

Growing Our Hearts Toward God



Daily Devotionals to Help You Grow

There are any number of reasons that could keep someone from sharing their faith. What is it for you?

- Is it fear?
- Are you not sure what to say?
- Do you lack significant relationships with people outside the church?
- Do you know how to share the difference God is making in your life?

Living the Mission (1): Living in a World of Trust

"Living the Mission" is a four-part series intended to encourage you toward greater cooperation with what God desires to do through you to live and share the Gospel with others.

If fear is keeping you from expressing your faith, you'll want to consider the motivations behind courage that are addressed in this week's devotional.

"But you are the ones chosen by God... God's instrument to do his work and speak out for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you."

- 1 Peter 2:9, *The Message*

This devotional corresponds with the November 1, 2009 message.

MONDAY

*It takes courage
to make a difference.*

Acts 4:1-20

1. All too often, our lives are driven by fear, not faith. When it comes to sharing your faith, what fears do you struggle with most?
2. In today's passage, what factors account for the boldness of Peter and John? What does this suggest in terms of why the early church couldn't be stopped in telling others about Jesus, when we so often cannot even get started?
3. What is a source of opposition or resistance in your life—a situation in which you are getting "push back" because of your faith in Christ?
4. Read **Luke 21:12-13**, and notice that Jesus helped his disciples to see that "opposition means opportunity." How would it help you to think positively of the above situation (question #3) as an opportunity for God to work through your life?

Notice the focus of the disciples' prayer just a few verses later: *Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.* (Acts 4:29) How does their prayer differ from what you might expect?

Pray: Ask God to give you courage to speak and live boldly, expecting Him to use you to make a difference in the lives of those around you.

TUESDAY

*Appreciate the life-giving
nature of your message and calling.*

2 Corinthians 3:7-12

1. The point of this passage is that the ministry to which we've been entrusted (the new covenant) is far more magnificent than Moses' ministry (the old covenant), as glorious as it was at times. What contrasts are drawn between the two covenants? How does this motivate you as you consider your mission as a Christ-follower?
2. The word, "boldness," in verse 12 literally means "freedom of speech." According to this verse, what stimulates boldness, or the audacity to speak the truth?
3. Sharing your faith is much like placing a teapot on a hot burner. It's only a matter of time before it whistles! Do you spend regular time in God's Word, "stoking the fire?"

Fundamentally, you cannot share what you do not possess. Boldness is not a matter of mustering up enough courage. Boldness comes from filling your heart with the knowledge of God. As you grow in your relationship with God, there is produced in you a passion to share God with others!

Consider: What energizes you most, spiritually speaking? Your own personal study of the Word? Listening to a favorite Bible teacher? Reading a good book about God? Give thought to how you can continue to enrich your knowledge and faith in God.

Southeastern's Mission: "Growing Hearts Toward God."

*"But grow in the grace and knowledge
of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."
- 2 Peter 3:18*

WEDNESDAY

*Embrace the foolishness
of the Gospel.*

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

1. What are some specific examples of God turning conventional wisdom on its head, showing the foolishness of the so-called wisdom of this world (vs 20)?
2. Prior to becoming a Christ-follower, did you find anything in the Gospel difficult to accept, absurd, or even offensive? If so, what helped you over these hurdles? Further study? Relationships? A crisis?
3. As a Christ-follower, do you continue to be unsettled with the "foolishness" of the Gospel? What circumstances or situations typically bring these issues to mind?
4. In what ways has your own coming to faith helped to sensitize you, and equip you to share your faith with others?

Jesus freaks. Who wants to be considered odd, intolerant, or even a bit crazy? But God has chosen to use the "backwardness" of the Gospel as the very means of saving the world. Let others call you crazy, but may God find you faithful in living and sharing His word.

Memorize: 1 Corinthians 1:18. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring this verse to mind the next time you find yourself either embarrassed or tempted to shy away from speaking God's truth into someone's life. Embrace the foolishness of the Gospel. Nothing less will do.

THURSDAY

*Rely on the prayers and partnership
of fellow Christ-followers.*

Ephesians 6:19-20

1. What can you learn from Paul's need for prayer, and also from his prayer request itself, that might be helpful to you?
2. Similarly in **Philippians 1:18-21**, Paul alludes to his ability to share the Gospel as a result of the prayers of others and the strength given him by the Holy Spirit. According to this passage, what was Paul's driving ambition—and reason for wanting courage, even in difficult situations?
3. How would adopting Paul's mindset help you to better frame the situations in which you find it difficult to share your faith?

Take action—Are you a part of a smaller group of Christ-followers who pray for you, and encourage you along these same lines?

If not, what is one change that would help foster this sort of environment?

Your life in Christ was never intended to be something you do alone. In fact, if you don't partner with others, you make living and sharing Jesus unnecessarily difficult.

FRIDAY

*Find encouragement in the unstoppable
nature of God's Kingdom.*

Matthew 16:16-18

1. Many have speculated about the exact meaning of the phrase, "on this rock" (vs 18), and completely ignored the most important part of the verse: "I will build my church." What, exactly, is Jesus trying to communicate—especially given the imagery he uses?
2. If you think about it, Jesus launched a movement with these words, and here we are almost 2000 years later. The Gospel message was proclaimed, and someone shared it with someone, who shared it with someone else, ...who shared it with you! And more than likely, either you or the one who shared the Gospel with you, came to faith through a few unexpected twists and turns of events. What do you know about these matters?
3. Think about the unstoppable nature of God's Kingdom, especially in terms of His work in your own life. How does this encourage you in terms of moving against your fear in sharing the Gospel?

Imagine: Read Jesus' parable of the growing seed, and then His parable of the mustard seed (Mark 4:26-29, 30-32). Consider how the truths of these parables might apply to some particular situations in your life at the moment.

Growing Our Hearts

Toward God



Daily Devotionals to Help You Grow

The principle, "It takes courage to make a difference," was the underlying theme of last week's devotional. To affect any kind of change—particularly godly change—will always involve moving against one's fear of failure, ridicule or rejection.

Compassion is another important trait. More than merely being sympathetic, genuine concern moves one to action. It expresses itself in a willingness to forget about oneself long enough to understand and respond to needs of others.

Living the Mission (2): Living in a World of Windows

But you are the ones chosen by God... God's instrument to do his work and speak out for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you."

- 1 Peter 2:9, *The Message*

This devotional corresponds with the November 8, 2009 message.

MONDAY

It takes compassion to make a difference.

Philippians 2:3-5

1. In crisis situations such as natural disasters, it's normal to think in terms of how to leverage our resources to meet the physical needs of family members and friends. But what about day-in-and-day-out, in terms of their spiritual needs? Is this an orientation that comes easily for you? Why or why not?
2. What do you find most challenging in verses 3 & 4 about the mind-set that Jesus exemplified? Why?
3. The word "look" in verse 4 actually comes from the root word for "scope," as in microscope or telescope. The idea is that, as Christ-followers, we are to focus on the needs of others and not focus merely on our own. How often do you allow self-concern to dull your heart to the needs of others? What could you do to focus less on yourself and more on others—on a more consistent basis?

Take action: What are the names of two people you would like to influence toward God? Re-read this passage and substitute their names for each time you come across the word "others." Ask the Lord to make you aware of their needs, their hurts, their doubts, their fears. This is exactly what love demands (1 Corinthians 13:5).

TUESDAY

Increase your "approachability" factor.

Matthew 9:9-13

1. What did the general public think of tax collectors like Matthew? Have you ever thought about why Jesus chose the particular men that he did, to be his disciples?
2. Jesus attracted the attention of those who, by conventional standards, should have been the least interested. What was it about Jesus that made him so approachable? What clues do you find in this passage as to why, in one regard, Jesus was considered "safe?"
3. Do you have a relationship that you would identify as "safe," where you feel the other person is "for" you and will not reject you. How would you describe your level of openness and connection with that person?
4. How "approachable" are you? Would you be considered a "safe" person? Explain. What is one way in which you could grow in this regard?

Consider: The religious leaders of Jesus' day would have considered themselves "doctors" as well (i.e., Mt. 9:12), in the sense that they liked to diagnose disease. But the problem is that they didn't care about their patients! They thought God cares most for correctness. Jesus, on the other hand, demonstrated God cares more for mercy.

Southeastern's Mission: "Growing Hearts Toward God."

*"But grow in the grace and knowledge
of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."*

- 2 Peter 3:18

WEDNESDAY

Listen to understand.

Hebrews 13:3; 1 Peter 3:8

1. Someone once said that in order to share the Gospel with the world, Christians must "take their place among the condemned." How does this statement strike you? How would this statement translate in terms of your own circle of relationships?
2. The ability to empathize, or "trade places" with another person is an essential part of building a healthy (and redemptive) relationship. Stephen Covey put it this way: "Seek first to understand, then be understood." What character traits does this require?
3. When people are sharing their thoughts or feelings, do you tend to criticize them, or express empathy? Does acknowledging someone's thought process or emotions necessarily mean that you endorse them?
4. How can you address (rather than avoid) a difference on an issue, while acknowledging someone's thoughts, feelings, and situation at the same time? (Avoiding issues only fosters "unsafe" environments.)

Rejoice: Jesus traded places with you so that you can enjoy a right relationship with God (2 Corinthians 5:21). What did this require of Him? What will it require of you...to build redemptive relationships with those who are disconnected from God?

THURSDAY

Find common ground.

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

1. What were Paul's motives for shaping his life around the needs and concerns of others (notice verses 19, 22, 23)? Do you share the same level of concern?
 2. In order to reach "as many as possible," what adjustments—time, inconvenience, personal discomfort, study, etc.—would be needed to your present lifestyle?
- As Henry Blackaby puts it, "You must make major adjustments in your life to join God in what He is doing." However, that doesn't necessarily mean dropping all your present involvements. In fact, they might be avenues for connecting with others.
3. What sports, hobbies, or activities do you enjoy? How could you be more intentional about using these activities as a bridge to build meaningful relationships with others? Are there fellow believers with similar interests, who would partner with you?

Pray—What lengths are you willing to go, in order to lead someone toward a relationship with God? Paul stated it well, "Everything is permissible for me—but not everything is beneficial." (1 Cor. 6:12) Ask the Lord for wisdom regarding the commitments you make to various activities—that they reflect a larger concern for others and make the most of the opportunities you're given.

FRIDAY

Extend hospitality.

Romans 12:13; 1 Peter 4:8-9

1. How does extending hospitality differ from merely entertaining guests? Can you think of a significant time when you enjoyed someone's hospitality? What made it so meaningful?

Hospitality was an important factor in the spread of early Christianity. The church typically met in homes (i.e., Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15). Hospitality was therefore considered a tangible and vitally important way of expressing love for one another. Today, at least in the United States, Christians typically meet in buildings.

2. In what ways has the move from meeting in houses to meeting in buildings been an advantage? A disadvantage?
3. Do you believe Christ-followers should be just as concerned about hospitality today? What would it require of you to make hospitality even more a part of your lifestyle?

Reflect: Given the advantages of meeting in a building on Sunday mornings, what could be done to offset the disadvantages? How could you contribute toward creating a greater sense of welcome—both during & after our assemblies, especially in terms of engaging Sunday morning and Wednesday evening guests?

Growing Our Hearts

Toward God



Daily Devotionals to Help You Grow

The Gospel message is not intuitive. It has to be explained. And it's a matter of using your *lips* as well as your *life*. People need both a demonstration and an explanation. In either case, clarity is absolutely essential.

When it comes to sharing the gospel, actions without words are just as empty as words without actions. Your life should naturally cause people to ask questions about your hope in God. And when they do, you have the ideal opportunity to share the difference that God makes in your life.

Living the Mission (3): Living in a World of Words

But you are the ones chosen by God... God's instrument to do his work and speak out for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you."

- 1 Peter 2:9, The Message

This devotional corresponds with the November 15, 2009 message.

MONDAY

*It takes clarity
to make a difference.*

1 Peter 2:9-10, 3:15-16

1. According to the first passage, as Christ-followers we've been chosen by God to "do his work and speak out for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference" God makes in our lives (2:9, The Message). On a daily basis, how attuned are you to this aspect of your calling? What is one thing you could do to be more faithful in this regard?
2. According to the second passage, the godly way in which you respond to mistreatment or adversity will often evoke curiosity, and with it, an opportunity to explain why you live the way you do. But first, you must "set apart Christ as Lord" in your heart. What exactly does this mean, and why is it essential? How does this translate, practically speaking, in terms of your own life?
3. What question should you always be ready to answer, according to verse 15? Would you say that you're always prepared? How does this differ from being responsible for answering a question about God or the Bible?

Consider: Every Christ-follower has his or her own unique story. Have you ever considered the various "threads" to your own story, and how telling one aspect might be more meaningful to share with someone, depending on their own particular background?

TUESDAY

Display the truth openly.

John 4:39-42

1. What strikes you from this passage, particularly as you consider the frequent use of the word "believe"? What do you learn from the Samaritan woman about being a witness?
2. How do the principles you glean from this passage fit into the "Invest and Invite" strategy that we've adopted as a church?
3. How would you describe the way in which God is working in your life right now? How could you express it in a way that would be "heard" by those around you?

It's hard to trust a stranger. Whether you are looking for directions or a recommendation for a good mechanic, it's easier to turn to someone you already know and trust. The same holds true when it comes to people looking for spiritual direction or help. Most people come to faith on the arm of a friend.

What is your "life message?" Are you good news? How likely are people to come to you for spiritual direction and help?

Pray: Ask God to help you grow in your ability to reflect Jesus in such a way that gives Him glory and draws others to Him (Matthew 5:13-16).

Southeastern's Mission: "Growing Hearts Toward God."

*"But grow in the grace and knowledge
of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."
- 2 Peter 3:18*

WEDNESDAY

Speak the truth boldly.

John 8:31, 32

1. Paying attention to truth is a good thing to do! Whether it involves something as simple as the red warning light in your car, or something as complex as a fact that you've discovered about yourself, acknowledging truth is important (as painful as it might be). How have you seen this principle demonstrated in your own life?
2. Likewise the opposite is true: Ignoring truth leads to negative consequences. Share one way you've seen this principle at work in your life as well.
3. Truth matters! Everyone needs a truth-teller in their life. Would you agree? How would keeping this in mind help to strengthen your courage and resolve in sharing God's truth with others? How would it possibly help to frame your discussion?

Reflect: God is intent on changing us—through the power of His Word (Heb. 4:11-12) and usually in the context of godly relationships (Eph. 4:14-16).

Do you have truth-tellers in your life? Do the people who give you advice call you back to God and His Word? How free are they to speak truth into your life, based on whether you're likely to be more receptive or resistant to their advice?

THURSDAY

Share the truth graciously.

Mark 10:17-31

1. This passage records one of the many "hard sayings" of Jesus. Yet Jesus always was able to speak truth into people's lives in a manner that offered hope. What does verse 21 suggest in terms of how Jesus was able to exemplify both "grace and truth" in his conversations with others (cf. John 1:17)? In your conversations with outsiders, typically which of the two comes easiest?
2. What other "hard sayings" of Jesus come to mind? Of these sayings, which have you struggled with most? Why? How has this affected the way in which you go about sharing your faith with others?
3. "Truth is always narrow." Would you agree or disagree? Why? If you agree, how could you illustrate this point as a way of responding to someone who told you that you were being too narrow, or that each person had to find his or her own truth?

Study: One of the reasons why Paul was so bold in sharing the gospel was because he had complete confidence in its power to transform a life (Rom. 1:16). How confident are you? Participate in a seeker-oriented class or study (and take notes!), or read an appropriate book—as a way of renewing your passion and improving your ability to communicate the gospel in a meaningful way.

FRIDAY

Reflect upon the truth regularly.

Colossians 4:2-6

Plt Stop, our Wednesday evening programming, is an effort to provide a "safe," engaging, and helpful environment for people to find spiritual help and direction for their lives. The idea behind the "Invest & Invite" strategy is that you do what only you can do—invite your friends. Then those who are teaching or leading groups do what they can do (and what you might feel ill-equipped to do)—raise the issues. It's a partnership in the gospel.

1. Even though someone else might "raise the issue" in a class or small group, it is still up to you to help your friend "process" what he or she heard. You could do this on the drive home, or drinking coffee afterwards. One question you could ask is, "What did you find most meaningful from the discussion?" What are some other processing questions that you could ask?
2. Of all the things mentioned in Col. 4:2-6, what do you consider your greatest need at the moment, in terms of sharing your faith?
3. On a scale from 1 (low) to 10 (high), how aware are you of opportunities to turn conversations toward spiritual matters?

Homework: What can you do to improve your awareness rating (#3 above) or increase the opportunities to engage the "outsiders" around you?

Growing Our Hearts

Toward God



Daily Devotionals to Help You Grow

The devotional this week focuses on the *content* of the Good News we've been called to share. Often, when we think of the gospel, we think in terms of certain propositional truths about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

This viewpoint certainly reflects a correct understanding of what God has done through Jesus on the Cross (i.e., Romans 1:1-6). In fact, Paul put it this way: *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Living the Mission (4): Announcing Good News

This week, however, we're taking a slightly different tact. We'll be looking at the gospel...according to Jesus.

But you are the ones chosen by God... God's instrument to do his work and speak out for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you."

- 1 Peter 2:9, *The Message*

This devotional corresponds with the November 22, 2009 message.

MONDAY

The Good News should reflect God's rule in our lives.

Mark 1:14-15

1. Verse 15 is Mark's summary of Jesus' message. Think of it as shorthand. What, exactly, is the "good news" according to Jesus? In your own words, what is the meaning of each phrase? How does Jesus' message compare with what comes to your mind when you hear the word "gospel"?
2. When Jesus announced, "the Kingdom of God is near," was he referring to a closeness in the sense of time or proximity?
3. The gospel proclaims that the coming reign of God has already broken into human history. But given all the evil in the world, why should the world believe this? How does your response to question #2 help to shed some light on the matter?
4. Respond to Clarence Jordan's statement, *"The crowning evidence that Jesus lives is not ... a rolled-away stone, but a carried-away church."*

Consider: Read Zechariah 8:20-23. The prophet envisioned the day in which the nations and peoples of the world would hear the news of the reign of God, and they would receive it not because of arm-twisting or guilt-preaching, but because they would recognize it as Good News.

How does this challenge you personally, in terms of declaring the Kingdom of God to those around you?

TUESDAY

The Good News announces the opportunity for a different way to live.

Mark 1:14-15

1. Jesus said, *"Repent and believe the good news."* What, exactly, was the "good news" that Jesus was calling people to recognize and accept? Keep in mind that, at this point, Jesus was not using the word, "gospel," to refer to his death, burial, and resurrection.
2. The idea of repentance involves both a "turning away" and a "turning toward" (i.e., Acts 3:19). Most assuredly, the gospel calls us away from a certain way of life. But it also offers something incredible to turn toward—the rule of God. The opportunity for repentance should be understood as an incredible *gift*, and not an onerous *demand*. From your own life's experience, how would you illustrate this truth to someone?
3. What are the implications of your understanding of "good news" and "repentance", both in terms of how and when you could best approach someone with the gospel message?

Resolve: The Good News is not that the world is going to hell in a hand-basket. The Good News is that God offers an abundant, life-giving alternative to an "empty way of life." In this sense, we should be *announcers*, not *denouncers*!

Southeastern's Mission: "Growing Hearts Toward God."

"But grow in the grace and knowledge
of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."
- 2 Peter 3:18

WEDNESDAY

*The Good News points
us to loving God with all our being.*

Mark 10:17-31

1. The man's question seems honest enough, asked out of deep humility, doesn't it? So why does Jesus begin by ignoring the question and focusing instead on the way in which he is greeted?
2. When Jesus does respond to the question, he recites many of the Ten Commandments. What strikes you about the particular commandments he lists (or doesn't)?
3. The man stated that he had kept the commandments—and Jesus responds, "one thing you lack..." Although Jesus goes on to mention three things—*sell, give, follow*—it wasn't a checklist he had in mind, but rather an attitude or orientation. What is it?

The man went away sad. He had been able to manage a Checklist Spirituality, but the re-centering of his life was something he considered too difficult.

4. When so many people regard Christianity as only a matter of keeping a moral code, how could you use this passage as a way of communicating the central truth about what it means to follow God?

Reflect: Mark 12:30-31 summarizes all the commandments. Perhaps this helps explain the missing commandments in Jesus' list. By omitting them, He was actually calling attention to them.

THURSDAY

*The Good News concerns itself with
transforming the heart.*

Matthew 15:10-20

1. What is the key verse in this passage? What is the point of Jesus' teaching?
2. Why is it so easy, (and appealing) to be obsessed about the outside (external actions), while ignoring the inside (internal attitudes)?
3. Read **Matthew 5:17-20**. How does this passage about keeping God's commandments square with what Jesus taught about the importance of the heart, especially considering verse 20?
4. How do the examples in Matthew 5:21-48 help to illustrate the kind of righteousness or "right living" that God desires? Is your greatest concern with keeping certain minimal requirements of God or with becoming a person like God? How open have you been in allowing God to change you—from the inside out?

Pray: God is looking for people whose hearts are given to Him. Jesus is calling for us to say, "I want to be God's I want to be more like Him. I want Him to change me inside out." Ask God to make you more aware and sensitive to the inner righteousness He desires.

FRIDAY

*The Good News invites
us to enjoy God's best.*

Matthew 20:1-16

This parable describes what it means to live under the rule of God (verse 1). For that matter, the parable explains how one "receives" or enters into the Kingdom as well.

1. What are the many unexpected and surprising twists within this parable? What do the actions and words of the landowner teach you about God's character?
2. What does verse 10 suggest as to why the first workers felt such outrage and offense? Have you ever been in a similar situation and felt the same? Explain.
3. Likewise, what about the joy and elation felt by those who were hired later? Share a time when you've had a similar experience.
4. What does this parable suggest as to the reason why people fail to experience more joy in their relationships? Even more importantly, how does it explain why the "least likely" folks entered into the kingdom of God, while religious-oriented folks did not (notice **Matt. 21:31-32; Luke 7:29-30**)?

Consider: The "Smith Barney" approach to a relationship with God (as "earned") keeps us from experiencing God's heart and robs us of joy. Even more so, it keeps one from accepting the Good News and God's salvation.