


Daily Devotions to Deepen Your Faith



TAKE



HEART



FOR TEENS



David Powlison

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Daily Devotions  
to Deepen Your Faith

DAVID POWLISON



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## INTRODUCTION



I had the great gift of a great earthly father. David Powlison was my dad for thirty-seven years before he went to live with his heavenly Father, and I wish you could have met him. He could make anyone feel at ease and often looked for a way to bring a laugh into the conversation. Before you jump into reading his words, I thought you might like to know a little more about him. So come along and let me introduce you to my dad.

It was the end of a long, hot day of driving in Northern California when my dad decided to chase the moon. He was there to teach at a conference—I was fourteen and along for the ride. As far as I know he had no idea where he was going. There were no cell phones or internet searches to get recommendations for *amazing nature experiences in Alameda County*. On that evening in June we were driving through a flat and barren land on a back road seemingly to nowhere.

We parked in the dirt and walked up a slight rise. The sky was vastly open, reflecting in its own way the washed-out landscape. The sun in the west was finally warming to the idea of setting by glowing in softer colors—not the harsh brightness of midday, but hues of dusky peach and soft plum. The sunset itself would have been worth the wandering, but soon we turned a half circle and saw the start of a parallel light rising in the east. I remember the quietness of awe settling on us as the full moon rose to give a farewell glance to the other great light. As it emerged, the color and feel of the whole sky shifted to cooler and serene. It was a magic of mirroring with my dad and me right in the middle. We didn't know where to look, so we kept repeating the half turn over and over. We made it a game to try and catch the last glimpse of the fading sun and the moment the moon was freed from the horizon to begin its rule of the night sky. We laughed and delighted in wonder.

I only realize now how unique this quality of my dad's was. Children are naturally filled with wonder and awe. But sadly, most of us grow out of it. He never grew out of wonder and awe and it affected every area of his life. You need a sense of awe to live a life of vibrant faith. Maybe you know that by now, but maybe you've forgotten. Let me encourage you that no matter why or how you came to have this devotional book in your hand, if you continue to read past the introduction, you will find reasons to remember and grow in your own sense of wonder. And a commitment to that growth will change your life.

Because my dad lived a life of awe, he wrote and spoke a lot about reasons to delight in and live under our awesome God. As you read, you will find that he was always finding new aspects of God's character to rejoice in and be uplifted by. He was fascinated by the ways the Bible speaks into the ordinary life experiences of all people. And he was especially filled with wonder at God's care for the hurting and the suffering. My dad loved the Bible, and if he were here to write this introduction, he would certainly encourage you to ponder the Scripture references that lead off each day. Because God is alive and the words of the Bible are living and active, a life full of Scripture promises to be pretty exciting. At the end of each entry, there are a few lines to *Take with You*. These thoughts and questions were added by the editors to help you pause and grab onto one more layer of who God is and how he is speaking to you in your daily reality.

I hope that as you walk forward, one day at a time, you will grow in your own excitement and delight, your own awe and wonder of your life with the God who sees you. And don't forget to stop and look at the moon.

—Gwenyth Powlison Ray

## JANUARY 1

As for me, I am poor and needy,  
but the Lord takes thought for me.  
You are my help and my deliverer;  
do not delay, O my God! —Psalm 40:17



**W**e don't like to be weak or let others think we are. But the truth is, we are. We are physically weak—we don't live forever, we get sick, and we face hard things. And we are spiritually weak—our hearts want their own way. We put what we want ahead of loving God. We think we are better than others or care more about what others think of us than what God thinks.

To admit weakness is not natural. We would rather hear people say, “You are STRONG!” and “You can do it!” But admitting we are weak is a good thing. *Weakness is a most unusual door into all the ways God makes us strong.*

Being unafraid to be publicly weak was true of King David. This psalm paints a picture of God's strength and rescue. Yet David describes himself this way: “As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me.” David's strength grew out of his total sense of weakness and his total faith in God's strength.

My deepest hope for you is that you would be unafraid to admit you are weak and that you'd find, like David, that admitting you need help is the doorway to the strength of God himself.

**Take with You:** Ask God for help when you feel weak. Instead of trying to cover up and pretend you are strong, tell God all about it and maybe talk with a friend too.

## JANUARY 2

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” —Matthew 6:33



**W**hat are you wishing for? What are you obsessing about? What do you want most? The answers to those questions will be connected to what you're worrying about. *When your whole heart is consumed with something besides God, you're going to worry about it. Only God can be pursued wholeheartedly without worry or anxiety.*

So the biggest question you will face cuts the deepest: What do you want with your whole heart? What are you loving? Who are you loving? Are you loving pleasure, your image, or control? Are you loving being liked? Are you obsessed with wanting to escape? These questions cut deep, and your answers affect everything you feel, everything you think, how you treat people, and the way you come into a conversation.

We're called to love God with all that we are. God wants us to seek him, his kingdom, and his good way of living first. We can make pursuing God the most important thing when we trust he's going to take care of all the other things. And, as we grow in our trust in God, our worries will be opportunities to turn to him for the help we need.

**Take with You:** When you are worried or consumed by something, stop and ask God to help you love him first and best right in the middle of your anxiety. Ask him to turn your anxiety into trust.

## JANUARY 3

For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. —2 Corinthians 4:6



**C**an people change? Can you change? Or do life experiences or personality dictate who you are? Some days it might feel like you are always going to have the same struggles. But that's not true. *The good news is that you can change when the Holy Spirit brings the love of God into your heart through the gospel.*

The things that have happened to you can shape you. But they don't have the last word on who you are and who you will become. On the contrary, disappointments can make you long to know your heavenly Father, Good Shepherd, Savior, and God! You can cry out, “Abba, Father,” and he will hear and answer you (Romans 8:15).

When God lives in you, his truth becomes clearer and brighter than your troubles, failures, and sins. You will change as you hear and see what God tells you about himself (Psalm 103:10–13; Isaiah 49:13–16).

God is in the business of changing people's minds; he is not hindered by wrong thinking. He can reveal himself, “[shining] in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). Life experience or the lies people believe don't trump everything. God is supreme, and he alone can change your heart, your mind, and your actions.

**Take with You:** What is one thing you would like God to change about you today? Change begins with knowing God. Ask him to show you specific ways he cares for you.



## JANUARY 4

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life.  
Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,  
and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.  
Do you believe this?” —John 11:25–26



**H**ow do you know that the promises God makes to you are true? How do you know that the living God gives true, concrete hope? Because Jesus defeated death. As a willing and sinless substitute, he died in our place on the cross. And God raised him to life and joy. He is alive! Peter explains it this way: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3–4 NIV). Your Father in heaven has great mercy. He makes us alive. He gives us realistic joy and hope.

Jesus is alive! His resurrection is his guarantee that you can live in real hope. *Your hope is not based on a pipe dream that changed circumstances, the passing of time, a new set of friends, or even giving up will somehow cure how you feel. God gives living hope based on the physical reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.* Because the resurrection happened and Jesus is alive, well, and at work, your story can end in life.

**Take with You:** Today when you’re sad, disappointed, or hopeless, ask God to give you hope based on Jesus’s resurrection. What difference does Jesus’s resurrection make to how you feel right now?

## JANUARY 5

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me. —Psalm 23:4



**W**hat will give you the most happiness in life? What pleasure will not dim through life's changes? It's the pleasure of knowing God and being known by him. You step into that pleasure by coming to Jesus for mercy and grace. You grow in your relationship with him by asking for mercy as a daily, lifelong habit. *Your own inability to deal with your everyday sins is God's mercy to you. It forces you to go to God for the help you need.* As you go to God, let his Word guide you.

In Psalm 23, God is speaking to you, and you can speak these words back to God. Praying through it is one way to experience the pleasure of a growing relationship with God.

Start by reading it out loud. Do you notice how the psalmist takes hold of suffering? He looks the shadow of death right in the eye: "I will fear no evil" (v. 4). He knows the Lord is with him. Notice how he switches from talking about God in the third person ("he") to the second person ("you"), remembering his intimacy with God. The last two lines say that goodness and lovingkindness are literally chasing him! "I am being pursued by your goodness and mercy all my life, and then I will live with you forever." This is the supreme pleasure.

**Take with You:** What are some words or phrases from Psalm 23 you can use today to talk to God? What words might God be speaking to you today from Psalm 23?

## JANUARY 6

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another:  
just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.  
By this all people will know that you are my disciples,  
if you have love for one another.” —John 13:34–35



**I**n heaven you will see the One you love face-to-face. But heaven will also be full of other relationships you enjoy—your closest friends and family, the people who love you without pretense, competition, or manipulation. We don’t wait for heaven to express love. We are to love now—even though it may be hard. Love for others is how we make God visible around us.

The Bible calls us to get out of our comfort zone and love enemies, strangers, people who are different from us, and those who are needy, sinful, and broken. This is a harder call, isn’t it? We are also to love these people right now—even though it might seem impossible.

This call tests whether we are turning the gift of a close relationship into something that shuts others out. Are you and the people you enjoy turning into a clique? Are you willing to widen the circle of intimacy so enemies become friends, strangers become like family, and someone you don’t know becomes like a dear brother or sister?

The goal is simple, joyous relationships with others—the mutual caring and honest give-and-take. *God calls you to widen the circle of your friendships and to avoid making a god out of those who bring you the greatest pleasure.*

**Take with You:** Who might God be calling you to love today from your close circle? And who might God be calling you to love today who is outside your circle? What’s one small kindness you can show others?

## JANUARY 7

The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. —Philippians 4:5–7 NIV



**T**he Lord has something to say about what you are going through every single day. Scripture has been designed by God himself to connect to the reality of human experience. But how do you make those connections? Start with the short, straightforward passages of Scripture. Philippians 4:6, for example, says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

But it’s hard to think straight when we are anxious. What promise could anchor you so you can make such a response? One of them is tucked in verse 5: “the Lord is near.” Anxiety is the experience that you’re all alone in a world that’s too big for you. You feel anxious because you can’t control your circumstances. But if the Lord is near, everything changes. You aren’t alone. The one who is in control, who orders and provides, is near. He cares for you and he is involved.

Starting with these basic promises reminds you in the midst of your day that the Lord is with you. *Simple promises, taken to heart, get you and God on the same page with each other.*

**Take with You:** Throughout your day, when you are worried or anxious, what can you do to remind yourself that the Lord is near? Try holding your one hand with your other hand and remember that the Lord is holding you.

## JANUARY 8

“Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’” —Matthew 6:9–13



**I**n the Bible, prayer lands in three main categories: prayers for physical circumstances, prayers for personal change, and prayers focused on God’s glory and power.

Sometimes we ask God to *change our circumstances*: heal a sick family member, help me do well in school and sports, keep me safe on a trip, help my friend who is depressed, provide a new job for my mom or dad.

Sometimes we ask God to *change us*: teach me to love hard people, deepen my faith, give me peace about the future, help me to be wise and honor you with my choices, show me how to understand Scripture and hold truth in my heart, teach me to encourage others and not gossip.

Sometimes we ask God to *change everything by revealing himself* in glory and power. Your kingdom come! Your will be done! Let your glory fill the earth! Come, Lord Jesus!

The Lord’s Prayer intertwines all three types of prayer. In God’s kingdom, sins and sufferings are no more. His rule brings perfect wisdom and a wealth of situational blessing. *Prayers for God to change me and my circumstances are requests that he show his glory and mercy on the stage of this world.*

**Take with You:** Ask God for his will to be done in your specific circumstance today. Where do you need his help, forgiveness, and deliverance today?

## JANUARY 9

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. —2 Peter 1:3–4



**G**od already knows we are a tangled web. We are slow to change. We have darkness within ourselves. Every one of us has stubborn inconsistencies and blind spots. *The only one who completely understands us is God. Sometimes he helps us to change rapidly. But he usually intervenes slowly—to transform how we think, love, fear, want, and trust on a scale of years, over a lifetime.*

Reorienting our hearts is a slow road. Our outward behaviors and speech matter and the deep, stirring waters of our inner person also matter. To attend to both the inner and outer workings of our lives, we need humility, patience, and an awareness of our need for divine help. We will only be made wholly right when we see Jesus face-to-face.

Our Abba Father is always reminding us of his love for us in Christ. We change as we believe his great and precious promises that are ours because of Jesus (2 Peter 1:4). God's powerful, patient love brings clarity to the challenges of hard life circumstances and our internal struggles.

**Take with You:** It takes great courage to acknowledge true need, but you are in a grand story. Ask for God's powerful, patient love to turn your heart to him today and trust him to write the next page of your grand story.



## JANUARY 10

If your law had not been my delight,  
I would have perished in my affliction.  
I will never forget your precepts,  
for by them you have given me life. —Psalm 119:92–93



**P**salm 119 is personal prayer. It's talking *to* God, not teaching *about* God. We get to hear what a man says out loud in God's presence: his joyous pleasure, open adoration, blunt requests, deep struggles, and fiercely good intentions. The synonyms for the Word of God (law, precepts, statutes) appear once in each verse, but I-you (relationship) words appear about four times in each verse.

So the topic of Psalm 119 isn't about getting Scripture into your life. Instead, it's the honest response that overflows when the truth of what God says about his world gets deeply into you. The words of Psalm 119 show a real life interacting with the real God. They are the words of someone who has listened to God and then opens his heart to God. That may sound simplistic, but the model of listening and responding holds the power to change a whole life.

How did the psalmist learn to be so outspoken to God? He listened to what God said in the rest of the Bible and lived it. *The Lord says who he is and is who he says. The Lord says what he does and does what he says. A life of faith is one of listening, experiencing what is true, and talking back in simple sentences.*

**Take with You:** We can be busy, noisy, distractible people in a busy, noisy, distracting world. Find a time today to quiet your space and your mind. Read a few more verses on Psalm 119. What is God saying? What do you want to say back to him?

## JANUARY 11

And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” —Luke 10:27



Jesus summarized the Bible’s goal in this way: Love God with your whole heart. Love your neighbor as yourself. God’s law is a picture of how a human being becomes truly human (Galatians 5:6; 1 Timothy 1:5).

The wholeness that comes by abiding in this law is the way life is meant to be experienced. The God of the universe calls us to love him with complete dedication. When I forget my Good Shepherd, I arrange my life around another god and I love some good gift more than the Giver of the gift. God, who made people in his image, calls us to love each other with the same fierce concern that we look out for our own interests. When I forget to live in the light of this truth, I get frustrated and hateful, or fearful and withdrawn. When I remember, I get boldly caring and outwardly focused. Will I primarily love myself and my own goals and preferences? Will I become wholly indifferent and blind to the needs of my friends, family, and community? I am commanded to the sanity of this whole, selfless love, and it lays my heart bare.

*The law of love is a mirror showing us who we are. It is also a lamp, lighting the way to where we ought to be.*

**Take with You:** Has anyone ever loved you in a way that you felt seen in your need? Ask God to show you one small way that you can practice love today.

## JANUARY 12

Rock of ages, cleft for me  
Let me hide myself in Thee  
Let the water and the blood  
From Thy riven side which flowed  
Oh, be of sin the double cure  
Cleanse me from its guilt and power  
—Augustus Toplady, “Rock of Ages”



Every part of the grace of God is meant to make us new. Anger, criticism, fear, and pride deform our lives until we find shelter and healing in the glorious forgiveness of Jesus. His blood poured out on the cross gives us a “double cure” from both the guilt and the power of sin.

His forgiveness cures us. James 4:6–10 captures the two simple actions that are needed on our part: *turning* from our way and *seeking* God’s way. In our need, we turn to the Person willing and able to help and we see that repentance in faith is rooted in relationship. These verses begin with a gift, “But he gives more grace.” In light of that gift of grace, we are called to action in the face of multiple expressions of sin. Life serves us big problems, but God is at the center of every solution.

God is *present*. When we seek, we find that Someone moves toward us with grace. Someone whose power freely helps us. To heal our hearts of internal and external conflict, we must seek God’s mercy. *Our strivings and struggles are fueled by trying to take God’s place. The grace of Jesus Christ forgives and reinstates God’s rule in our hearts.*

**Take with You:** Read James 4:6–10. Notice the words that describe our actions and the phrases that describe God’s action. Take a moment to thank God for the wild gift of grace.

## JANUARY 13

The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.” —Exodus 34:6–7



**G**od consistently reveals who he is in the incredibly wonderful dance of mercy and justice. It’s hard to understand how mercy and justice can exist together perfectly in God, but one of the most vivid expressions of this in the Bible is when God reveals himself to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Even though we go wrong daily, we are still invited into God’s life-giving goodness. But he does not ignore unacknowledged and unrepentant wrong. This can be confusing. Is God patient, or is he impatient? Does God forgive, or is he unforgiving? Does he show love, or not? His mercy creates a conflict with our sins as we do not receive what we do deserve. His mercy is not niceness. His mercy is not blanket acceptance of any and all. *Mercy to us costs him—the blood of the Lamb.* His steadfast love and faithfulness welcomes us to turn to him in repentance. We are needy, and mercy is given through Christ. God repeatedly invites us to faith as a response to his abounding mercy.

**Take with You:** It’s okay to have questions about God’s intricate and infinite character. As you seek answers throughout your life, remember that *because* of your brother, Jesus, you have full access to God the Father and to his love, wisdom, and welcome.

## JANUARY 14

“If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is of God hears the words of God.” —John 8:46–47



In his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus triumphed over the powers of darkness. He knew the ugly reality of the world, the weakness of the flesh, and the tempting deceit of the devil better than any human before or since. *In the midst of his real enemies, he trusted in his heavenly Father to bring light out of darkness. He continually called everyone he encountered to the same living, active dependence on his heavenly Father.*

Jesus recognizes that the Evil One plays a significant role in adding to human misery. But he continually speaks to the human heart and how the state of the heart informs the whole person. In John 8 when Jesus describes the devil, he is speaking to a group of people right in front of him (John 8:44–47). The devil’s influence is real, but Jesus directly asks questions about life or death to his listeners and expands on the conversation. These can be the same questions we ask of ourselves and others to uncover the deepest reasons for joy or sorrow in life:

- Who are you allowing to guide you?
- Whose words are catching your ears and repeating in your mind?
- Whose desires and examples are you following?
- Who do you say Jesus is?

**Take with You:** In John 1:5, it says, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” This is a promise to you. There is no darkness in your life that the light of Christ cannot reach. Take heart. You are not alone.

## JANUARY 15

When my anxious thoughts multiply within me,  
Your comfort delights my soul. —Psalm 94:19 NASB



**B**ecause there's trouble in this world, we have good reasons to be anxious. In the midst of trouble our hearts forget God, and we get attached to other masters—to all kinds of desires, needs, beliefs, and quick comforts. We get anxious for bad reasons, and we overreact even to the good reasons we have to be anxious. Living in a world where there is trouble, with hearts that quickly stray, means we will always be tempted to lose sight of God. When we lose sight of God, we try to control our world on our own, and we become filled with worry.

*But don't despair: God, in his Word, gives you better and never-ending reasons for responding to the troubles of life in faith. His comfort can and will delight your soul when you turn to him.* You can learn to remember God instead of forgetting him. God wants us to know him so intimately and trust him so completely that our desire to fix our troubles in our own way will no longer consume us. As we grow in our love for God and our knowledge of his character, we will experience the right kind of concern in the midst of our troubles.

**Take with You:** In moments of anxiety, try having some go-to prayers and statements to remind you of who you are in God's kingdom. "I am not alone." "I am loved with an everlasting love." "I am seen and known right now." "I have a friend who is always near."