

Dear Lonehill Methodist Church,

This devotion guide is designed especially for your use during the Lonehill Methodist Church's Time to Build Campaign. The subjects for each week parallel the subject of the sermon each week. You'll do a week's devotions on faith, then a week on service, then purpose, then commitment, then sacrifice and finally thanksgiving.

We pray that this building campaign will be a time of incredible spiritual growth for us as individuals and as a church. When we begin to pray and give and sacrifice, we grow in our expression of what it means to be an authentic community living transformed lives, because of Jesus. These devotions are an important part of that opportunity for maturity in each of our lives. We want God's word to be at the center of our faith and prayers. We want God's direction to be the single motivation for our gifts and sacrifices. These devotions will help you, as an individual or as a family, to personally discover God's direction in His word.

You'll see that there are family discussion questions included and on some days children's activities. In addition your kids will receive their own devotional from Kid's Church, Y'rd or Alive Youth every week during the campaign. If you're doing this devotion by yourself you can use the discussion questions as thought questions. We encourage you to make notes in the spaces provided. The best way to be consistent in these devotions is to find the same time every day to do them. You'll find some other suggestions for reading through this guide on the next page.

May God bless you and your family,

With love,

Gary and Jacqui Rivas

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FAMILY DEVOTIONS

Family devotions can often seem more like chaos than church. Here are a few simple suggestions for adding a sense of God's holiness into your busy household:

1. Choose a consistent time and place. Whether it's at breakfast around the table or in your children's rooms just before bedtime, having devotions at the **same** time and **same** place is the best way to be consistent. Choose the best time for your family and then don't worry if you miss a day here or there.
2. Have different family members read the Scripture and devotion each day. This will give everyone a feeling that they're a part of **deciding** to have family devotions.
3. After reading the devotions, take a minute to pray together. Talk to God about the needs in your family... the church...the world... your friends... those who need to find Christ... your work... your school...etc.
4. Be yourselves! It's O.K. to laugh. Noise is not only allowable during devotions... it is probable. If you allow your children to be themselves during times of devotion it's amazing how much more they learn. What you think is bouncing off of them is actually sinking deeply into their souls.

*"You must love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and might. And you must think constantly about these commandments I am giving you today. You must teach them to your children and talk about them when you are at home or out for a walk; at bedtime and the first thing in the morning."*

*Deuteronomy 6:5-7 (TLB)*

**Sunday - Faith**  
**FAITH IS LIVING BEYOND THE ROUTINE**

*“What is faith? It is the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it up ahead.” Heb 11:1 (TLB)*

Faith is the secret to “rut free living.”

We all know what it’s like to live in a rut. Too often what starts with great promise settles into a lifelong habit of routine. A couple gets married - yet somehow a promise of life long love turns into habit and routine. A business gets started - but before long the dream turns into drudgery. A fresh and real commitment to Christ is made - yet you find yourself settling for the average life rather than the abundant life. Faith makes the difference! Faith helps us to handle the two main things that might push us into the rut of routine.

**Life’s disappointments...**

Disappointment can make us feel despondent, thinking we’ll have to learn to settle for less. Faith energizes us to look past our disappointments and to see God’s promises.

**Life’s successes...**

Disappointment can make us bitter... success can make us self-satisfied. A little success can be a dangerous thing! Faith has the power not only to help us with our struggles, but also our successes. Faith puts success in perspective. It reminds me that I’m not the source of the success - it is God who has given these gifts to me. It also helps me to see that I’m not the reason for the success. Of course, God is pleased with my happiness. But the ultimate reason for all He does in our lives is to show the world what He is like... to bring glory to Himself.

*Family Discussion Question: Is disappointment or is success the greater challenge in your life right now?*

*Children’s activity: Show your children how “ingrained” a routine can become by having an “unroutine” day: Have everyone sit at different places when you eat or watch T.V... or sleep with your head at the foot of your bed. You come up with ideas.... have fun with this!*

**Monday - Faith**  
**THE CHANGE EXCHANGE**

*“By faith Abraham, even though he was past age--and Sarah herself was barren--was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.” Heb 11:11 (NIV)*

Have you made faith’s great change exchange? Have you learned to exchange life’s pressures for God’s promises? We all live in one of two ways, under life’s pressure or within God’s promises. The secret to promise living is faith... believing what God has told me about Himself and His world in His word.

When you believe God’s promise you belittle life’s pressure. When you trust God’s promise you trample life’s pressure. When you count on God’s promise you count out life’s pressure. When you depend on God’s promise you defeat life’s pressure. When you receive God’s promise you reject life’s pressure. Is that clear! Promise and pressure are mutually exclusive... they can’t exist together.

There are two common attitudes that push the promises of God out of our lives as believers. Watch out for these! (You can see them in the life of Abraham as he struggled with believing God’s promise about sending He and Sarah a son)

I’ll have to settle for less  
I’ll have to get it myself

Although Abraham struggled with these attitudes, he ended up putting his faith in God. Just because **you** struggle does not mean that you cannot end up making the great “change exchange.” You can be a person of genuine faith.

*Family discussion question: Where do you feel pressured right now? As a family, pray for each other. Pray that God’s promises will ease your pressures.*

*Children’s activity: Show how promises “push out” pressure by filling a cardboard tube (paper towel or toilet tissue) with crumpled paper. Once the tube is filled show them how the new paper you put in always pushes out the old.*

**Tuesday - Faith**  
**FAITH'S FINAL EXAM**

*"Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people." Acts 6:8 (NIV)*

Know how to recognize a priceless person? Just look at their price tag! You can see what a person is worth by looking at what it takes to buy them off. I wonder how you and I would do if we had to face "faith's final exam." It is an exam that only a few Christians down through the ages have had to face. It is a test that has only one soul searching question.

Stephen faced this test when he was being judged for his faith in Acts 6. Faith's final exam is "Would I be willing to give up my life for what I believe?" We sing about giving our all to Jesus and tell Him that we'd offer our very life for him. But what if the threats were real? It's an important test, for your attitude towards dying for your faith has much to say about how you'll live your faith!

Take a look at Stephen, for example. He showed himself to be a priceless person, a person who would not back down in his faith no matter what the threat. Stephen became the first Christian to actually die for his faith. What was the secret to such a great faith? Acts 6 tells us that Stephen lived as a man "full of faith and the Holy Spirit." **He had answered faith's final exam long before he faced the court that would condemn him.** We're all like tubes of toothpaste. When the squeeze is put on us what comes out is whatever we're full of! This means that we don't have to "cram" for the tests of faith. Let Christ **fill** your heart and mind, your decisions and actions... today!

*Family Discussion Question: Where do you need to be "full of faith" today?*

*For younger children: Make up some "price tags" to show the real value of some of the things in your home. Have your kids tell you how much things like furniture and appliances are worth...make up a tag and put it on those things. Then, ask them to put a price tag on a Bible.... then on themselves. Remind them of the incalculable value of the Bible, of the tremendous value God place on them.*

**Wednesday - Faith**  
**TRUE DEDICATION**

*“So the king and all the Israelites dedicated the temple of the LORD.” 1 Kings 8:63 (NIV)*

What do we mean when we say dedication? To one person it may mean giving up a part of a football game to come to church on Sunday mornings, to another it may point to a decision to begin giving some of their money to the Lord's work, while to another it may add up to leaving all that they know to serve the Lord as a missionary in a foreign country. What does it mean to dedicate a temple, a church, a child, a life to the Lord? In 1 Kings 8 Solomon dedicates the great Jerusalem Temple to the Lord. In so doing he teaches us some important lessons about the character of dedication.

**Dedication means Open Declaration**

Dedication is a public announcement of your intentions and commitments. Many see dedication as some inner commitment that no one can really see or understand. Not true... it is expressed in public commitments and public actions. You know when dedication begins to happen? When you begin to place your faith on the line in terms of public commitments. It's that willingness to declare to others that adds up to dedication.

When our forefathers penned the Declaration of Independence they turned a philosophy into a dedication to freedom.

When John Kennedy said, “We will put a man on the moon before the end of the decade.” He transformed a scientist's dream into a country's dedication.

God asks us to make “open commitments” of our faith. Baptism is an open statement that you've dedicated your life to Christ. Prayer is a way that we bring out into the open our dependence on God. Worship is one way that we say openly and publicly that God is important to me.

*Family Discussion Question: When others look at your life, what do you think they would say you are “dedicated” to?*

**Thursday - Faith**  
**TRUE DEDICATION, PART 2**

*“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.”*

*Rom 12:1 (NIV)*

There are two more lessons about dedication that we learn from the study of Solomon that we began yesterday. Besides Open Declaration...

**Dedication means Sacrifice**

They sacrificed an unbelievable amount that day! 22,000 cattle and 120,000 sheep and goats. That's a lot of T-bone steak and leg of lamb! Why? What could be the purpose of such sacrifices? What did sacrifices do for men that was so important to the Lord. Sacrifices are “A gift of trust to the Lord.” As they sacrificed they declared that they trusted God to take care of their needs. They were saying, “Instead of hoarding and declaring my trust in myself, I'll give to You, Lord, to declare my trust in you.”

Dedication will inevitably involve some sacrifices. Sacrifice is ultimately an expression of trust in the Lord. You're willing to give something up because you trust Him more than that something.

**Dedication means Praise**

A significant part of dedication is praise to God. Solomon's praise as he dedicated the temple centered on the fact that God has kept His promise. There is a **specific** praise that not only expresses, but actually increases our dedication to the Lord. That specific praise that grows our dedication is “Thank You Lord for your Faithfulness.” It is a praise that recognises that all that we have comes as a result of God's promises to us... as a result of His faithfulness in our lives.

That type of praise recognises that I can be dedicated to God because God is dedicated to me! He is dedicated to my joy, my peace, my growth. How dedicated is He? “He who did not spare His own Son, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things.” (Romans 8:32)

*Family Discussion Question: What sacrifice would REALLY stretch your dedication?*

**Friday - Faith**  
**TRUE DEDICATION, PART 3**

*"Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven and said: "O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below--you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way." 1 Kings 8:22-23 (NIV)*

Dedication means praise and sacrifice and open declaration. Today we learn one final truth about dedication from King Solomon

**Dedication means Ministry**

We cannot be dedicated to God without being dedicated to meeting the needs of the people He has made. Solomon dedicated the temple to the needs of the disappointed and the defeated, those besieged by sin and by loneliness, those involved in the battles and the prisons of life.

Too many, too often make dedication the most impractical of things. It could never be lived, only talked about. There is a dedication made up of myths and fables and pipe dreams.

If you're striving to become more dedicated to the Lord it doesn't take you long to discover that there is a whole Christian subculture in which dedication is made up of spiritual sounding words and big name conferences and fancy looking materials. You cannot practice dedication in a conference or with mere words or on the pages of a notebook. It's built out of trusting God with the practical needs of your everyday life. You might be able to learn about it at a conference and be inspired toward it with a notebook, but don't ever fall into the trap of believing that the conference is where real dedication is expressed. **Dedication is expressed in ministry.** It is expressed in what you choose to DO with your life: a decision to serve the Lord and to serve the people He has made.

*Family Discussion Question: Can you think of one simple ministry your family could do this week?*

*Children's activity: Do a simple ministry project **with** your children this week.*





**Saturday - Faith**  
**AN ABEL FAITH**

*“By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.” Heb 11:4 (NIV)*

The best way to learn faith is from people. Why? Because faith is not so much a matter of what you know as of who you are, it's built not just out of knowledge but out of relationships. Take a look at Abel, the first faithful man. Three things happened to him because he had faith. They each point out how faith will affect our lives.

**He offered a better sacrifice.**

*Faith affected his generosity.* What was better about Abel's sacrifice? Cain offered but Abel offered his best. Faith adds up to a willingness to give your best to the Lord. You can trust Him with it!

**He was commended as righteous by God.**

*Faith affected his relationships.* Righteous is a word about relationships, it points to being in right relationship with God. Preschoolers define it as being God's friend. Faith gave Abel a commendation for his relationship with God.

**He still speaks**

*Faith affected his influence.* The most powerful tool you have for influencing this world is your faith. Why so powerful? Because actions and decisions based upon faith simply last longer. Cain may have cut Abel's life short, but Abel's faith still speaks! Want to make an impact? Seminars can hone your skills and organisation can improve your opportunities and principles can enhance your planning... but it's all a drop in the bucket without faith. Great skills and no faith has no impact. A few skills multiplied by a great faith adds up to incredible impact.

*Family discussion question: Where could you “offer your best” to the Lord right now in one specific way?*

*Children's activity: Have your children take an offering to church today or tomorrow. Put it in an envelope, on which they write (or write with them) “My best for the Lord”.*

**Sunday - Service**  
**BECOMING A SIGNIFICANT SERVANT**

*“Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years.” James 5:17 (NIV)*

How do we live the most significant life possible? **We serve our way into significance.** For most of us the words “significant” and “servant” do not go together. There is a man in the Old Testament book of Kings who can show us the way. His name is Elijah! One of the most significant things about Elijah is that he was like us. He was a man of awesome miracles, of powerful actions, and the book of yet James reminds us that he was just like us. Since he is like us we can learn from him some lessons about being a significant servant.

**Servant Lesson #1: God is willing and able to meet all of my needs.**

Significant servants make that confidence the launching pad of their lives and ministries. God is ABLE - He has the power. God is WILLING - He has the love.

In 1 Kings 17 Elijah learns this lesson beside a brook in the desolate Kirath Ravine. In order to teach him this lesson God does for Elijah what He regularly does for His servants. **He reduces life to the basics.** Elijah certainly was down to basics! All he had was the water the Lord sent and the food that God delivered. God used a raven to bring food to Elijah. God has help where we least expect it! He provides in ways that go beyond our narrow expectations. That’s what we learn when life is reduced to the basics.

The “basics” are simply this: **a place of complete and total dependence upon God.** In that place God reminds us: we depend on Him alone for all of our needs. Why does God put us in such places? Reducing life to the basics helps to refocus on God. We recognise again just how dependent on God we really are. Not our paycheck, not the mall, not the microwave or McDonald’s or Mastercard. God is the Father who graciously supplies all of our needs.

*Pray this Servant’s Prayer: Everything in my life is there because you bring it to me Lord. I’m totally dependent upon you for everything! Every drink of water, every breath, every bite of food.*

*Family Activity: Make up some “God gave us this” stickers on post it notes and have your kids stick them all over your house to look at today.*

**Monday - Service**  
**BECOMING A SIGNIFICANT SERVANT, Part 2**

**Read: 1 Kings 19**

**Servant's lesson #2: Outer victories mean nothing if I do not win the inner battle.** You'd think that chapter 18 of 1 Kings contained the biggest battles of Elijah's life. He battled the powerful king Ahab, he battled 450 false prophets! But in chapter 19 he faces an even bigger battle, the battle within himself. He won the battles of 18 fairly easily, yet almost lost his life in the battle with himself. In 1 Kings 19 Elijah gives clear expression to the kinds of inner battles which God's servants will inevitably have to face. See if you can relate to any of these feelings he expressed.

"I want to run."

We often feel like running after a great victory. The combination of physical and emotional fatigue make us feel like escaping when everyone else is celebrating. When we're run down we want to run away.

"I've had enough."

The feeling is, "I've reached my limit..."

"I'm all alone."

The greatest inner battle is the battle of loneliness. When you decide that you're all alone the inner battle is lost.

The inner victory for Elijah was won on 6 different fronts. God told him: You need **rest!** (v. 7) You must **worship!** (v. 8) You can **tell someone!** (v. 9-10) You need a **fresh encounter with God!** (v. 11-13) You are **useful** (v. 15-17) You **aren't alone!** (v. 18)

Let's focus for a moment on the idea of a fresh encounter with God. Elijah, who had always seen God in the fire and the storms, heard God this time in a gentle whisper. You might feel desperate to hear God's voice right now. Keep listening! Elijah didn't hear God the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> or even the 3<sup>rd</sup> time. But he was faithful to be where God wanted him to be and eventually heard God's still small voice. What do you need to hear God whisper?

*Pray this servant's prayer: Lord, I want to serve you for the rest of my life. I pray that you would give to me the wisdom to rest when it's needed, the desire to place a priority on worship, the courage to tell You about the problems I face, the inner confidence that I am useful to you and the assurance that I am never alone in serving you. I pray that I would regularly hear you speaking to me in fresh, new ways.*

**Tuesday - Service**  
**THE SERVANT'S SURVIVAL STRATEGY**

*"You can be sure that the more we undergo sufferings for Christ, the more he will shower us with his comfort and encouragement." 2 Cor 1:5 (TLB)*

The world is full of survival manuals and instructions. You need them whenever you go into unfamiliar territory. A 'PC Trouble Shooting for Dummies' manual that helps you to deal with almost any computer problem. A parent's survival manual to tell you about nappies and diet and discipline. Second Corinthians is a Servant's Survival Manual containing a Servant's Survival Strategy. Chapter 1 in the manual is, "How do servants deal with burdensome problems?" There are three steps, none of which can be ignored.

**God pours out His comfort.**

He is the God of compassion. He is the Father of all comfort. The word comfort here means "to come alongside and help." This is much more than a card in the mail! God promises Himself to comfort His servants in difficult times.

**We are filled with God's comfort.**

God makes comfort more than a word on a page, He makes it real in our lives. God's comfort comes in reaction to our circumstances. This is why worry is so devastating: we're trying to find the comfort before we've faced the circumstance. God's comfort causes us to look back after the trouble is past and say, "I don't know how I survived that."

**Our comfort from God overflows to others.**

We are comforted, so that we might comfort others. We may always be able to figure out the reasons why a problem comes into our lives. But we can always see God work the miracle of transforming our sufferings into other's comfort. God's comfort is so magnificent that when He pours it out on us there is always enough that it overflows to others.

*Family Discussion Question: What is one place in your life where God's comfort has or could overflow from you to others.*

*Family Activity: Show your children how God's comfort overflows by filling up a glass with a jug of water. Talk about the fact that because God is bigger than us He always has more help to give us than we will need.*

**Wednesday - Service**  
**GIFTS FOR SERVING**

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*There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. 1 Cor 12:4-6*

Who is the most important worker in the restaurant? The owner: the one who plans what the restaurant will serve? The master chef: cooking everything to perfection? I'll give a vote for the waiter. Without her or him you'd never enjoy what the owner planned, never eat what the chef prepared. Never discount the value of good service!

Who is the most important worker in God's kingdom? The preacher that everyone notices? The leader who gets the applause? I'll vote for the unnoticed servant. Without him or her 90% of what gets done in God's kingdom would go lacking. We'd have teachers teaching to empty auditoriums, leaders with no one to lead. Never discount the value of a good servant!

One of the great joys of heaven will be in seeing, really seeing, the great impact and value of servants who have gone without fanfare in this world. Hundreds of volunteer servants make Lonehill Methodist Church what it is.

The greatness of service is only released as we choose to use whatever gifts God has given us for His glory. The greatest tragedy in God's kingdom is a gift that is undiscovered or unused or underutilised.

The great violinist, Nicolo Paganini, willed his marvelous violin to Genoa - the city of his birth - but only on condition that the instrument never be played after his death. It was an unfortunate condition, for it is a peculiarity of wood that as long as it is used and handled, it shows little wear. As soon as it is discarded, it begins to decay. The exquisite, mellow-toned violin has become worm-eaten in its beautiful case, valueless except as a relic. The moldering instrument is a reminder that a life withdrawn from all service to others loses its meaning.

*Family Discussion Questions:*

*Do you know any 'unnoticed servants?'*

*Recognise the gifts that God has given to those in your family. Beginning with the youngest, focus on one person at a time. Have each person in your family affirm their gifts by saying, "You are really good at%" or "God has given you a gift for%"*

**Thursday - Service**  
**Thursday - Service**  
**WHAT DOES A SERVANT LOOK LIKE?**

*“After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.” John 13:5 (NIV)*

There is a feeling in the thirteenth chapter of John that we are there for one of the most significant events in history.

What’s your picture of the atmosphere in the upper room where Jesus and his disciples met the night before Jesus died. Maybe hushed tones and a holy glow come to mind. Let me shatter that vision with a hefty dose of reality. We come in to excited noises. The disciples are expecting Jesus to make His move to take over soon, and they’ll go with Him to the very top. They talk about what that will be like. You can just imagine them dreaming. Suddenly the volume increases. No longer excitement, but argument.

Which would be the greatest?! The argument really began when they walked into the room. No one took time to wash the other’s feet. With thoughts of greatness on their minds, they had no time for an activity usually assigned to slaves. The fact that greatness is measured with the metre stick of service had not yet registered with them.

There sits Jesus, hardly noticed as the others argue. No one sees Him get up and walk to the other side of the room. A few notice as he takes off His robe and pours a basin of water. Stunned silence overtakes them all as Jesus comes to each disciple and begins to wash his feet.

Jesus washed their feet. God in human flesh washed dirty feet. Scrubbing dusty toes - now that’s love made practical! Real love is an action, not a feeling. Everything was ready for someone to serve: the water jug was there, the wash basin was there, the linen cloth was there. It just took a person to take it up.

We hear Jesus say, “You should wash **one another’s** feet.” What does it mean to wash the feet of a disciple today? Ask yourself, why did Jesus wash the disciples feet? It wasn’t a religious ceremony, that’s for sure! He washed their feet because their feet were dirty!! How do you wash other’s feet? What does that mean? **DO something that somebody else needs.**

*Family Discussion Question: Who in your own family needs their feet washed today? Who has a practical need that you could all be a part of meeting?*

**Friday - Service**  
**SERVING AT HOME**

*“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature ; rather, serve one another in love.” Gal 5:13 (NIV)*

If one of God’s most important calls to us is the call to be a servant, doesn’t it make sense that we need to incorporate that service into our daily lives. That means being a servant where we work. That means being a servant in our own homes. If we don’t serve those with whom we spend the most time, those whom we love the most, then servanthood is half hearted at best. How can I be a servant at home? Here’s a few ideas suggested by Galatians chapter 5.

**Survey your Home**

Ask yourself: is my home a place of indulgence, or service? You see, an opportunity to serve is also always an opportunity to indulge. Nowhere is that so true as in the home. Nowhere is our human tendency towards selfishness seen so clearly as in the home. What are you doing with your opportunities? Are you taking advantage of your family? Perhaps you’re taking advantage of their work by your laziness or of their forgiveness by your anger, or their giving by your taking?

**Surrender your Heart**

Servants surrender their heart to the guidance of God’s Spirit. What makes me into this servant type of person? God's Spirit! Some specific surrenders need to happen in your heart for your home to become a place of service. Wait a minute, you might be thinking. Isn’t this church stuff. What does the Holy Spirit have to do with my family? Everything! Eph. 5:18 tells us, “Be filled with the Spirit,” and then spends the rest of the chapter talking about what that does in our families! Being filled with the Spirit gives us the power to make those specific surrenders that make a family strong. He enables us to surrender our plans and our agendas and our desire to have OUR needs met in order to love others. Your family life does not have to be determined by how you were raised, not if you surrender. It does not have to be governed by how it has been, not if you surrender. It does not have to be limited to what it is now, not if you surrender.

*Family Discussion Question: Where is it difficult for you to surrender yourself to God’s daily direction?*

*Children’s Activity: Use a white flag to illustrate to your kids the idea of surrender. Talk about how waving it shows that you’re giving up what you want to give someone else what they need. Use some practical illustrations like which TV show you watch or who gets to sit in the best seat in the car.*







**Saturday - Service**  
**SERVING ON A DONKEY**

*"He answered: "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, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"*  
Luke 10:27 (NIV)                      *(Read the story of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-36)*

Jesus parable of the good Samaritan is a parable about the service that springs from love. The story is so simple that we often miss its incredible applications for our everyday lives. It is the story of three different types of people, three different responses to needs.

**Those who create needs.**

The robbers in this story created the needs that the Samaritan would eventually meet. How did they become such takers rather than givers? Their actions were the result of a single attitude: "My needs are more important than your needs." Or, to say it in a word, they were **selfish**. Self-centeredness creates an avalanche of needs. That's why the Lord so clearly says to us through Paul "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Phil 2:4)

**Those who ignore needs.**

The Levite and priest just "passed by." It was easier to pretend the need didn't exist, although it meant that the man would probably die. Ignoring needs is so easy. This is where the majority of us struggle. Why do we ignore others needs?

Fear: We're afraid we might get hurt

Judgment: We have judgmental attitudes.

Busyness: We're too busy with life's details. (Ouch!)

False purity: We're afraid of how their problems might affect us.

**Those who meet needs.**

The most striking thing about the Samaritan was that he made the choice to meet another person's need. That meant personal sacrifice. His sacrifice was built upon his **compassion**. His compassion overcame fear and apathy. His compassion made him willing to **care**. His willingness to care came with a **cost**. It cost him the price of an inn. It cost him his time. It cost him his comfort, he walked while the man rode his donkey.

*Family Discussion Question: Do you find it difficult to pay the price to love? To give up plans and time, comfort and resources?*

*Children's Activity: Act out the story of the good Samaritan... it's OK for one person to play several parts!*

**Sunday - Purpose**  
**A PLAN FOR YOUR FUTURE**

*I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a future and a hope. Jer 29:11 (NIV)*

One of God's most purpose filled promises is this great promise of His plan for our lives from Jeremiah 29. Purpose is impossible without a plan. A plan and a purpose are impossible without HOPE. How do you plan for the future? In order to have hope for your future you must start with God's purpose. All the planning and scheduling in the world will not help if you do not have God's purpose for your future right at its very root. When you start with God's purpose you realise, "God has plans for me!"

God plans your prosperity

That may or may not include material prosperity, the real focus here is on significance of life. Imagine God up in heaven with a sheet of paper in front of Him. Yes, that does take some imagination! Now imagine that the paper has your name on it. Under your name is the heading, "Plans for success and significance." And finally imagine this - the paper is *filled* with ideas and goals and plans.

God plans your future.

Before we plan anything we should always ask "God, what are *your* plans for my future." Our goal is not to get God to bless the future we've planned. Our desire should be to live out the future that He plans to bless us with.

God plans to give you hope

However discouraging things may seem at times, God has a plan for your hope! He's told us in advance, "I want to give you hope." Even the worst of circumstances can give us hope by causing us to transfer our trust from this uncertain world to God's certain future in eternity.

*Family discussion question: How does this promise of God give you a new sense of hope in some particular area of your future.*

*Children's Activity: This is a great verse to memorise. Why not work on it together as a family over the next week. Write it on a card and place it on your refrigerator to remind you.*

**Monday - Purpose**  
**HOW DO YOU BUILD A PURPOSE?**

*“Stand up! I have chosen you to be my servant and my witness—you will tell people the things that you have seen and the things that I will show you. This is why I have come to you today.” Acts 26:16 (NCV)*

Do you find your longing for a greater purpose and significance in life constantly being met by the realities of the routine of everyday living? It seems as if we are constantly ordering a scoop of mocha almond fudge, of mountain raspberry swirl parfait... and life keeps handing us vanilla. Vision vanishes... and sadly we tell ourselves that's the only way it can be. Many never become visionary because they expect it to pop full grown into their heads. Vision must be grown... it must be built.

**You have to discover your purpose.** The foundation for vision is God given purpose. You take the first step towards building a vision when you say to yourself “God has a specific purpose for my life.” Your God given life purpose will include an **excellence** in your God given relationships and the **exercise** of your God given gifts. You may discover it suddenly as Paul did on a Damascus road, or the discovery may dawn on you slowly but no less brightly.

**You have to dare to dream.** To dare to dream you must **prepare** to dream. We somehow get the idea that great things done in our world are done on the spur of the moment, an emotion overtakes us and we accomplish something wonderful. It takes time to dream! Paul spent 17 years in the desert after his vision of purpose, preparing. To dare to dream you must also share your dream. God's promptings are transformed into living purpose as we dare to **share** our dreams.

**You have to focus with goals.** Goals are a means for making specific the purpose of God. One of our problems is that our faith never gets specific. “What am I going to do and when am I going to do it?” God given goals are actually statements of faith. By the way, the best goals always grow out of our worship.

*Family Discussion Question: What goal for carrying out God's purpose for your life do you need to set, or to remind yourself of, today?*

**Tuesday - Purpose**  
**NOAH'S LIFE PURPOSE**

*"Noah was a pleasure to the Lord. ½He was the only truly righteous man living on the earth at that time. He tried always to conduct his affairs according to God's will." Gen 6:8-9 (TLB)*

Where do you find the motivation to live out the purpose of God? One of the greatest examples of God-centered motivation in the Bible is found in the life of Noah. In his life lies the secret of a man who survives the disaster of his age. What motivated him?

When Noah **built the ark** he showed us the motivational power of obedience. God gave Noah the directions and Noah followed them. The ark was a huge object lesson in obedience. Arks, temples, churches are built by people who trust God. Lives and hearts and families are built by people who trust God.

When Noah **entered the ark** he showed us the motivational power of trust. He walked into the ark behind all of the animals and God shut the door. He shut it seven days before the first raindrop fell. While the sun was yet shining and the sky was blue, while the people around were still convinced that nothing was going to happen, God shut the door. What do you think Noah was thinking that first week? All he had to carry him through was his trust.

Noah **on the ark** shows us the motivational power of faithfulness. How many days do you think Noah floated on the ark? 40? The rain fell for 40 days, but the actual time on the ark until the water receded was actually 382 days! When you feel that God is taking too long to act and yet you keep trusting - that's faithfulness.

When Noah came **out of the ark** he reminded us of the motivational power of worship. The first thing Noah does when he leaves the ark is go give thanks to God. What would you want to do first after a year in an ark? One of life's greatest motivators is found in taking the time to say thank you to God.

*Prayer: Today my Obedience to God will motivate me to... My Trust in God will motivate me to... My Faithfulness towards God will motivate me to... My Worship of God will Motivate me to...*

**Wednesday - Purpose**  
**JACOB'S LIFE PURPOSE**

*“By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph’s sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.” Heb 11:21 (NIV)*

Jacob¼ it’s all in the name. His name means “schemer.” He was a guy who always had an angle. He cheated his own family out of birthrights, inheritances and land. But here he is in Hebrews 11, commended for his faith! Jacob was the man who wrestled with God. Jacob wrestled his way to a great faith.

There were actually three phases to Jacob’s life. His early life was lived in **the scheming phase**. We can understand this. America is a nation of schemers.

He spent his life trying to earn for himself what God wanted to give him as a gift.

Then, after years of scheming and at the edge of disaster, came **the wrestling phase**. It lasted only one night but it changed Jacob’s life. He had a wrestling match¼ with God! When Jacob wrestles with God three things happen:

He brings him face to face with **who he is**: Jacob, a schemer. Jacob had to admit to God what he was really like. It’s not that God didn’t know! He wants Jacob to confess the truth about himself.

He brings him face to face with **who he can be**: Israel. God changed Jacob’s name to Israel, the man who would become a nation. He was the bearer of God’s promise and his descendants would be as the stars. I think we have too many “Jacob’s” and not enough “Israel’s.” Too many who can tell God what’s wrong with them but haven’t finished the story. What’s God’s new purpose for your life?

He brings him face to face with **who he can’t be**. Jacob tries to wrestle with God and win. Bad idea! God leaves him with a limp Jacob, who lives the rest of his life with a physical reminder of the fact that God is the boss. That’s the third phase, the limping phase. Jacob’s limp was an every step reminder of his need for God.

*Family Discussion Question: What is it in your life that reminds you of your need for God every step of the way?*

*Children’s Activity: Put a small pebble in your shoe and try to walk across the room. Remind your children that since a little thing like a pebble can hamper us we should never pretend that we are so smart or strong we don’t need God.*

**Thursday - Purpose**  
**I CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

*“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in Him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:5 (NIV)*

We can't be satisfied with just making a living, we must feel that we're making a difference! Try it - just bring home a paycheck. Nothing else - nothing more. Even if the paycheck is R100,000 a month it won't satisfy. (Right now you are thinking “I'd like to try!”) But the truth is, we need to make a difference. Jesus gives us a promise that tells us the secret to really making a difference in this world. The secret is “abiding in Christ.” What does that mean? There are 4 aspects of abiding in John 15.

Be aware of how much you need Him. Don't miss this, “Apart from me you can do nothing!”

Allow His word to mold your life. - -

Seek to please God.

Ask for His help through prayer.

Significance is not a contest - you don't win it in competition with others. Importance is a wonderful gift given by God's love. People who make a difference in this life are people who live the joy of being chosen by God - of being important to God Himself. You are Jesus' friend. Jesus starts John 15 calling us branches and ends up calling us friends. When you see Jesus as a friend it turns your thinking upside down. It's much easier to face trouble when you have a friend beside you. You're likely to stay attached to someone you know is your friend. And, when it comes to asking, it's always easier to ask a friend. Your life is meant to count! You are chosen to be significant: to bear “fruit that will last.” Lasting fruit means changed lives, new hope, real impact upon people's hurts. It is drawing people's attention to the eternal love of God, changing someone's eternal destiny by introducing them to the opportunity we all have to place faith in Jesus Christ.

*Family Discussion Question: You are Jesus friend! What's something you could do to treat Jesus like your best friend today?*

**Friday - Purpose**  
**KEEPING YOUR PURPOSE ALIVE**

*“Solomon, my son, get to know the God of your fathers. Worship and serve him with a clean heart and a willing mind, for the Lord sees every heart and understands and knows every thought.” 1 Chr 28:9 (TLB)*

A burned out light bulb, an empty toothpaste tube, a broken record. That's not you! People never outlive their usefulness! True, we do feel burned out and empty and even broken at times, but don't let that fool you. You've got more to offer than a toothpaste tube! You cannot outlast your usefulness!!

One of the major causes of a lack of drive is a lack of purpose. Life seems empty when it is without purpose. Sometimes we run out of purpose long before we run out of energy. How can I renew the sense of purpose in my life? In 1 Chronicles 28 David shows us how to refresh our purpose when we come to a crossroads.

**Involve your heart** (1 Chron 28:9)

Real purpose has to involve more than the merely routine - you have to have your heart in it! If the purpose is being imposed from outside it has the feel of pressure. If the purpose is welling up from inside it has the feel of real promise and enthusiasm. Some of you are caught in the Twilight Zone between wanting and willing. You've got a case of the "shoulds." Give God a willing heart.

**Inspect your plan** (v. 19)

Ask yourself: are my plans big enough? Are they bigger than your comfort? David's plan for his life went beyond comfort in his life. I talk to a lot of people who's greatest plan is personal comfort. That's not big enough!! Are your plans bigger than your desires? Have you discovered the surprising fact that even if you got everything **you** desired, it wouldn't be big enough?

**Invest your resources**

When a purpose catches a hold of your heart and life you become willing to invest yourself in it! David invested his own resources! About R150 million in gold and R75 million in silver - no small investment. It's one thing to use someone else's resources, quite another thing to invest your own. Purpose has a personal price!

*Family Discussion: What's the biggest plan you feel God has for your life?*

*Children's Activity: Squeeze some toothpaste out of a tube¼ and then try to put it back in again! Talk about the fact that while WE can't put everything back into our lives like we'd want to, God can do anything!*







**Saturday - Purpose**  
**THE VALUE OF PURPOSE**

*"My life is being given as an offering to God, and the time has come for me to leave this life. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." 2 Tim 4:6-7 (NCV)*

Is it worth it? Visionary, purposeful living is not always easy. It not only requires a measure of personal discipline, it also includes real opposition and problems! Is it worth it? In the book of Second Timothy Paul writes knowing he will be executed in a few days - it doesn't seem as if the Lord will intervene this time. That makes a person think about what was really of value in life. As he looked back across the years Paul was able to state three elusive, exciting qualities that had marked his life because of his vision.

**An Overcoming Spirit** - "I have fought the good fight"

Life is a battle. God's purpose enables you to overcome. The words Paul uses here have the sense of "I did it!" You can sense the finality and the victory in these words. Vision changes a defeated spirit into an overcoming spirit... a fearful spirit into an overcoming spirit¼ an angry spirit into an overcoming spirit¼ a compromising spirit into an overcoming spirit.

**Staying Power** - "I have finished the race"

Life is a marathon. More people's faith has been defeated by the details of everyday living than by the big battles of life. God's purpose enables you endure. The key for Paul wasn't being first, it was finishing. For Paul life was not a matter of competition, but of completion! Now there's a simple truth to transform the way you live. We spend so much time trying to beat those around as we dash around everyday that we run out of energy for finishing the race.

**Abundant Life** - "I have kept the faith"

Life is a gift. It is a wonderful gift, but also a challenging gift. Remember as a child getting a puppy for Christmas or a birthday. Your parents sat you down and said, "Now you have to walk it, train it, feed it." You might have thought, "This isn't a gift... it's a responsibility!" The word Paul uses for "kept" here relates to the responsibility of a servant left in charge of a household in the absence of his master. Some people are overwhelmed by life and others are overjoyed by life. Having an eye on God's purpose enables us to enjoy the responsibility of life as a gift from God.

*Family Discussion Question: What does life feel more like to you right now: a battle, a marathon or a gift?*

**Sunday - Commitment**  
**Sunday -Commitment**  
**COMMITMENTS THAT LAST!**

*"...those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."  
Isaiah 40:31 (NIV)*

"It'll never last." Three little words so easy to say, and yet the results are so devastating! Tempted to give up on a dream? Feeling like divorce is the only way out? Feeling like the struggle of faith just isn't worth it anymore? You just want to quit, give up, bail out, toss in the towel? Isaiah 40 is for you.

Isaiah 40 contains one of the most beautiful expressions in the Bible of the power and nature of God. Why does Isaiah talk about this? Because our ability to last through the storms comes from Him who makes and calms the storms. Our ability to endure through the long wait comes from Him who has been here forever. God's word stands forever... I can last, if I'll stand upon His word! God's has measured the waters in His hand... I can last, if I'll put myself in His hands! The Lord is the everlasting God... I can last, if I'll make Him my everlasting Lord!

When you hope, your commitments will last! That is the promise that God makes to us in these verses. Your strength will renew.

You'll soar - like an eagle. Renewed strength is the ability to dream again.

You'll run - and not be weary. Renewed strength is the ability to strive again.

You'll walk - and not faint. Renewed strength is the ability to endure again.

*Family discussion question: What are you having a hard time waiting for right now?*

*Children's Activity: Emphasize the words soar, run and walk with your kids by reading the verse and picking them up to "soar" when you read soar, running when you read run and walking when you read walk. Read it several times to try and remember the verse.*

**Monday - Commitment**  
**GOD'S PROMISE OF DIRECTION**

*"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;  
in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."*

*Prov 3:5-6 (NIV)*

God's purpose must be built in to the direction and decisions of everyday life. Here in Proverbs three are three commitments of life that ready you for the decisions of life. They build a lifestyle that enjoys God's daily direction.

**Determine your Director** - "Trust in the Lord with all of your heart."

This simple phrase encourages us to ask two of life's most important questions. Firstly, who am I trusting? Is it myself, my fears, my friends? Or is it the Lord? Secondly, how am I trusting? We're encouraged to trust with all our heart. Half hearted trust is not trust at all.

**Detect your Detractor** - "Lean not on your own understanding".

Leaning on own understanding is a major reason for directionless living. How do you avoid the temptation to lean on only yourself? A few suggestions. **Take time with your decisions.** Rollo May said, "It is an old and ironic habit of human beings to run faster when we have lost our way." **Talk to God about your decisions.** Here's the acid test for determining which way you're leaning: how often do you talk to God?

**Declare your Delight** - "In all your ways acknowledge Him."

Acknowledge means to let others know. Declare your delight. Personally, in your devotional life take time to tell the Lord you appreciate Him. Publicly, in your witnessing life tell others you appreciate the Lord.

Acknowledge Him! And the promise is, God will direct your paths. Not might, or could, but will. How can I know God's will for my life? How can I know what decision God would have me to make? If you'll work on determining and detecting and declaring, God will do the directing!

*Family discussion question: Have each person in your family answer the question, "the decision that I'm facing right now that I would most like to have God's direction in is....."*

**Tuesday - Commitment**  
**A COMMITMENT TO YOUR NEW LIFE**

*“Let the peace that Christ gives control your thinking, because you were all called together in one body to have peace. Always be thankful.” Col 3:15 (NCV)*

How on earth do heavenly minded people act? What does the new life Christ gives us look like? Colossians 3:12-17 outlines for us the daily commitments that are a part of the new life that we live as believers in Jesus.

**We put on the love of Christ.** Love others as Jesus loved them? *Every day?* Paul reminds us of three truths about ourselves that give us a foundation and a strength for loving others. I am a **chosen** person. By God’s for a purpose. I am a **holy** person. People who love others aren’t constantly trying to prove themselves. I am a **dearly loved** person, dearly loved by God. In order to love I MUST KNOW that I am loved.

**We’re ruled by the peace of Christ.** To rule is an athletic term which means to umpire. The umpire is the one who has the final say. Who has the final say in your daily attitudes and decisions? Is it the worries of the world or the peace of Christ? We all struggle with allowing our anxieties to control our lives. Paul reminds us in these verses that one of the secrets to changing our focus is found in expressing our thankfulness to God.

**We’re indwelt with the Word of Christ.** God’s word does dwell in us as we hear, read, study, memorise and meditate on it. But we’re reminded in Colossians three that it dwells in us *richly* as we teach and encourage others with what it says.

**We do everything in the name of Christ.** Everything, from shopping for groceries to office staff meetings to filling out tax forms to homework. How do we make this practical? Billy Graham’s wife Ruth used to have a sign over her kitchen sink that read, “Divine services held here three times a day.” Washing dishes can be an act of worship if you do it in the name of the Lord. To do something in God’s name means you focus on both your purpose for Him and His presence with you.

*Family Discussion Question: Can you think of: the name of one person towards whom you need to act in the love of Christ. One decision do you need the peace of Christ to rule in. One believer with whom you need to share the word of Christ. One place that you can start acting in the name of Christ.*

**Wednesday - Commitment**  
**UP THE DOWN ESCALATOR**  
**Read 2 Kings 12**

Life as a believer in this world is somewhat like walking up a down escalator. As long as you keep moving ahead with your commitments, you're fine. But try to stand still and you find yourself moving in the wrong direction!

The book of Second Kings is about a time in Israel's history when the escalator was moving down very quickly. During this time there were three kings who stood out for their commitment to faith even in the toughest of times: Joash, Hezekiah and Josiah. They each have some great lessons to teach us for *our* tough times about the commitments we can make to keep moving ahead.

**Joash** repaired the temple in 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 12. He rebuilt the place of worship! The place of worship must remain strong in our lives if we're to swim upstream without being washed down or worn out. I'm talking about more than just attending a worship service, but giving your attention to worship. Joash's experience reminds us of a vital truth regarding keeping worship at the center of our inner lives. We have to be willing to pay the price. It takes time, valuable time, to worship the Lord.

**Hezekiah** in 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 18 removed the "High Places," the places of false worship. A growing faith comes when we deal with the destructive and the distracting influences in our lives. Look at how Hezekiah dealt with such places. He removed, smashed, cut down and broke them into pieces! There was no compromise... they were completely dealt with. You can't deal with "high places" with halfway measures. It takes commitment.

**Josiah** rediscovered God's Word in chapters 22-23. Even if you haven't picked up your Bible for awhile, you probably know what shelf it's on. That's better than the people of Israel had done. They had literally lost the Lord's law. When Josiah rediscovered and read it everything changed. You may need to make a rediscovery of your own; to rediscover the meaning of God's word for your daily life. Start reading it again as if your very life depends upon it!

*Family Discussion Question: Whose example do you most need right now: Joash, Hezekiah or Josiah?*

*Children's Activity: Draw a picture of a fish swimming upstream (against the flow of some rubbish going downstream) and put your name on the fish.*

**Thursday - Commitment**  
**REBUILDING A COMMITMENT**

*“The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding”  
Nehemiah 2:20 (NIV)*

We are a society desperately in need of the art of rebuilding. I’m not talking about houses and cars. We need to perfect the art of rebuilding relationships: rebuilding marriages and families and friendships. We need to learn how to rebuild hope and rebuild trust and rebuild our ability to make commitments. The promise in Nehemiah 2:20 answers the question, “What makes you into a rebuilder?” Today: let this promise encourage you to rebuild an important commitment in your life.

**Expectation** - “the God of heaven will give us success”

It is our relationship with God that grows us into expectant people. God is perfectly powerful. He is the God of all the heavens. He can accomplish whatever dream He puts in my heart. Success is a gift of God!

**Dedication** - “we His servants”

Nehemiah said an encyclopedia full about what it takes to be a rebuilder in these few words. He had chosen to be a servant of God. Self-centered people never do a very good job of rebuilding. They may even think they have good intentions, but the truth is they become more rearrangers than rebuilders. They try to rearrange to suit their needs rather than rebuild for God's glory.

**Determination** - “will start rebuilding”

What’s the number one reason why rebuilding does not occur? Lack of determination to start! Who's going to start? In your marriage, with your kids, in your ministry. Say to yourself, “I will start” Come on, become a rebuilder! Stop relaxing, rebuild!! Stop retreating, rebuild! It may be a relationship, maybe a commitment. Determine to start.

*Family discussion question: What’s one place where you could start to practice this art of rebuilding?*

*Children’s activity: Fix something together today with your kids. Make it something simple. Suggestion for non-repair types: make some pictures on your wall hang crooked and get the kids to notice them. Fix them together.*

**Friday - Commitment**  
**MARY: THE CHARACTER OF COMMITMENT**

*"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" "Nothing is impossible with God." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Luke 1:34, 37,38 (NIV)*

Perhaps the greatest commitment made by any human being was the commitment that Mary made to trust God's will in giving birth to His Son. How would you react if told you were to bear the Son of God? We see in Mary's reaction not anything strange at all; in fact, something very familiar. She acted much as people today do when they come face to face with the fact that Jesus has come into the world... that Jesus is willing to come into their world. Mary goes through three stages... confusion, questions, commitment.

**Mary begins with Confusion**

She was confused, because she didn't understand who God was. Her great fear made her want to draw away. The angel helps her to understand, helps us to see: if you're afraid of God, you don't understand who He is. God's angel clears up our confusion by saying, "Don't be afraid." How needed those words are in so many of our lives. Fear, in pushing us away from God, is pulling our lives apart. "You will give birth to a son." Truth calmed her fear and changed it to wonder.

**Mary moves from Confusion to Questions - "How will this be?"**

Mary was saying, "Lord, I'm not qualified." She had as good a reason to say that as anyone in history. What the angel was telling her was impossible! However good or poor the excuse, the lesson that's needed is the same: stop looking at yourself and start looking at God. "How will this be?" Go ahead and ask! God answers our questions. He helps us with our doubts.

**Mary moves from Questions to Commitment**

In verse 38 you see an attitude in Mary that shines for us. Commitment seems to leap from the page as you read this verse. She makes her decision, "Be it done to me." William Barclay writes that the world's most common prayer is, "Thy will be changed." Mary refused the world's most common prayer and prayed the world's greatest prayer: "Thy will be done."

*Family Discussion Question: From confusion, to questions, to commitment; a journey that millions have taken when faced with that baby in a manger. Where do you need to take the next step in that journey today?*







**Saturday - Commitment**  
**WHERE COMMITMENT LEADS**

Where did the commitment that Mary and Joseph made take this young couple?

**Their commitment led them to Egypt.** Because King Herod was trying to kill the baby King they had to flee their homeland. It wasn't always convenient - all fun and games - to have Jesus as their son. Hollywood would have Mary saying, "I don't feel like cooking tonight, Jesus here's some bread and loaves, could you whip something up." Or, "One of the kids is sick, heal them." The truth is, their commitments made their lives better but not easy. Commitments are not always convenient!

**Their commitment led them to a temple.** The temple where they lost Jesus when He was 12 years old. They lost the Son of God. (Or they at least *thought* that they had!) Their great commitment led to a tremendous feeling of having let God down. Some people are afraid to make commitments because they feel they won't be able to keep them perfectly. Let me set your mind at ease¼ you're right, you won't! But those who are afraid of stumbling never get in the race.

**Her commitment led to being involved in Jesus' first miracle.** Mary was the one that encouraged that miracle! Opportunity is being in the right place at the right time so that God can use you in His way. You can't always schedule God's will, sometimes it's just a matter of being available. Mary's commitment made her available.

**Her commitment led to the foot of a cross.** Mary, the mother of Jesus, was there at the cross. Can you imagine the emotions that must have broken her heart? She knew that Jesus was God's Son. But Jesus was also her son. She had nursed and cared for Him as a baby - and now He was being tortured on a cross. Trust sometimes leads to a broken heart. A broken heart over our own sin. A broken heart over those who reject Christ.

**Her commitment led to the upper room.** In Acts we're told of the new church starting in an upper room. Not many people realize that Mary was there when that new church started. She saw the resurrected Jesus. She witnessed the beginning of His church that would change the world. In the end, her life of commitment led to a fulfillment of God's promise that she could have never imagined.

*Family Discussion Question: Where is your commitment leading you right now?*

**Sunday - Sacrifice**  
**SACRIFICING TO CHANGE**

*“Take with you your only son—yes, Isaac whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah and sacrifice him there¼” Gen 22:2 (TLB)*

We all have something we’d like to change in our lives. It might be our schedule or our habits, our words or our weight. Many of us struggle with making those changes. Instead of telling yourself you cannot change, why not discover the secret of lasting change.

The secret of lasting change is sacrifice. In the give and take of life what you give you keep and what you take you end up losing. Any talk about change must include an honest look at sacrifices. Lasting change is built on real sacrifices. Your attitude towards sacrifice can be a grumbled, “We all have to make sacrifices,” or a faith filled, “God asks us all to make sacrifices.” The sacrifices God asks of us always build towards the blessings God wants to give to us.

Abraham understood sacrifice. He sacrificed his former life and people when he moved to the promised land. And then, when it seemed that all the sacrifices had been made and he could coast for the rest of his life, God asked for the biggest sacrifice of all. He told Abraham to sacrifice his son. How could God ask that of Abraham? How could God ask so much of us? You've got it all wrong! It's not as if He takes and we give. It's more that he teaches us how to give so that He can give us even more.

We read this story and the tension builds - would God really let Abraham go through with it! There is a sigh of relief in us all when God stops Abraham at the end - when He provides a ram in the thicket. Hebrews 11 tells us that Abraham trusted God to resurrect his son even if he had completed the sacrifice.

In New Testament days this scene is replayed. Once again it's an only son, ready to be sacrificed. But this time it is Jesus, God's son, on the cross. But this time no voice calls out, no ram in the thicket. What He would not allow Abraham to do God himself did. Jesus sacrificed His life!

The sacrifice that Abraham did not have to make changed him. The sacrifice that Jesus did make changed us. There is no change without sacrifice.

*Family Discussion Question: What would you like to change?*

*Family Activity: “Change” the colour of some water by adding a few drops of food colouring. Talk about the fact that having Jesus in our lives may seem like a little thing to some people, but it changes EVERYTHING about us.*

**Monday - Sacrifice**  
**SACRIFICING TO GROW**

*“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize?  
Run in such a way as to get the prize.” 1 Corinthians 9:24*

The truth is, our biggest hurdle in making the sacrificial commitments we'd like to make for Christ is often ourselves! We don't always feel like doing what we know is right to do! Sometimes we feel like doing what we know is the worst thing to do. Wouldn't it be great if they made a TV remote control for people! Circumstances become overwhelming - click - change channels. Can't wait patiently - click - fast forward. Afraid of the future - click - pause. Want to make up for a mistake - click - rewind. Wouldn't it be great if they made a remote control for self-control?

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9 “I make myself.” How do you do that? The key to self control is Christ control - the Bible says it is a fruit that God's spirit wants to bear in our lives. Paul talks about three areas of life that we need to make a commitment to if we are to follow his leadership in our lives in this area of a new sense of self control.

Run for the Prize: Excellence

Don't run at the back, don't run with the pack, run for the prize. In a world where many are think it enough to have simply participated, we are challenged to strive for excellence.

Train for the crown: Eternity

If the relatively small promise of a reward like a gold medal can motivate us to such great heights even on a human level - just think of what a focus on eternity could do!

Aim for the goal: Energy

If you're running a race it's good to have your eye on the finish line! Paul reminded us that those who reach the finish are those who make sacrifices. He said he “disciplined his body.” We have a choice. We become a slave to our passions or we live for Christ with the passion of a slave.

*Family Discussion Question: Where do you need a renewed commitment to excellence, focus on eternity, a discipline for energy?*

**Tuesday - Sacrifice**  
**SACRIFICING TO LOVE**

*"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal." 1 Cor 13:1 (NIV)*

It's not enough for love to just be exciting, it also must be lasting! Teen age romance won't satisfy a middle aged couple. Puppy love won't last through the dog days of life. How can you build a love that lasts longer than a 2 hour movie, or a 210 page paperback novel? Paul writes to the Corinthians amidst their turmoil and tells them the secret of love that makes relationships last. Let's look at 1 Corinthians 13 together and get some clues to the daily sacrifices that keep love alive.

***"Love is patient..." (1 Cor 13:4)***

Love is alive when it has time, it is dying when it is hurried, it is dead when it cannot wait. Waiting **together** is a part of all of our relationships! But many times love also means that I must wait **for** someone else - wait for them to grow or to understand - wait for them to heal or to get motivated.

***Love is kind... (1 Cor 13:4)***

Love is alive when it cares, it is dying when it forgets, it is dead when it ignores. Kindness is the ability to do the little things well. The love expressed in kindness is learning how to turn those grand vows in a ceremony into washing dishes and dumping trash, how to turn those great hopes in a hospital nursery into changing nappies and staying up with sick children. Do you ever forget to be kind? We all do! Kindness in our families, with those we are closest to, takes real effort.

***"LOVE does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud" 1 Cor 13:4***

Love is alive when it is secure... is dying when it doubts... is dead when it loses trust. Security is one of the #1 issues in relationships. Add a little insecurity to the best of relationships and love battles to stay alive. This is true even in our relationship with God. What one step could you take to make that relationship where you are struggling more secure? What difference might it make for you to talk to or call someone today and say "No matter what happens, no matter how ill you become or how far apart we are, I will always love you."

*Family Activity: Here's your assignment... be kind to someone in your family today in some unusual or new way. See if you can catch each other being kind.*

*Children's activity: Show your kids how our actions affect our feelings. Have them act sad, ask if it makes them feel a little sad. Have them act angry, then act like they don't care. Then have them act happy and ask again how their actions affect the way they feel inside.*

**Wednesday - Sacrifice**  
**SACRIFICING TO LIVE**

*"I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."*

*John 12:24 (NIV)*

Imagine a grain of wheat talking to itself, admiring itself, noticing how round and brown and fully packed it is. Imagine it thinking about that physiology and psychology of falling into the cold, dark ground. The grain of wheat might say, "I'm feeling a little uncomfortable with this concept. I like myself as I am and think that falling into the ground would be a waste of my life."

Jesus is not talking about wheat in this verse. He is talking to us! He's reminding us that a sacrifice given out of a loving heart for Him always results in new life for ourselves and for others. Yet most of us have felt like our mythical grain of wheat. Sacrifice is a great idea¼ for other people or for some other time.

We all want to do something great with our lives. We think, "I'll finish those goals and then I'll have time to make the sacrifices." Jesus says to us, "Sacrifice comes first!" Jesus led the way for us. He sacrificed His life, literally, so that we could be forgiven. The most significant sacrifice in history brought about the most significant impact upon history.

This sacrifice is not a simplistic "no pain, no gain" philosophy. We're not talking about working hard. (Although there's nothing wrong with hard work.) Nor is this an invitation to a "martyr complex" faith. We're talking about true sacrifice: giving up that which is most important to you. Jesus could not have been clearer. Losing your life comes before finding your life.

And find it you will! Someone once said to a group of missionaries serving in a remote area "you have certainly buried yourselves here." The missionary replied, "We were not buried here, we were planted here."

*Family Discussion Question: How do we get past the "I'm not sure I really want to do this" feeling that goes along with all genuine sacrifices?*

*Children's Activity: Plant some seeds and watch them grow.*

**Thursday - Sacrifice**  
**SACRIFICING TO GIVE**

*“Those who cry as they plant crops will sing at harvest time. Those who cry as they carry out the seeds will return singing and carrying bundles of grain.”*

*Psalm 126:5-6 (NCV)*

A missionary tells about understanding the significance of this verse for the first time. During a time of drought the tribe with which he was working saw their supplies of corn stretched to the limit. He recalled seeing a father take one of the last bags of dried corn out of his families store room. This corn could have been pounded into meal to make the cakes that were the staple of the families diet. But, instead, he took the corn to the field where he sowed the seed into the ground. The missionary saw tears flowing down the man’s cheeks, and he understood. It hurt to put into the ground what might be his families last meal. Yet he knew that without sowing that seed his family would certainly starve the next year. So he sowed with tears knowing that he would one day reap with joy.

What’s the lesson? That we should give away our last meal? Of course not! The lesson is that it’s not always easy to “generate generosity!” When we talk about “giving cheerfully” it can sound as if giving is always an easy thing to do. That simply is not true. For those who give there is often the strange mixture of sacrifice and joy. You know that you’re doing what is right and yet it is often hard to let go. That’s true when we give our time, our money, our talents or ourselves.

But the truth is there is an inevitable law of sowing and reaping at work. It’s a natural law. It’s a spiritual law. Those who sow in tears WILL reap with joy. The result of our sacrificing to meet other’s needs is not just a feeling of satisfaction, well being or “having done the right thing.” It is JOY! What is joy? It is an overflowing sense of God’s perspective on life, an overwhelming experience of God’s presence in life and an overarching knowledge of God’s security for life.

*Family discussion question: Can you remember a time when it was difficult for you to give something? (Even preschoolers can think of an answer to this question!)*

**Friday - Sacrifice**  
**TWO COINS**

*Read the story of the widow in Luke 21:1-4.*

Two very small coins. Two mites, two cents. What could such a small amount buy? How could such a pittance be of any value to even a poor widow? It wasn't enough to make a difference; to buy a meal or rent a room or purchase a robe. It was seemingly only enough to remind her of all this widow had lost, all that her life now lacked. Yet, they were all that she had. She lived in a society in which a woman without a husband was not allowed to provide for herself. *These two coins had become her only security: all that she had left.*

Two very large coins! Two of the most talked about, most adored pieces of money in all of human history. More valuable than the crown jewels of England for their impact. More rare than the rarest of coins for their teaching. What could these two coins buy? They earned the highest praise of Jesus. Jesus looked at this woman and saw not a poor widow, but a woman of wonderful faith. *These two coins became her lasting legacy, summing up all that she had done right.*

There is a hidden fear for many of us in the reading of this story. If Jesus commended this woman for giving all that she had, might He not also ask the same of us? He does! He asks us to be **willing** to trust Him with our all. And if He ever challenged us to actually give it all away, be assured that He would not stop meeting our needs. Can you imagine the reward of that kind of genuine generosity?

Jesus is teaching his disciples, then and now, an important lesson as He points to this widow. We tend to be impressed with the amounts that people give. God is impressed with the heart that we give it with.

*Family Discussion Question/ Children's activity: Make up a story together. How do you think God rewarded this poor widow when she got to heaven. Enjoy this by going into the wildest and grandest detail you can imagine.*







**Saturday - Sacrifice**  
**THE JOY OF SACRIFICE**

*“But remember this—if you give little, you will get little. A farmer who plants just a few seeds will get only a small crop, but if he plants much, he will reap much.”*  
*2 Cor 9:6 (TLB)*

I'd like to suggest that we desperately need to give more and grow more in our lives and our families: the give and grow. Paul's advice to us is simple, found in a two word command and a two word promise.

The command? Plant much! The promise? Reap much! It's the simplest addition: few = small, much = much. It's the simplest agriculture: if you plant a lot of seed you can expect a large harvest. How do we sow with our lives? We can give ourselves in hospitality: opening our home in order to meet people's needs. Or how about ministry: going out from your home to meet people's needs. Or what about stewardship: using the resources God has given to us to bless others. The challenge is clear. We need to plant our lives.

Paul says that we are made rich so that we can be generous. That's an eye-opener!! Our riches are given not primarily to encourage our luxury, but our generosity. God's riches are not an invitation to luxury, there are an opportunity for generosity. We should all carry around stickers that say “opportunity.” Stick them on everything that God places into our hands: our paycheck, our car, our house. Each are an opportunity to praise God, love people and express our faith.

*Family discussion question: What do you need to put an “opportunity to praise God” sign on in your mind right now?*

*Children's activity: Write “opportunity to praise God” on several 3X5 cards. Ask your kids what to put them on today.*

**Sunday - Thankfulness**  
**THE INGREDIENTS OF THANKFULNESS**

*"I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus."  
1 Cor 1:4 (NIV)*

Understanding the right ingredients is all important! Heloise wrote in her "hints" column that the best way to cook a moist turkey was to, "Put a cup of water in the cavity of the turkey, cover with tin foil and bake." A reader wrote back to complain. "The turkey came out fine, but the plastic cup in the turkey melted!" Imagining that person trying to squeeze that cup into that turkey reminds us that directions must be specific! What are God's specific directions for developing a thankful heart? What are the ingredients that result in thanksgiving? Here's your "Thanksgiving recipe."

**Recognize God's grace**

When was the last time you sent your boss a thank you note for that month's check? Of course you don't, you don't generally thank someone for what you earned. That's why recognition of God's grace is such an important ingredient of thankfulness. When we recognize that all we have is a gift from Him it makes us into grateful people.

**Understand God's righteousness**

"Righteousness" means that God ALWAYS does what is right. Beginning to get a glimmer of how righteousness ties in with thanksgiving? Sometimes life doesn't feel like a gift - doesn't look all pretty with a bright bow on top. Thankfulness results from the knowledge that God is righteous. When life seems to have been unfair, when it seems when it seems to have cheated you, remember that God is righteous. His purpose will reign in the end.

**Thank God with other people**

Of course you can and should give thanks all alone. But the truth is: if you don't have a place to give thanks with others you'll soon stop giving thanks at all. You need to hear others give thanks. You need to share what God's doing in your life with others. Thankfulness is like bananas... it grows best in bunches.

*Family Activity: Start making a "Thanksgiving List" today, see how many things you can write down. Try to fill several pages.*

**Monday - Thankfulness**  
**HOW TO SAY "THANK YOU"**

"I will never worship anyone but you! For how can I thank you enough for all you have done?" Jonah 2:9 (TLB)

"Thank you." Those two words are incredibly significant and deeply spiritual. One of the greatest skills we can develop in life is the skill of saying thank you. Nehemiah had obviously developed this skill. In chapter 3 of this book there are 3 important lessons about saying a simple "thanks."

**Be specific**

Recognise the person. Say their name when you're saying thanks. A thank you is a wonderful opportunity to let another person know how important they are to you. Also, be specific about what they have done. It's one thing to say, "Thanks for dinner." It's better to be more specific, "Thanks for cooking the sauerkraut just the way I like it."

**Be sensitive**

The best words of thanks recognise not only an action but the heart behind the action. Jesus showed this kind of recognition when he noticed a child's humility, a widow who gave two mites, a woman who poured perfume on his feet. How encouraging it was to people as He looked beyond the bare bones of their actions to see and recognise the valuable attitudes of their hearts.

**Be searching**

Find ways to invite your mind to think about those whom you might want to thank. It bothers me that I often rush through life without taking time to thank those who have meant the most to me. Does that also bother you? I have a question written on my weekly schedule to force me to think about thanking people: "What 5 people will I write a note of encouragement to this week?" You might try something like this to help you to mentally search out those whom you want to thank.

*Family discussion question: Who do you need to write a note of thanks to today? Take a minute right now to thank each person in your family for something they have done recently? Be specific. Be sensitive.*

**Tuesday - Thankfulness**  
**THANKSGIVING LIVING**

*"No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus." 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (TLB)*

We all know how a Christmas turkey fills our stomachs. How does living gratefully fill our lives? What does thanksgiving DO to us? To understand the result of thanksgiving you need only look as far as the objects of thanksgiving. What we're thankful for becomes the faith focus of our lives. If we're not thankful at all we end up living a faith without focus. Thanksgiving has the power to bring God's perspective and focus to our everyday lives!

When I thank God for his blessings it impacts my attitudes.

We all know what it's like to be around the person who thinks the world "owes them something." That kind of thinking fills a person with ingratitude and bitterness. What about the person who recognises through thanksgiving the wonderful truth that God has "given them everything." That's the person with the truly magnetic personality. The attraction is in their attitude of continuous joy. You cannot find that attitude in our world apart from thanksgiving.

When I thank God for His Character it impacts my character!

Thankful people become holy people. As you thank God for His patience you develop endurance. As you thank Him for his unfailing love you'll grow an ability to love even the unloveliest, to love even in the worst of times. As you thank Him for His grace you develop a giving attitude. Praise not only pleases God, it changes us!

When I thank God for His Son it gives me a new sense of security and victory. The results of the gift of Jesus are staggering, truly "indescribable." Thankfulness is the proclamation of our trust in the truth that Jesus loved us and gave His life for us. When your faith focus becomes Jesus Christ then your life focus becomes victory!

*Family Discussion Question: What character quality of God would you like thank God especially for this thanksgiving week?*

**Wednesday - Thankfulness**  
**PRAISE TO GOD**

*“Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his.”  
Dan 2:20 (NIV)*

The Bible tells us that Daniel was one of the wisest men who has ever walked this planet. Even a quick look at his life reveals that one of the secrets to that wisdom was his everyday decision to give praise to God. Intelligence and knowledge without praise add up to pride. It is when we add praise to the mix that God’s wisdom begins to emerge. In Daniel chapter two we see in Daniel’s example three specific ways to praise God:

Praise God for His Character - “Wisdom and Power are Yours”

Tell God, “Your love is great, Your faithfulness is wonderful, Your decisions are perfect.” One of the healthiest things we can do is praise Him for who He is.

Praise God for what He is doing to YOUR Character

“You have given ME wisdom and power!”

Praise God for His Actions in History

Daniel 9:15 says, “Do it again, Lord.” That’s pure praise: rejoicing in God’s power in the past and recognising God’s power in the present.

God’s greatest action in history was the giving of His son. 1 Corinthians 1 calls the crucifixion of Christ foolishness to the world, but to us the wisdom of God. The cross is where God shows His wisdom and power to the world today.

We have a picture in our minds of getting wisdom by visiting a holy man on top of some far off hill. As if someone who is detached from the world is the person who has all of the answers? Wisdom IS found on a hill, but the hill is called Calvary. It is not found in someone who is detached from us, but where God identified Himself with all in the world. Want to see wisdom? Look at the cross. Praise God for what He did for you on the cross.

*Prayer: Thank You Lord, for the love that you showed for me on the cross. Let the truth that you will love me no matter what guide my decisions and my actions today.*

**Thursday - Thankfulness**  
**THANKSGIVING DAY**

*"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" 2 Cor 9:15 (NIV)*

Let me call your attention to the most important "thanksgiving" we have to offer. We should give the greatest thanks for our greatest gifts. The Bible reminds us that the gift of Jesus Christ is so great it is beyond description.

Thanks for that great a gift demands more than a card or a few words. Thanks to Jesus is given as we give our lives back to Him. Give Jesus your past, depending on Him for forgiveness and freedom. Give Jesus your present, trusting in His direction for today. Give Jesus your future, count on Him for the hope that you need.

*Family Activity: Have each person in the family give a gift of thanks to Jesus.*

**Friday - Thanksgiving**  
**TAKE THE TIME TO SAY THANK YOU**

*“When one of them saw that he was healed, he went back to Jesus, praising God in a loud voice. Then he bowed down at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. (And this man was a Samaritan.) Jesus said, ‘Weren’t ten men healed? Where are the other nine?’” Luke 17:15-17 (NCV)*

Only one in ten took time to tell Jesus thank you. Jesus asked a striking question, “Where are the other nine.” Indeed, where had they gone. What were they doing that was so important that they did not have time to thank the one that saved them from leprosy? Let’s imagine where the “other nine” might have been for a moment. The purpose is not to condemn them, but to recognise that we might easily have been among them.

One of the “other nine” might have been hurrying to the temple to complete the legal requirements that went along with such a healing. So focused on keeping the rules and getting things done in the right order that he did not have time to stop and say thank you.

Another was just following the crowd. If the majority had turned back to tell Jesus thank you, he would have gladly followed. It would have never occurred to him to do something other than what “the others” were doing. Those who take the time to say thank you are those who stand above the crowd, not simply with the crowd.

One of the nine might have been afraid to go back. Someone with the power to heal his leprosy might also use that power to give him leprosy again. He might have felt that he didn’t really deserve so great a blessing. What if he said or did the wrong thing and Jesus found him out for who he really was.

A few of the nine might have felt embarrassed to go back. As a leper he’d been used to thinking of himself as a useless outcast. What difference would his word of thanks make to a powerful public figure like Jesus.

Odds are that all of us find ourselves amidst “the others” at times. Today take some time to be “the one” who tells Jesus and tells others “thank you for what you’ve done.”

*Family Discussion Question: What have you “forgotten” to thank God for?*

**Saturday - Thanksgiving**  
**THANKSGIVING IS CELEBRATING**

If you haven't learned how to celebrate you haven't truly learned to trust God. Those who truly trust in Him take the time to celebrate what He is doing. Believers in Christ should not be unsmiling workaholics. They have learned to accomplish great tasks while still being able to enjoy life. Sometimes we accomplish a task only to find that we have become consumed by it, and so we cannot celebrate it. Nehemiah was a leader who not only knew how to work, he knew how to celebrate. As he led his people to celebrate after they had finished the wall around Jerusalem he teaches us some important lessons in celebration.

**Celebration grows out of worship.**

Worship is one of the vital keys to personal joy. In the Old Testament they regularly celebrated in festivals and special Sabbath days. They intentionally built into their lives opportunities to celebrate God.

**Celebration should be fun.**

Sacred does not equal sad. Enjoyment, after all, is God's idea. And so Nehemiah includes in his celebration a great feast. There should be no one in this world who has a better time celebrating than those who know Jesus as their savior. We have something to REALLY celebrate!

**The result of celebration is strength.**

*The joy of the Lord is our strength.* Far from sapping our strength for "more important things," celebration actually gives us the real strength we need to endure. Some people have the attitude, "Let's wait until we get to heaven to celebrate. Right now we have work to do." The problem with that is it doesn't take into account the way God has made us. We need to celebrate what He has done in order to receive the strength to do what He wants us to do. If you feel like your spiritual gas tank is empty here's your one word prescription: CELEBRATE!

*Family Discussion Question: What has God done in your lives this last year that you need to celebrate? Personalise this devotion guide by taking time to individually write down your "celebration list" on the last page of this guide. If you have children that cannot write, ask them to tell you what to write for them.*

*Children's Activity: Cut up some confetti or get some streamers, read John 3:16 and then throw them into the air to celebrate what God has done.*

