio. The important thing is that we sing from our heart.

Since we are made in the image of God, I've often imagined God as a person much like us. As our heavenly Father, I'm sure that God has experienced things with us, His children (Galatians 3:26), just like we experience things with our children. I remember several times that my children would draw a picture when they were very young. When they finished the picture, they often would give it to me or my wife as a gift. Many times, I looked at the picture and made a comment about the picture, praising my child for the beautiful picture that they gave me. However, looking at the picture objectively it was quite clear that none of the pictures would end up in the fine arts museum. In fact, from an artistic perspective, many of the pictures were quite bad. But that did not stop me from putting the picture on the refrigerator or on the wall near my desk in my office and thinking fondly of my children whenever I saw it.

If I might take liberty for a moment to imagine how this might apply to our heavenly Father, I cannot help but think that God has a lot of ugly pictures on His refrigerator. However, like us, He knows that our gifts to Him of these things come from our heart motivated by love for Him. Likewise, it does not matter if we sing like an old hound dog with a sore throat. If we're singing to God from our heart, the last thing that I would think that is on His mind would be if we won a Grammy for our singing. Therefore, when we share our worship of God in Spirit and in truth with others it will not only help to draw us closer to Christ, but others as well.

Consider this

In 1 Samuel 16, the Lord asked Samuel how long he would mourn for King Saul since God had rejected Saul from being king over Israel. God had rejected Saul from being king because of his disobedience and idolatry. Therefore, God sent Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint a new king. Samuel traveled to Bethlehem

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where he anointed David as the new king of Israel. Immediately after this happened, the Bible says in 1 Samuel 16:14-23 that the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul and the Lord sent an evil spirit to trouble him. When this happened, Saul's servants recognize what was happening and asked him if he would like them to find someone that can play music for Saul. Saul agreed to this and eventually his servants sent for David, whom they knew could play music for the king.

When David arrived, Saul loved him greatly and made him his armor bearer. Then when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, David took a harp and played for Saul. The Bible tells us that Saul was refreshed and the evil spirit departed from him. What many people do not realize is that David also sang when he played and the lyrics that he sang were the Psalms. This passage teaches us that when we sing Christian music that is doctrinally correct and contains the Word of God, it has supernatural power that results in great things. Therefore, contributing your worship in song will have results in the hearts of those that hear.

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves contributing your worship. Today, your challenge is to sing your new song for someone. For many people, this may be a very difficult challenge. However, you must remember that you're singing for your heavenly Father, and it is Him that you seek to please. Therefore, plan a time when you can sing the song that you've learned for worship to bless others. You might sing your song as part of your worship with your small group, or you could make arrangements with your church leadership to sing your song to the congregation during your worship service. Either way, make arrangements to contribute your worship to others by singing your song to the Lord. If this is your focus, it will help you not to get nervous because no matter what, if you sing from your heart to the Lord it is pleasing to Him.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you've taken twenty-four steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Section 5 - Communicating

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” Matthew 28:18-20

For the first time in human history, man has the ability to stream live pictures from anywhere in the world and deep space. We have progressed from dialing in to a static filled broadcast from a local radio station to clicking on a live feed from the remote surface of Mars. More information is available to us now through the internet than has been available from all the world's libraries combined throughout human history. Our cell phones have more functionality now than the most powerful computers had just 20 years ago. With this information explosion, man has the ability to communicate to more people than any time in human history. With this new capability, we have opportunities to reach more people with the message of Jesus Christ that could not have been imagined just 30 years ago.

Along with this technological explosion, a new generation of tech savvy young people have grown up with a preference of electronic media over hard printed books. Bible applications can be downloaded for free, and the possibilities are endless when it comes to Bible study tools. Despite all this progress, it is still necessary that sharing the message of Christ and growing closer to Him requires people who are willing to step out of their comfort zone to minister to a kaleidoscope of cultures and lifestyles in a way that reaches the heart of each person no matter where or whom they are.

My wife and I have a wide range of experience with different technologies. We have the ability to track where the traffic comes from that accesses our messages, articles, and training on our ministry websites. To our surprise, a large percentage of people that access our websites live in primitive conditions surrounded by oppressive regimes and cultures that absolutely reject anything related to Christ and will put someone to death for being in possession of this information. However, we have also seen where these people are exploiting technologies to get around restrictions put in place to prevent them from accessing our ministry websites. Why do they do this? Because they are hungry for the truth, and they are willing to take the risk to be fed with God's Word.

At the time of this writing, we are working toward building an entire Bible college program along with other life application courses on the internet so that anyone, anywhere in the world can have access to the training they need, not only for their own needs, but to prepare them to minister to others. It is our vision to provide this training at no cost because of what the Apostle Paul teaches us in 1 Corinthians 9:16-19. In this passage, Paul explained how he was committed to preaching the gospel, not for his glory, but instead because he would suffer great sorrow or distress if he could not preach the gospel. He adds that because he willingly desires to preach it, his reward is to do so without charge so that he would not be seen as using it for personal gain, but rather so that he can be a servant to all men. Simply stated, the gospel is not for sale. It is the gift of God, not something to be purchased or earned. Therefore, we pray that we can do the same as we work to communicate the message in ways they can reach beyond borders and technologies.

With this in mind, the last six days of your journey to growing closer the Christ will focus on getting you out of your comfort zone. Your steps will be bigger, and your challenges will be harder, but your focus will be doing your part to communicate the Word of God and His gospel of salvation to those God brings across your path. You will learn about ways to do this over these last six days. May God bless you as you take these last steps toward drawing closer to Christ.

Day Twenty-five - Communicating the Word

Today, Biblical literacy is at an all-time low. Not only do people not believe that the Bible is the Word of God, but they also have no idea what the Bible teaches. This has led to a worldview that is destroying civilized societies. Likewise, the culture has not only become anti-Christian, but it has also become wicked and perverse. Social psychologists tell us that their numbers say that everything is getting better, but their numbers do not reflect the reality of how an anti-Christ worldview is destroying families. So, instead of admitting the obvious destruction, the world has redefined what is good and normal.

What is the twenty-fifth step to growing closer to Christ?

The twenty-fifth step to growing closer to Christ is communicating the Word. On day three you connected with the Word of God and began reading your Bible every day. On day 14 you continued in the Word and began a process of memorizing Scripture. Hopefully by now, you're reading and memorizing of Scripture has resulted in times when Bible verses come to mind out of nowhere in certain situations. This is the evidence that the Holy Spirit is speaking to you (Hebrews 11:1). Therefore, the next step is to share with others what God is showing you in his Word.

How does communicating the Word help you grow closer to Christ?

Imagine for a moment that you received a gift of a large sum of money. I'm not talking about just a few hundred dollars. I'm talking about millions of dollars. And if you received a gift of millions of dollars, what would be one of the first things you would do as soon as you found out? Well, the answer is pretty obvious. You would be on the phone, social media, and maybe even the news telling everyone about how you just obtained the great fortune. Many people who have received millions of dollars quickly found out that many people are interested in their story. However, they also found out that many of those same people are interested because of not so honorable reasons.

If you think about it, haven't we received a gift of great value? After all, how much is eternal life worth? Yet, few of us are as excited about sharing the news about the gift that we have received of salvation through Christ as we would be about sharing the news of receiving millions of dollars. Furthermore, one of the first things that people ask when you win a large sum of money is what are you going to do with the money? With this in mind, it would also be expected that if you received a gift of a large sum of money people would want to know how it happened. Additionally, we can also expect that they would want to know how they could also receive a gift of a large sum of money. This has often made me think, I wonder why we don't ask the same of ourselves, what are we going to do with our gift of salvation, and how can someone else receive it too? It should be apparent by now that the Bible gives us the answers to these questions. So, when we communicate the Bible's Words to others it pleases God and will help us grow closer to Christ.

Consider this

In Romans 10:12-17, the Bible teaches us about the importance of sharing the Word of God. It tells us in verses 12 and 13 that there's no difference between any of us when it comes to the Lord's willingness to bless us. It also says that anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. In verses 14 and 15 the question is asked how anyone can call upon the name of the Lord and believe what He did on the cross for them unless somebody tells them. It continues by asking how anyone can tell them unless they are sent to share the good news of God's Word. However, in verse 16 we are also told that not everyone who hears

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the good news of God's Word believes it. But, in verse 17 it is reinforced that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.

These verses give us the simple truth on why it is important to communicate the Word of God to others. But we must be prepared to accept the fact that not everyone will receive it and believe it. There will also be those who will openly reject it and may even become hostile to us for even mentioning it. The Bible goes on to tell us in Romans 10:18-21, the Word of God has been shared all over the world, but that should not stop us from continuing to proclaim its gospel message. Therefore, as long as we draw breath on this earth, we must actively take the steps to communicate the Word to everyone.

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves communicating the Word. Today, your challenge is to share the Word of God with someone. By now, you should be established in routine Bible study. Hopefully, you also are meeting with others during your small group times or at your church for the purpose of studying the Bible. Today, take some note cards or invitation cards and create invitations that you can give out to people to meet for Bible study. When you have completed the cards, personally hand them out to people and tell them that you would be honored if they would come to your Bible study. Again, the location, time, and who conducts the Bible study is up to you. The important thing is that you do your part to invite people to come so that they can hear the good news of salvation through the Word of God.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you've taken twenty-five steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Day Twenty-six - Communicating the gospel

I mentioned on day one of our study that in my experience I found that over 85% of the people who call themselves a Christian cannot describe what the Bible teaches about salvation. However, they still believe that they will go to Heaven when they die. If this many Christians cannot explain what the Bible teaches about salvation, imagine what the numbers are for those who do not describe themselves as Christians. As we see the signs mentioned in Scripture of the imminent return of Christ it is crucial that we share the gospel with as many people as possible.

What is the twenty-sixth step to growing closer to Christ?

The twenty-sixth step to growing closer to Christ is communicating the gospel. The gospel is the core message of every verse in Scripture. From Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21, the message is clear, that God provided a way that we can have an eternal face to face and heart to heart relationship with Him. However, our own sin has separated us from God. Therefore, communicating the gospel, the good news about Jesus Christ, is the number one way that we can show our love for God and show our love for each other.

How does communicating the gospel help you grow closer to Christ?

The vast majority of people take great joy in watching a wedding. In fact, I have met several people who met their spouse at a wedding or as a result of a friend marrying someone else, which introduced them to people they did not know before. At a wedding it is not uncommon to see people cry. Most often, people cry because weddings mark an important milestone in someone's life. In some cases people cry because the wedding is a milestone that marks the leaving of childhood and becoming a full-fledged adult. In other cases, people cry for simply the sheer joy of the moment, knowing that the couple is about to embark on an adventure like no other in their lifetime.

The same can be said about someone who trusts Christ as their Savior. Many times in my experience, when someone has trusted Christ as their Savior or when they were baptized, many tears were shed. Like the wedding, salvation marks an important milestone in somebody's eternal life. On one hand, it marks the leaving of a life where the person was all alone in their struggle against sin and death. On the other hand, it marks the moment when the sheer joy of knowing that they have victory over sin and death along with an eternal future in the presence of the Lord overwhelms them with emotion. In either case, they too are about to embark on an adventure like no other for eternity. Nothing can give the child of God more joy than the moment that we share the truth of salvation through Jesus Christ and somebody accepts His gift of salvation. This joy is a powerful influence toward drawing us closer to Christ.

Consider this

In John 15:1-17, Jesus taught His disciples that He was the true vine and God the Father was the husbandman. A husbandman is a person that tends to a garden, making sure that it is well cared for and watered so that it will grow. Throughout this passage, Jesus compared the work done in a garden to the work that He called us to do on earth. In verse two, He explained that branches that do not bear fruit are taken away and branches that do bear fruit are purged, or pruned, so that they will bring forth more fruit. In verse three, He explained that we are clean through the Word of God which He spoke. In verses four through eight, He described how a branch can only bear fruit if it receives a life-giving energy from the vine. He also warned that if a branch does not live in the vine, it withers and is cast in the fire to be burned. In verse eight, He said that when we bear fruit, we are His disciples, and we glorify God. In verses 10 through 13,

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He explained that our motivation for bearing fruit is love and that love will give us a fullness of joy. He added that there is no greater demonstration of love than someone who lays down their life for their friends. Finally, in verses 14 to 17, He finished by saying that we're no longer servants, but His friends and that He has chosen us to bring forth fruit that remains and will also provide all that we need to carry out this task.

Many people believe that Jesus was referring to good works as the fruit. However, there's one phrase that is very telling about what is most important. It is found in verse 16 when He said that we should "bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." Just as a branch produces fruit from the strength of the vine, Jesus uses us to produce new believers through the sharing of the gospel. These new believers are the "fruit that remains." Likewise, if someone does not abide in Christ, they're not a believer and their version of salvation does not produce fruit that remains. Therefore, it is important as believers that we understand and can share the clear gospel message in a way that is easy for others to understand.

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves communicating the gospel. Today, your challenge is to share the gospel with someone. There are many different ways to share the gospel. One method is to buy gospel tracts that explain how to be saved and hand them out to people. However, we must learn how to share the gospel from memory. For this reason, John 3:16 can be used as a simple way to present the gospel (1). John 3:16 is as follows:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

You can use this verse as an outline in the following way. First, "God so loved the world", means that God loves every one that has ever lived, is living, and will live. "That He gave His only begotten Son", means that God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to be born as a baby, grow to be a man, and live a life without ever committing any sins. Because He never sinned, He was not deserving of death because the Bible says the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). However, Jesus willingly allowed Himself to be wrongfully crucified on the cross to pay for our sins. "That whosoever believeth in Him" means that whoever believes that Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins, "should not perish", meaning they will not have to die and go to Hell to pay for their own sins. "But have everlasting life", meaning that when they die they will spend eternity living in the presence of the Lord!

It is important that you really understand what John 3:16 says. Then, when you're ready, either write out John 3:16 on a card or bookmark it in your Bible. When you have done this, practice how you will present it. One of the best ways I have found is to simply ask someone if it would be all right to show them one Bible verse that tells them how they can go to Heaven. If they say yes, then open your Bible or show them the card and teach them what each part of the verse means that you learned above.

Additional references explaining John 3:16 are as follows:

For God so loved the world: 1 John 4:10 and 1 John 2:1-2
That He gave His only begotten Son: 1 John 4:9-10 and Romans 5:8-21
That whosoever believeth in Him: John 20:21 and 1 John 5:1-13
Should not perish: John 10:28 and Matthew 10:28
But have everlasting life: John 5:24 and John 6:51

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Once you are ready to share the gospel, go somewhere where there are many people and share with them what you have learned. After you present the gospel to someone, ask them what they think about what they've read. They may ask questions, so it is important that you know the gospel very well. However, before you leave, ask them if they believe that Jesus died on the cross to pay for their sins and was raised from the dead. If they say yes, then ask them if they would like to pray to thank God for their salvation and His strength to live a new life. If they say no, then ask them if it is all right if you pray for them for God's blessings. Finally, leave some sort of card or paper that has contact information and invite them to your Bible study or church services.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you've taken twenty-six steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

(1) Williams, Michael, (2007). *Sharing Our Savior*. Albuquerque, NM.

Day Twenty-seven - Communicating your testimony

Everyone loves a good story. It may be in the form of a book or movie, or it just may be a story that one of your elderly relatives told you. I mentioned before that if you look at every name etched in stone in a cemetery, you could write a book or create a movie about their life. At that time, we were discussing the talents that each of us are blessed with. However, the story is what gives us a full picture of who they were and the influence that they had on others.

What is the twenty-seventh step to growing closer to Christ?

The twenty-seventh step to growing closer to Christ is communicating your testimony. A testimony is someone's telling of events that took place. Sharing your testimony of salvation with others is an excellent way of demonstrating how God's grace and mercy changed your life. It also serves as a constant reminder of why we love Christ, which draws us closer to Him.

How does communicating your testimony help you grow closer to Christ?

In the legal world, a testimony is an important part of sharing the truth through an eyewitness description of what a person knows as it relates to a court case. However, when it comes to our testimony, it is a description of what we know as it relates to the events that occurred when we learned about salvation through Jesus Christ. A testimony in court provides others with a better understanding of not only what happened, but also how it may have happened. Likewise, our testimony puts a face on how salvation through Jesus Christ produced results in us.

I remember one time that my family and I were attending a church service in Salt Lake City, Utah. During the service, two little girls that were sisters sang the song, *Amazing Grace*. As we listened to these little girls sing this song, I started chuckling when the little girls sang the lyrics, "that saved a wretch like me." Most people tell you that I have a very broad sense of humor and sometimes will laugh at the most obscure things. In this case, I envisioned for a moment that these two little innocent girls once lived a life as troublemakers carousing around town starting fights in the local bars. (Don't say I didn't warn you that I have a very broad sense of humor). Anyhow, you and I both know that it is a ridiculous proposition to suggest that these two little girls, about the ages of six and seven, lived a lifestyle that was even remotely close to what my warped sense of humor suggested.

Nevertheless, it got me thinking about salvation. We all love to hear the story of the troublemaker that carouses around town and started fights at local bars that was saved and is now living a changed life. Sometimes, I think that we base our understanding of the miracle of salvation on how extreme someone lived their life before being saved. However, these little girls singing this song reminded me that in God's eyes, stealing a cookie from mommy when we knew we were not supposed to is worthy of the same penalty as the troublemaker starting fights and even murderers. Therefore, we must also realize that every testimony is worth telling. In the case of these little girls, they may not have the dramatic testimony of someone saved from a long hard life of sin. However, their testimony tells the story of the great effort of how their parents, as adults, were producing two little girls who boldly stood before the entire congregation and shared their love for God and us through their song. Their song drew me closer to Christ because it made me realize how amazing His grace really is as it works in every person.

Consider this

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In 1 Peter 3:12-15, we're told about why it is important to share our testimony. In verse 12, we are told that the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous and His ears are open to their prayers. The Bible teaches us that the righteous are those who by faith, have trusted Christ as their Savior (Romans 3:10-4:12; Ephesians 2:8-9). Likewise, we are told that we become children of God by faith in Christ in Galatians 3:26. On the other hand, verse 12 also tells us that the face of the Lord is against those that do evil. Those that do evil in God's eyes, have not trusted Christ as their Savior (Proverbs 15:28; Jeremiah 13:10; Hebrews 3:1-12; Hebrews 10:22).

In verses 13 and 14, we're told that if we are followers of that which is good, Jesus Christ, and suffer for our beliefs we will be happy and not afraid. Finally, in verse 15 we're told to sanctify the Lord in our hearts and always be ready to give an answer with meekness and humility before God to any one that asks why we're so happy and full of hope. This is the core of our testimony, the constant reminder to ourselves of what Christ did for us. When we can use that motivation combined with our personal story of how He changed our life, it can be more powerful than any story imagined by any writer or producer from anywhere in the entertainment industry. Therefore, we have an obligation to present our story to the glory of God.

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves communicating your testimony. Today, your challenge is to communicate your testimony with someone. There are many different ways to share your testimony. One way is to tell your story from the personal perspective of yourself. You can tell what your life was like and how you came to know the truth of salvation and what it did for you. What I have found is that sharing your testimony can be an effective way of sharing the gospel. You can do this by tailoring your testimony so that it weaves the gospel into specific parts of your story. For example, earlier I shared with you the testimony of how my wife and I got saved. As part of that testimony, I explained our thinking about how we came to believe the truth of salvation. When you present your testimony in this way to unbelievers, it presents to them in a nonthreatening way how the gospel applies to their lives too. It also gives them an opportunity to ask questions based on your story when they're too shy to share their own.

Take the time to write down your testimony of salvation. Rehearse it in your mind until you can share it with someone if you have only 1 to 2 minutes to do it. This may take a lot of editing to create a simple way of telling your story that is effective in communicating the truth of what God has done in your life. When you're ready, share your testimony with at least one person, praying that God will use it to reach the heart of someone else like He reached your heart.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you've taken twenty-seven steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Day Twenty-eight - Communicating the ministry

If you ask people what comes to mind when they think of the term nonprofit, you might get several answers. Often you will find that a church or house of worship is what comes to mind for most people when they think of a nonprofit. Other people will think of any organization that is tax exempt as a nonprofit. However, being a nonprofit should only be one aspect to consider when thinking about any organization that serves people. Likewise, we should carefully consider promoting any organization that claims to help people.

What is the twenty-eighth step to growing closer to Christ?

The twenty-eighth step to growing closer to Christ is communicating the ministry. Throughout your study on how to grow closer to Christ you have learned many things. Hopefully, you have learned that Jesus came that we may have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10). Because of what He did on the cross, we should be motivated to demonstrate our love for God by loving one another in service. However, it is also important that we discern between who really loves God and their neighbor and who says that they love God and their neighbor for personal gain when it comes to ministry. When we take the time to discern whether not a ministry is doing the work of the Lord, it helps us to understand that there are others that we can join with for the Lord's work, which will help us all to grow closer to Christ.

How does communicating the ministry help you grow closer to Christ?

Having a Biblical counseling ministry gives us a unique perspective on the struggles and needs of many people. Likewise, it also gives us a unique perspective on what takes place in many ministries. Often, I have found that people who struggle with life issues and meeting their own needs attend churches that have no interest in ministering to people outside the walls of their church. Likewise, many churches do not promote ministries who help people because they are not connected or affiliated with their ministry. Instead, their focus is getting people to come to them and support what they're doing.

Often, when people ask about our church, one of the first things they ask is how many people do we have attend our services. Likewise, in the past when I have interviewed with a church as a potential candidate to be their pastor, I have been asked what I will do to grow the church. My answer was, it still is, it is not my job to grow the church. It is God that grows the church as He sees fit. It is my job and the job of every believer to be faithful in serving the Lord and our neighbor with sincerity and in truth. This means our focus should never be on how many seats we can fill on Sunday, but instead, how many souls we can fill every day. With this in mind, it is important that we identify ministries that have a Christ-centered attitude in their mission, vision, and values in their desire and practice of doing the Lord's work. Then we should make every effort to promote and support those ministries.

Consider this

We find the word minister many places in the Bible. In Exodus 24:13, Joshua is described as a minister of Moses. In Exodus 28:1, Aaron and his sons are described as ministers of God. Paul considered himself a minister of Jesus Christ to the gentiles in the role of ministering the gospel of God (Romans 15:16; Colossians 1:25). We could continue, but it is clear throughout the Bible that a minister is a servant to someone. Therefore, anyone who calls themselves a minister must adopt the mindset of a servant that is focused on serving others. Our perfect example of this mindset is Jesus Christ. He was a minister to the Jews to confirm the truth of God and the promises made to their fathers (Romans 15:8). Likewise, He did not seek to self-promote any reputation for Himself, but instead, took upon Himself the role of a servant in

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the flesh as a human man. As a servant, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the will of God the Father, even to the point of dying on the cross for our sins (John 8:26-31; Philippians 2:5-8).

With these things in mind, just as we are called to promote the message and ministry of Christ to the world, we should also promote those who focus on promoting the message and ministry of Christ to the world. To do this, we must have discernment. We need to ask the hard questions required to determine if the ministry that we promote meets this criterion. Consider these questions:

- Does the ministry promote Christ and his message above anyone or anything?
- Does the ministry seek to minister in spirit and in truth?
- Does the ministry strive to go out into the world and make disciples for Christ?
- Does the ministry practice good stewardship of the things and finances that God has blessed them with?
- Does the ministry focus more on bringing people to Christ than bringing people to themselves?
- Does the ministry operate from a legalistic set of rules and regulations ahead of serving with a Christ like mindset?

By now, hopefully you get the picture as to the questions you need to ask when it comes to promoting a ministry. As you discern which ministries serve with this Christ-centered attitude and practice, you should then take an active role in promoting these ministries.

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves communicating the ministry. Today, your challenge is to identify and promote a ministry. Using the questions listed above, along with any others, identify a ministry that you can promote. Meet with those involved with that ministry and talk with them about their mission, their vision as servants, and the values that they maintain in carrying out their mission and vision. In addition to this, pray intently for God's wisdom and discernment in this task so that your choice would please God. Once you have identified a ministry to promote, regularly reevaluate the ministry using this criterion because, sadly, not all ministries will maintain this perspective and mindset. When you're confident of your choice then do all, you can to promote that ministry to others.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you've taken twenty-eight steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Day Twenty-nine - Communicating the need

If you ask most ministry leaders what is the number one thing that is needed for their ministry, the top answer given is help. Likewise, it is a quietly quoted fact by ministry leaders that 90% of the work in most ministries is usually done by the same 10% of the people. Additionally, there are those in the other 90% that are not doing the work that complain about how the faithful 10% are doing the 90% of the work. With this in mind, it is no secret that communicating the need for help is important.

What is the twenty-ninth step to growing closer to Christ?

The twenty-ninth step to growing closer to Christ is communicating the need. I am sure that you have noticed that your challenges for each day have required you to do more things. Likewise, most ministries start out small with very few people, but as the workload grows, so does the need for help. Unfortunately, the people in the trenches doing the work of a ministry often struggle to find the time to look for help. Therefore, when you successfully communicate the need to others to join in the work of the ministry it serves to draw everyone closer to Christ.

How does communicating the need help you grow closer to Christ?

Over the years while serving in ministry, I've encountered many people who were quick to offer advice on what needs to be done in our church. Likewise, I have also encountered many people who have attended our church, and they express extreme pleasure in the worship, the messages, and the ministry outreach of the church. However, when asked to help with the work they are often very noncommittal or make excuses as to why they cannot help. Additionally, I've encountered many people who are interested in helping, but they exhibit no faithfulness in attendance or personal discipleship and for these reasons they are unable to be relied upon.

One area of particular note in many churches is the church nursery. Nearly everyone I've talked to says that a church should have a place where very young children can be taken during the service. However, it is often very difficult to find anyone willing to take on that task. Suggestions have been made that the mothers of these children along with the volunteers in the nursery should take turns serving in the nursery. Unfortunately, many are unwilling to do this, which leaves a select few to do the work and results in them very rarely having the ability to participate in the weekly worship service. When this happens, it leaves many of these workers burnt out and discouraged. Likewise, many of these workers struggle with life issues because they do not have the opportunity to learn and grow in their faith because they are not able to attend most of the services offered as they are working in the nursery.

In addition to there being a lack of help, I have often seen people who make statements about things that churches should provide, but not only are they unwilling to help, but many will leave the church to attend another church because the other one offers those things. It is very clear from my experience and the experience of many others in ministry that many people in the church, like those in our culture, have a consumer mindset and feel that it is someone else's job to contribute to the effort. It is sad because this mindset robs them of the opportunity to be part of something greater than themselves, which provides great joy and a sense of belonging which draws them closer to Christ.

Consider this

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In John 4:4-38, Jesus was traveling through Samaria and had just met a Samaritan woman at a well. After He had a discussion with her about who He was, His disciples came to Him and encouraged Him to eat. Jesus told them that He had meat that they did not know of. This confused the disciples, so they asked each other if someone had brought Him something to eat. Jesus then told them that His meat was to do the will of Him that sent Him to finish His work. He continued by asking them if it is true that they say that there are four more months and then it will be harvest season? He added that they should lift up their eyes and look on the fields because the fields were ready for harvest.

Jesus continues this conversation by explaining that those who are doing the work of the ministry receive wages while they are making an eternal difference in the lives of the people they serve. He added that their work, both sowing and reaping, brings joy to all involved. He also stated that one person may sow, and another may reap, but each has an important part to the success of each other's work. This teaches us that each of us has a role in the work of the ministry. That no role can be independent of the other roles because each role is important to the success of the others. Therefore, whether it is serving in the nursery, cleaning the church, shoveling the snow, cutting the grass, or preaching the message, each person serving in these roles needs the others serving in their roles to ensure that God's mission is carried out successfully. Likewise, these verses teach us that each of us have a role to help and to recruit others for the work that God has ordained us to do. (See also 1 Corinthians 3:4-15; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31; 1 Corinthians 15:58).

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves communicating the need. Today, your challenge is to communicate the need for workers in the ministry. Yesterday, you took the time to identify a ministry that you could tell others about. Today, you'll take it to the next level by communicating the needs of this ministry to others and committing to doing your part to meet those needs. Ask the ministry leaders what you can do to help and make a commitment to them to be part of the effort. At the same time, ask what other help they need so that you can actively recruit people to commit to do their part for the work of the Lord.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you've taken twenty-nine steps toward growing closer to Christ. God bless you as you continue on your journey.

Day Thirty Communicating the message

Well, here you are. Day 30 of your journey. I am sure that along the way there were times you wondered if you would ever make it to this day. At the same time, you're probably now wondering what is in store for you on this last day. I will tell you this, up until this day your focus has been on growing closer to Christ. However, I would like you to consider for a moment how your journey has also prepared you to do great things for the Lord. Likewise, consider how you have accomplished things that you may have never been able to do before. Therefore, although I hope today will be a milestone in your relationship with Christ, it is my hope and prayer for you that your journey does not stop here but continues forward to accomplishing even greater things for Christ.

What is the thirtieth step to growing closer to Christ?

The thirtieth step to growing closer to Christ is communicating the message. Throughout your journey, you have progressed from making connections and commitments to actually carrying out daily challenges that require ever-increasing faith and effort. Now, you will take the biggest step of all toward growing closer to Christ. God has been preparing you for this day and strengthening you so that you can be as successful as you have been on previous days. I am confident that when you complete your challenge for this day you will experience a closeness to Christ that you've never had before.

How does communicating the message help you grow closer to Christ?

If you've ever read *Fox's Book of Martyrs*, you will find story after story of those who were persecuted and, in most cases, put to death for their faith since the time of Christ. When you read the details of what was done to them, it is hard to imagine how one human being can kill another human being simply because they disagree with them about what happens after they die. Yet, one would ask how is it that anyone could find the strength to be faithful to Christ, even if it means their death. How was it that someone can be tied to a post and wood stacked around them and set on fire and they can sing hymns to the Lord with joy until they finally burn to death? The answer is really quite simple when we consider that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13).

So then, how is it that you can do all things through Christ? The answer is that as you grow closer to Christ, He enables you to do things beyond any human reasoning. As you grow closer to Christ, you learn that you can trust Him more with each passing day. This trust enables you to take bigger steps in your faith because you know that He loves you as His child and He wants what is best for you. With this in mind, when you experienced this relationship, how could you ever want it to be a secret? How could you not want to share the message with others that not only has changed your eternal destiny, but changes your very being? How can you hide the change He is making in you that makes you more like Christ and see the world the way He sees it. Therefore, communicating the message to others outside your circle of friends will solidify your confidence that you can do all things through Christ with His strength.

Consider this

Our Scripture passage for these last six days is Matthew 28:19-20. Our keyword for these last six days is the word communicating. On day 25, your challenge was to communicate the Word. On day 26, your challenge was to communicate the gospel. On day 27, your challenge was to communicate your testimony. On day 28, your challenge was to communicate the ministry. Yesterday, on day 29, your challenge was to communicate the need. Each of these days are an important part of communicating the message.

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One of the greatest missionaries of all time was the Apostle Paul. Paul was a Pharisee who played a great role in the persecution and even death of those who trusted Christ as their Savior. However, while traveling to Damascus to persecute even more Christians, the Lord personally revealed Himself to Paul. This personal intervention resulted in Paul being changed from a persecutor to a promoter of salvation by grace through faith in Christ. This did not sit well with the religious authorities that looked to Paul to be their right-hand man in putting an end to what they saw as a blasphemous uprising against God and their established religious system that had given them prestige and made them prosperous.

The first thing that the apostles had Paul do after learning of his testimony of salvation was to send him back home to Tarsus to preach the message to his family and friends. Later, as the message of Christ spread beyond Judea, Paul was called into service to take the message throughout the Mediterranean in a series of missionary journeys. We learn from Paul's testimony that there comes a point in the growth of our faith that we must take our ministry to the next level. In this case, the next level is to go on our own missionary journey so that we can communicate the message that Paul and others communicated before us.

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith

Your daily challenge sure to increase your faith involves communicating the message. Today, your challenge is to communicate the message of salvation on a short-term mission trip. Talk to your pastor and others that you know that are mature in their faith and very involved in the work of the Lord. Tell them that you want to go on a short-term mission trip and that you would like their advice and help. With their help and guidance, make a decision as to what mission trip you will participate in and take the steps to make it happen. Keep in mind that a short-term mission trip does not necessarily have to be out of the country for a long period of time. There are plenty of people not far from where you live that need to hear the message of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Your short-term mission trip needs to be one that is at least a few days long and away from home. Likewise, it should involve working with others to do whatever is planned for that mission. You'll also have to consider the expenses involved and taking the time away to complete a trip. Finally, pray intently and fervently that God gives you the strength, the confidence, and the wisdom to do what He needs you to do during this trip and that He opens your eyes to the endless possibilities of what can be done for His glory.

Once you have completed this daily challenge, you've taken thirty steps toward growing closer to Christ. However, this is not the end, but only the beginning of many more days of growing closer to Christ. God bless you as your journey continues until the day that you've arrived in the presence of our precious Savior.

Epilogue

Congratulations! You've reached the end of this study: *Grow Closer to Christ in 30 Days*. By now, you realize that the daily challenges did not get any easier as you progressed through each day. Likewise, you probably noticed that some of the challenges may have been quite difficult, if not impossible in some cases, to complete in one day. However, the point of this study was not to grow closer to Christ in 30 days and leave you there thinking that you've arrived. No, the point of this study was to establish new habits and routines in your life that will serve as a starting point toward growing closer to Christ every day for the rest of your life.

Remember, we looked at Acts 2:14-47 as the lesson plan for these 30 days. Likewise, each six days had a key word that served as the theme for your challenges. Those keywords were connecting, committing, continuing, contributing, and communicating. Notice carefully how each of these keywords also served as milestones for your growth in your faith and relationship with Jesus Christ. From the first connection to your latest communication, you have progressed in what you can accomplish for Jesus Christ. This is the very essence of discipleship, building upon what you learned the day before and using it for His Glory.

In Acts 11:22-30, we learn about the ministry of Barnabas and Saul, later known as Paul, in the Greek city of Antioch located near the present-day border of Turkey and Syria. Peter had just shared the gospel with a gentile named Cornelius and went to Jerusalem to share with the disciples what had happened. After some initial surprise that Peter had gone to a gentile's house, they rejoiced when they heard that the Holy Spirit have been given to the gentiles. Therefore, they sent Barnabas to Antioch with the news and to teach the disciples in Antioch how to draw closer to Christ (Acts 11:22-23).

Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and his preaching and teaching attracted many people. So, he decided that he should go get Saul (Paul) and have him come to Antioch to help train the disciples. Barnabas and Saul spent the whole year teaching many people (Acts 11:24-26). After training them for a year, the disciples in Antioch were the first ones to be called Christians. The question is, what did Barnabas and Saul teach them during that year? We find from numerous references in the Bible that the teaching that was used to train disciples to be Christians in Antioch and other places was the very same teaching that was used in Acts 2:14-47. This is why this teaching is referred to as discipleship.

It is important to note that although these disciples were believers, they were not called Christians until after their training. This reveals to us the need to offer discipleship training today in our churches. It is no secret that many people who call themselves Christians do not understand or know that a Christian is someone who is like Christ. Therefore, as you learned in this study, to become like Christ you must commit to continuing in discipleship so that God can change your heart, which will change your mind, so that your life changes into the image of Christ.

With these things in mind, you're probably wondering where you go from here. You were given 30 days of challenges, but now you have the foundation to know what you need to do next. I would suggest that not only do you commit in your effort to continue as a disciple of Jesus Christ, but I would also recommend that you make an effort to learn more. Therefore, I would challenge you to seek out training in the following areas. First, take a course that introduces you to the Bible and how to study it. Second, take Old Testament and New Testament courses so that you become more familiar with the books of the Bible and what they contain. Third, take a Bible doctrines or systematic theology course so that you can learn what the Bible teaches about certain subjects such as God, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, the church, angels, Satan, humanity,

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end-times events, and other things. Finally, take a course on the life of Christ. These courses should give you a good overview of your Bible and will serve as a foundation for advanced study and wisdom that will take you to deep levels in your relationship with Christ and your relationship with others.

Now, I will give you your final challenge sure to increase your faith. Read Psalms 37:1-8 and pray that God will make this passage your goal for the rest of your life. Do not worry or be envious of those who reject righteousness. Trust the Lord in all that you do, and He will provide a place for you and ensure that your needs are met. Take joy in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart. However, He will bless you with a heart that desires much more than anything that can be found in this world. Commit your way to the Lord and trust in Him and He will bless you with success, increase your righteousness, and sharpen your judgment. Rest in the Lord with patience without worrying about those who prosper in wickedness. Finally, as you commit to this goal, you will find peace, freedom from anger and rage, guarding of your heart and mind from evil, and the desire to share God's gift with as many as will receive it.

May God bless you and keep you. May his face shine upon you and give you peace until that day that we can share sweet fellowship in the presence of the Lord as brothers and sisters for eternity. Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift.

Dr. Mike