

# 21 DAYS OF PRAYER

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21 Days Dedicated  
to Getting Your  
Heart Healthy

# JAN- 2020

# GETTING YOUR HEART HEALTHY

21 Days Dedicated to Getting Your Heart Healthy

## DEAR FRIEND,

Over the last few months, I've spent a lot of time asking God to show me a word to help kick off a new decade as a church. Increasingly, what I heard the Holy Spirit say to me was "Dusty, help them get their hearts healthy."

This wasn't a surprise to me. Over the last two years, Kendra and I have worked tirelessly on this area of our own lives. As we've put in some hard work over the last 24 months, we realized areas that we needed to grow and have worked to be more intentional in these areas than ever before.

All of us are responsible for the condition of our own hearts. What I've realized is that more people live in the realm of unhealthiness in their hearts than do not. Past pain, current relational struggles, a lack of discipline, and a myriad of other things contribute to the reality that most people live in. If you have ever felt like you've not been the best version of yourself, you aren't alone. There are a lot of people walking that same road and it's often hard knowing how to move past it.

So in several different areas throughout the year, we're going to work on our hearts and this January series entitled, "Getting your Heart Healthy" and 21 Day Prayer Guide that accompanies it are where we're going to begin.

What I've discovered is that many of the biblical characters that we often read about were on a journey towards getting their own hearts healthy. In this very simple study, we'll look at 21 different Biblical characters and

discover 21 different traits that we must develop in our personal lives that will help contribute to a healthy heart. I hope you'll take the time and really consider each of these. Chances are, you'll find yourself in at least one of the characters.

I want to encourage you to join us for 21 Days of prayer. Since I can remember, Heartland Church has given the beginning of our year to this period of focus. When you discover the beauty of daily conversation with Him, you'll experience the presence of God that will change your life.

Prayer changes everything!

**Pastor Dusty Dean**



**"WE'RE  
GOING TO  
HELP YOU  
UNDERSTAND  
HOW TO  
PRAY MORE  
EFFECTIVELY  
AND TO  
HEAR GOD  
MORE  
CLEARLY."**

# HOW TO USE THIS PRAYER GUIDE

The first 7 days are devoted to hearing God while the second 14 days are all about your prayer life.

While this guide will help give you specific topics to pray about, we want you to use it as a daily devotional as well. As a result, here is a specific guide of the sections that will be included each day and how you can effectively use these sections to help you grow spiritually.

## **SECTION 1: SCRIPTURE READING**

The Scripture reading is a passage of Scripture that we want you to study. You will notice that we only reference the passage and do not include it. That is because we want to encourage you to open a physical Bible, preferably not an electronic form, and read the text.

Once you have read the passage, reread it a second time and use a highlighter or pen to underline key words that stand out to you in the text.

## **SECTION 2: DEVOTIONAL THOUGHT**

The devotional thought features a character from Scripture and a trait of a healthy heart.

## **SECTION 3: JOURNALING**

The third section is a place for you to journal. Here we want you to write your observations about the text as well as how you believe the Holy Spirit is challenging you to grow you in the specific area. You can get as detailed as you like in this area. We've included questions to guide you.

# PERSONAL PRAYER TARGETS

## MY GOVERNMENT

President: \_\_\_\_\_

National Leaders: \_\_\_\_\_

State leaders: \_\_\_\_\_

City leaders: \_\_\_\_\_

## MY FAMILY

Spouse: \_\_\_\_\_

Children: \_\_\_\_\_

Parents: \_\_\_\_\_

Siblings: \_\_\_\_\_

Extended Family: \_\_\_\_\_

## MY CHURCH

Pastors: \_\_\_\_\_

Small group leader: \_\_\_\_\_

Small group members: \_\_\_\_\_

## MY LIFE

Employer: \_\_\_\_\_

Co-workers: \_\_\_\_\_

Employees: \_\_\_\_\_

Teachers and professors: \_\_\_\_\_

**THOSE I AM INFLUENCING**

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**THOSE WHO NEED GOD**

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**MY NEEDS**

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# DAY 1

## MARY LUKE 1:26-28

Mary's life was marked by her belief in God's ability to do the impossible. She was a seemingly normal, young girl when an angel appeared and told her she was going to have a baby as a virgin.

Hebrew law dictated that Mary should've been killed for having sex outside marriage, and she was engaged to a man who might not have believed her story about the angel. Despite these circumstances, Mary chose to respond in faith, "I am the Lord's servant...May your word to me be fulfilled" (Luke 1:38).

Imagine what her pregnancy was like or what it was like to be the mother of the man who created everything. The power of God was inside her womb. Jesus grew up before her eyes, becoming strong and filled with wisdom (Luke 2:40).

Mary was there for it all. She saw Jesus' character shaped through His experiences. She saw her suspicions about Him proved through His actions. She became not only Jesus' mother on Earth but also a devoted disciple.

God worked through a humble woman to change the course of human history. Mary was faithful with little and then with much. God trusted her with an intangible promise and then with a child: our Savior. No matter what others said about her or her son, Mary believed. And in the end, her faith was satisfied as she saw the prophecies about Jesus become reality through His death and resurrection.

Faith is a huge part of building a healthy heart. In this journey towards a healthy heart, it's pivotal that you believe that God can take you where it doesn't seem that you can take yourself.

### REFLECT:

- What kind of circumstances typically cause you to question God?
- What has God entrusted you with that seems small?
- How is God asking you to step out in faith in this season?

# DAY 2

## JOHN MATTHEW 4:20-22

Jesus was by the Sea of Galilee, choosing and calling men to be a part of His inner circle of friends. This group would walk with Jesus every day of His ministry. Here, among a sea of seemingly low-status men, Jesus began to call His disciples.

“Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him” (Matthew 4:21-22).

Jesus wasn't looking for equipped men when He chose His disciples, He was looking for men He could equip. And the qualifications for Jesus' calling? Nothing. Jesus knew John fully and loved him completely.

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**JESUS CALLS US  
TO A LIFE OF JOY,  
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BUT BECAUSE OF  
HIS LOVE FOR US.**  
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Jesus calls us to a life of joy, not because of what we do, but because of His love for us.

Jesus called John to a complete life change, not because of anything John had done or was able to do, but because Jesus loved him. Jesus does the same with each of us. He calls us to a life full of joy, not because of what we do, but because of His uncontainable love for us.

Saying yes to Jesus' call is part of building a healthy heart. You must passionately and resolutely accept the fact that Jesus wants to chisel off some of the rough parts of your life knowing that He's a loving father that works things for your good.

### REFLECT:

- In what areas of your life have you felt like you had to work for Jesus to love you?
- How has God's love changed you?
- What is Jesus calling you to put aside so you can follow Him completely?

# DAY 3

## PETER

**MATTHEW 4:18-20, 16:18**

Wake up, go to work or school, come home, go to sleep, and repeat. Falling into a routine is normal. But God wants more than normal for us. God wanted more than normal for Peter.

When Peter first met Jesus, he was casting nets into the Sea of Galilee. Fishermen in Peter's day were the equivalent of high school dropouts. Peter's daily routine probably went something like this: wake up, cast a net, catch some fish, come home, sleep and repeat.

This all changed when Jesus told Peter, "Come, follow me" (Matthew 4:19). Peter didn't hesitate. He dropped his nets and followed Jesus.

Peter wanted a new, more purposeful life, but he couldn't find that life until he met Jesus. It isn't until Jesus calls us to be something or someone greater that we realize how limiting the expectations we have for our lives can be. By dropping his nets and following Jesus, Peter learned God had great plans for his life. "...You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18).

No longer was Peter a dropout. He became the foundation for the church and led thousands of believers as the Gospel spread across the earth.

Breaking out of your rut is part of building a healthy heart. While there are parts of our lives that will always become routine, we can't let the routine cause us to become lulled into unhealthiness or a lack of growth.

### **REFLECT:**

- If there were any areas of your life right now you were prone to get into a rut, what areas would that be?
- What do you need to do to break free?
- Are you lowering your expectation of what God wants to do in you? If so, how?
- What is Jesus calling you to? What step do you need to take to begin following Him?

# DAY 4

## MATTHEW

### MATTHEW 9:9-13

# DAY 4

Matthew was a tax collector—a corrupt position no self-respecting Jew would take. So when Jesus went to a party with Matthew and his friends, it caused quite a commotion.

Religious people couldn't understand why someone like Jesus would want to hang out with sinners like Matthew and his co-workers. Jesus answered saying, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick...For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:12-13).

***"THOSE WHO ARE PHYSICALLY SICK NEED A DOCTOR. THOSE WHO ARE SPIRITUALLY SICK NEED A SAVIOR."***

When Jesus invited Matthew to follow Him, Matthew got up, left everything and followed Him. Matthew recognized his sickness of sin and his need for Jesus.

Matthew's willingness to drop everything without looking back is a beautiful picture of obedience. Matthew is also proof that Jesus can use anyone, no matter his or her past. We were all born with a sickness called sin and only Jesus can make us healthy. Are you willing to drop everything and follow Him?

Being obedient to God is part of building a healthy heart. When we trust Jesus with our yes, we trust Him to take the parts of us that we're not proud of and mold us into a righteous image that God desires. Courage isn't the absence of fear. It's saying yes in the very middle of your fear.

#### **REFLECT:**

- Are there any areas of your life you need to submit to Jesus? What areas?
- Is anything keeping you from leaving your old life behind to follow Jesus? What and why?
- When was the last time you brought someone to church or started a friendship with someone far from God?

# DAY 5

## ANDREW MARK 1:16-17

As the son of a fisherman, Andrew would have spent hours learning his dad's trade and preparing to follow in his footsteps. Day after day, Andrew and his dad cast their nets until, on one seemingly mundane fishing trip, Jesus lured Andrew with an invitation: "Come follow me and I will send you out to fish for people" (Mark 1:17).

Jesus extends the same offer to each of us. As Andrew soon learned, life change starts when we accept Jesus' invitation and follow Him.

Andrew had heard about Jesus and probably heard some of Jesus' preaching (John 1:35-42), but this was only the beginning of Andrew's journey with Jesus. Because Andrew had faith, he was willing to follow Jesus and leave the life he was accustomed to. As a result, Andrew witnessed numerous miracles including Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

*"COME FOLLOW ME AND I  
WILL SEND YOU OUT TO FISH  
FOR PEOPLE"*

Jesus was no longer a distant celebrity or rumored messiah. As one of Jesus' 12 disciples, Andrew knew Jesus intimately and personally. But this relationship only began after Andrew left his former life for the new life Jesus had to offer.

Leaving old habits and attitudes behind is part of building a healthy heart. Many of us want God to create a new heart in us while still gripping tightly to our old habits and lifestyles. But God is not in the business of accommodation, he's in the business of being God. We must surrender the parts of us to Him that don't make us more like Him.

### REFLECT:

- What do you most want God to change in your life?
- When was a time in your life when you had to ask God for the faith to leave something behind?
- What next step do you need to take today?

# DAY 6

## THE BLEEDING WOMAN

MARK 5:25-34

Looks can be deceiving. It's easy to live a life that appears perfect but lacks a desperate need for Jesus. We can know the Bible, have godly spouses and be involved in church, but sometimes it takes significant pain to force us to fall at the Lord's feet. Sometimes, we see God's mercy best through the pain.

In Mark 5, Jesus encountered a woman who was driven to Him by her own weakness. For years she had lived with the same problem. She was ostracized by the society in which she lived. She was not considered fit for marriage, and would not have been welcomed by the "church people" of her day. Though it was likely difficult for her to recognize, all of this was God's way of drawing the woman to Jesus.

**"GOD  
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MESSIEST."**

Jesus changed this woman's life on the spot. At some point, many of us have believed the lie that we need to clean up before coming to the Lord. We have lived in fear that God wouldn't be able to handle the mess we have made and that we would be left to begin the cleanup process alone. What God asks of us is to seek His help and the help of His people. God welcomes our mess, and often His voice is the clearest when our lives are the messiest.

Inviting God into the difficult parts of your life is part of building a healthy heart. So often, our pride leads us to believe that we can fix our problems and messes on our own. But the truth is that we need a savior to get into the fold. Once we invite the savior in to the brokenness, it's there that truly the process of getting healthy can really begin.

### REFLECT:

- What messes are you dealing with today?
- What could God be trying to teach you through your pain?
- Are you willing to seek the help of other Christians in this area? Why or why not?

# DAY 7

## THE ROMAN CENTURION

**MATTHEW 8:5-13**

A centurion was a career military officer in the Roman army. This man would have been the boss of more than 100 soldiers. He had money, power, and influence. Still, the centurion had the ability to see what so many others could not: Jesus was not just another teacher.

The centurion was a caring man, as evidenced by his concern about his servant's suffering. The centurion could not control this illness, but he knew Jesus could.

Despite being a powerful man himself, the centurion was able to see the power that Jesus had. Jesus had authority over all things, including illness. Because the centurion understood Jesus' authority and acted upon this belief, the servant was healed.

Often, we believe that the greatest miracle occurs when Jesus saves those who have little — whether little status, money or health. We love dramatic testimonies that begin in poverty and end in prosperity. Just as much of a miracle occurs when a person who is great by the world's standards sees his poverty and, in light of God's greatness, recognizes his need for Jesus.

Humility is part of building a healthy heart. While pride, wealth and status kept others from Jesus, those things didn't hinder the centurion because he humbly understood Jesus' authority over all things.

You have just completely 7 days' worth of devotionals. Congratulations on that milestone. Now, keeping going. Keep building off this momentum and ask God to continue to speak.

### **REFLECT:**

- What part of your life feels out of your control right now?
- Do you believe Jesus has authority over all things and you don't? How do your actions reflect that belief?
- Do you have trouble asking for help? Is pride stopping you from coming to Jesus for help with any area of your life? Why or why not?

# 8

## THE GIRL POSSESSED BY DEMONS

**MATTHEW 15:21-28**

# DAY

When the mother of a demon-possessed girl came to Jesus, she broke every rule of society. Jews like Jesus did not associate with non-Jews like this woman. For a non-Jewish woman to approach a Jewish man was incredibly culturally taboo and offensive. Clearly, this woman was desperate to petition Jesus for her daughter's healing.

Even after Jesus said "no," the woman was not disheartened, and her faith was not hindered. She pressed on and Jesus

**FAITH  
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healed her daughter. This woman received the change she desired for her daughter because her faith was tireless, even in the face of discouraging circumstances.

This woman's courageous, persistent faith is the kind of faith God wants for us. If we want to see change in our own lives, we must have the faith to persevere. Faith is the precursor to change.

Persistence is part of building a healthy heart. Just how bad do you want to be healed? How badly do you want to be made whole? How badly do you want to see your life take on the fruit that God so desperately wants for your life? The answer to that question often lies in your endurance.

### **REFLECT:**

- When was the last time you were so desperate to see Jesus move that you stopped caring what other people think? What stops you from having that kind of bold faith all the time?
- How do you respond when God doesn't answer prayers right away? What can you learn from the mother of the demon-possessed girl?
- Is there anything that you hesitate to talk to God about? What's holding you back?

# DAY 9

## ZACCHAEUS

LUKE 19:1-10

Zacchaeus, Jericho's chief tax collector, was so intent on seeing Jesus that he climbed a tree just to catch a glimpse of Jesus as he passed through town. We don't know what Zacchaeus was thinking, other than "How can I get a clear view of this man?" Maybe Zacchaeus felt guilty about his past choices. Maybe he had heard of Jesus and knew Jesus was the only hope for change. Maybe calling out to Jesus was spontaneous. All we know is the result of this encounter: Zacchaeus was changed.

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### *FAITH DOESN'T JUST AFFECT OUR THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS; IT PRODUCES ACTION.*

We often think of faith as something that is confined exclusively to our head and our heart, but our faith doesn't just affect our thoughts and emotions; it produces action. After a simple invitation from Jesus, Zacchaeus offered to return money to anyone he had defrauded and to give half his possessions to the poor.

Faith changes us. Zacchaeus was wealthy, crooked and greedy. However, his faith in Jesus changed the way he lived his life. How is your faith being demonstrated in your life?

Action is part of building a healthy heart. You cannot just expect God to simply act alone, you must start to do some of the hard work as God instructs you. Maybe there's someone you need to forgive, or perhaps you need to take a step about a small group. Whatever it is, put what God is speaking to you about in action and have faith that He'll produce good fruit through your best efforts.

#### **REFLECT:**

- How has your faith in Jesus shaped your relationships, your approach to your job, and your attitude toward your hobbies?
- How can you show someone else the love of Jesus today?
- What recent actions have you taken in faith?

# DAY 10

## THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

**JOHN 4:1-30**

Ever feel like you have the weight of the world on your shoulders? Sin weighs us down and nothing we do can take that weight off of us. It is so easy to get caught up in our sin and lose sight of our Savior. Here's the good news: God wants to give us a new life.

The Samaritan woman Jesus met in John 4 was weighed down by sin. She was weighed down by her five ex-husbands and the new man she was living with. To have one ex-husband at this time was scandalous enough. To have five made her an outcast. The fact that this woman was living with a man she wasn't married to and getting water during the hottest part of the day were good indicators that she was done playing by society's rules. She didn't want to hear what anyone had to say and she had all but given up.

Jesus met this woman where she was. Using the well water as a metaphor, Jesus offered her a new life, and love that would fulfill her forever (John 4:14). After meeting Jesus, the Samaritan woman was so changed that she ran into town and told everyone about her encounter. Jesus knows everything we've done and will ever do. He doesn't want us to try to fix our lives. Jesus wants us to accept His gift of salvation and follow Him. In doing so, He'll give us a new life, a life greater than the one we imagine for ourselves.

Accepting Jesus' forgiveness is part of building a healthy heart. So many people live out of the shame of the yesterday and because of that, they are unable to see their tomorrow. Realizing that Jesus loves you at your worst is often fuel to serve him with your best. Be encouraged today that no matter how low you feel, Jesus is reaching out for you.

### **REFLECT:**

- What's weighing you down today? Confess it to Jesus. He can handle it.
- How do you respond when you make a mistake? What's the difference between hiding it or fixing it and confessing it?
- The woman at the well couldn't wait to tell people about the man who knew everything about her and loved her anyway. Who do you need to share the gospel with or invite to church?

# DAY 11

## THE LAME MAN BY THE POOL

JOHN 5:1-15

In John 5, Jesus goes to pools believed to have healing powers. If someone got into the pool at the right time any illness he had would be healed. As Jesus approached these miraculous pools, He saw a lame man who had been lying by the pools for a long time. Jesus boldly walked up to the man and asked if he wanted to be healed.

“‘Sir,’ the invalid replied, ‘I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me’” (John 5:7). Jesus’ response? He rescues the lame man from a hopeless situation and heals him on the spot!

When the lame man was healed, his circumstances changed. But believing in Jesus is what changes a man’s heart. A little while later, Jesus finds the formerly lame man at the temple and warns him, “Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you” (John 5:14).

### HEALING IS PART OF BUILDING A HEALTHY HEART.

The reason for healing is not to change our circumstances; God wants to change our hearts. God rescues us from seemingly hopeless situations all the time, but believing in Jesus is the only way to change our hearts.

Healing is part of building a healthy heart. What areas of your life are you genuinely needing Jesus to heal so that you can become all that He’s called you to be? Each of us must do the hard work to come before Jesus and give up our disappointments, moments of rejection or wounds. The good news is that we serve a God who isn’t just able to heal, but takes great delight in healing.

### REFLECT:

- What has God healed you from? What has God forgiven you of?
- God changes our circumstances in order to change our hearts. How has your heart changed as a result of what God’s done in your life?
- What seemingly hopeless situations are you facing today? God wants to rescue you. Will you accept His help?

# DAY 12

## THE MAN BORN BLIND

JOHN 9:1-41

In John 9, Jesus provokes the religious establishment by breaking their man-made traditions. He heals on the Sabbath, the weekly day of rest, and mixes water and dirt to make mud, a forbidden Sabbath activity. After one encounter with Jesus, the man born blind was no longer the same.

Jesus confronted the Pharisees for their made-up rules, their self-righteousness, their entitled attitude, and their lack of compassion. Spiritually speaking, the Pharisees were as blind as the man before Jesus.

Through the blind man's story, we see the miracle of our salvation and the slippery slope of religion. Too often, we forget who we were and what we were doing when Jesus saved us. When that happens, we can become like the Pharisees — full of knowledge and lacking in gratitude. We must never forget that we have been rescued.

When we stay connected to our salvation, when we continue to live just as we did when we first declared Jesus as Lord, we will be strengthened in faith and overflowing with thankfulness. That's what it means to truly see.

Keeping perspective and taking time for reflection is part of building a healthy heart. In the rat race to move forward, we often forget where we've been. Chances are that in the midst of frustration with what you have going on today were once prayers that you could get to this point. Let's not grow weary with the blessings and manna that God has provided us already.

### REFLECT:

- What was life like before you met Jesus? What was different after you began a relationship with Jesus?
- Can you say that you are just as passionate now as when you first believed? If not, what is different?
- The greatest revelation Jesus can give us is a clear picture of Himself. Take this opportunity to pray for a clearer vision of Jesus.

# DAY 13

## THE RICH MAN

MARK 10:17-27

A wealthy man approached Jesus and asked what he could do to inherit eternal life. The man sensed that Jesus was a good teacher, and wanted help because his lifestyle of riches and ruling left him empty.

When Jesus told the wealthy man to sell his belongings, give to the poor and follow Him, the man left saddened because he loved his possessions. The wealth he had gathered became a barrier to following Jesus.

Some people don't change right away when they meet Jesus. Change can be a process, not just a moment. Jesus wanted to change the wealthy man's life, but He wanted the man to want to change. Unfortunately, the man resisted change when Jesus called him into a better life.

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**OUR IDENTITY  
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NOT OUR  
POSSESSIONS.**  
”

God wants us to live completely devoted to Him, not chained to our possessions or status. Our identity is shaped by our provider, not our possessions.

Being willing to change is part of building a healthy heart. If you're searching for more this year, then chances are that it's going to require something from you. Perhaps Jesus will call you into something new and that requires us to let go of what's currently in our hands to grab onto the new. Be rest assured: Jesus is better than our possessions. God has generously given us Jesus, and He asks us to dedicate ourselves to Him, because God wants to do amazing things with our lives.

### REFLECT:

- Do any of your possessions steal your affection from Jesus?
- What's holding you back from taking your next step in following Jesus?
- How prepared are you for change? What can you do now to be ready for when and how Jesus calls you to change?

# DAY 14

## BARTIMAEUS

MARK 10:46-52

All of us have reached a point where we desperately needed help. Whether it's help with relationships, finances or life decisions, there are challenges we can't face alone. It's easy to say we have faith that God will bring us through struggles. It's far more difficult to walk through conflict trusting He will take care of us.

Bartimaeus was a blind roadside beggar who cried for help when he heard Jesus was walking by. There's no record Bartimaeus had ever met Jesus or interacted with Him before but Bartimaeus believed something about Jesus even before he encountered Him. Bartimaeus sensed he needed Jesus' mercy and he asked Jesus to do something. He wanted Jesus to do a miracle in his life by restoring his sight. Despite others telling him to be quiet, Bartimaeus continued to beg Jesus for healing until He did it. Jesus changed Bartimaeus' life by restoring his sight. After he was healed, Bartimaeus immediately followed Jesus, using his newfound vision to participate in the work Jesus was doing.

With even the smallest amount of faith, God can work the most amazing miracles. God hears the cries of broken people and heals us in His timing. Let's not be like the naysayers in verse 48, discouraging those around us from begging God for help. And let's not give up ourselves in asking God to work miracles in our lives. Jesus loves when people seek Him with the faith that He will change their lives. Reaching out to Jesus for help is part of building a healthy heart. Most of us let our pride get in the way of asking God. Perhaps it's the fear of looking weak or maybe the fear of God not delivering what we're needing that keeps us isolated. But healthy people refuse to live in isolation, and they refuse to let their pride stop them from reaching out. If you want to be free, it begins by asking.

### REFLECT:

- What miracle are you asking God for today?
- How can we continue to walk with Jesus in faith, even though we don't know when God will show up with a miracle?
- Do you tend to be a critic and naysayer or a positive supporter of others? Why or why not?

# DAY 15

## MARTHA LUKE 10:38-42

Martha was intensely practical. She knew what needed to be done, how much time it would take, and how many people she needed to accomplish the task. But Martha's schedule left her exhausted. Always thinking, planning and adjusting, but never resting. When others wouldn't listen to her realism, she felt ignored and had to work all the harder. Her busyness led to self-righteousness, bordering on a lack of faith.

Martha knew the power of God that was in Jesus, or so she thought. She believed He was the Messiah, the Savior of the world, and she knew He could heal any sickness.

Yet, Martha's focus on tangible, practical issues masked the deeper questions she wrestled with: Why am I the only one working to make things better? Why do people ignore me? Why don't other people follow the rules? Why am I always worried? Is it OK to enjoy things?

Jesus knew this, so when Martha confronted him in exasperation, He paid attention to her. He heard her words, but more than that, He heard her heart. He redirected her focus, calling her out of her circumstances: "but few things are needed—or indeed only one" (Luke 10:42). The one thing she needed was Him.

Praying **FIRST** is part of building a healthy heart. So many times, we're looking everywhere else for a solution to the problems that we're facing when what we really should be doing is petitioning our God before anything else! Like Martha, the answer to our anxiety, fear, and need for order is to focus all our attention, thought and worship on Jesus. He is the only one who provides lasting purpose to fulfill our deepest desires.

### REFLECT:

- What are you worried about right now?
- How can you trust God with your circumstances?
- What step do you need to take to make time for rest?

# DAY 16

## THE GUARDS WHO SAW JESUS CRUCIFIED

**MATTHEW 27:45-54**

There were many spectators at Jesus' crucifixion, but none were as unlikely to be changed by that event as the Roman soldiers.

These military men were the type of people whose lives were immersed in violence. They'd seen countless criminals beaten, tortured, and crucified just as Jesus was. To them, He was simply another criminal who deserved to die. But that day, they realized He was different.

These Roman soldiers were probably some of the same men who earlier mocked Jesus.

### *INSTEAD OF FIGHTING BACK OR CONDEMNING THEM, JESUS PRAYED FOR HIS PERSECUTORS:*

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Jesus chose to love instead of retaliating. We don't know what became of those soldiers or if their lives changed after that moment. But we do know they faced a decision that day. They had to decide what to do with Jesus, and they admitted, "Surely He was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:54).

This should probably go without saying, but let's make sure that we say it: JESUS is part of building a healthy heart. The soldiers' story reminds us that Jesus interrupts our routines and changes our minds. In the midst of performing their jobs as torturers and guards, Jesus' presence affected them. When God gets involved in our lives, we are forced to make a decision: What will we do with Jesus?

#### **REFLECT:**

- Who in your life would you consider unlikely to believe in Jesus? Will you pray for that person now?
- How has God gotten involved in your life? When have you sensed His presence with you?
- How has Jesus changed your mind?

# DAY 17

## JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA

MATTHEW 27:57-60, JOHN 19:38

Sometimes we carve out a portion of our lives and choose to live it differently than the rest. What we fail to realize is half-hearted obedience is really disobedience. God does not mean for us to go through life wearing a mask for certain people or in certain settings. He calls us to live honestly.

After Jesus' death, Joseph of Arimathea goes public with his faith. He is remembered for stepping out in faith to claim the body of Jesus, but what might he have missed out on because he delayed?

Joseph was a secret disciple. As one of Israel's wealthy religious elite, it was dangerous for Joseph to associate with Jesus. It was not until Jesus' crucifixion that Joseph was willing to risk a public association. Fear and hesitation caused Joseph to miss out on three years of miracles and life change.

**TOTAL  
OBEDIENCE  
IS PART OF  
BUILDING  
A HEALTHY  
HEART.**

Total obedience is part of building a healthy heart. What are you missing out on because of an unwillingness to go public for Jesus? Imagine looking back at your life and realizing that you missed countless opportunities to be a part of God's miracles on earth. This is Joseph of Arimathea's story. He knew Jesus, but missed being a part of many of the miracles Jesus did during His ministry.

### REFLECT:

- Are you the same person at work or home on Monday as you are at church on Sunday? What's stopping you?
- What changes do you need to make to live consistently for Jesus in all areas of your life?
- Who can support and encourage you as you commit to living for Jesus everywhere, all the time?

# DAY 18

## MARY MAGDALENE

**JOHN 20:1-18**

When we love someone, we do crazy things. Mary Magdalene was consumed with love for Jesus. He changed her life. Once demon-possessed, Mary had been set free because Jesus healed her (Luke 8:1-3). There was no way Mary was going to forget this man. She knew He was the Savior of the world, because He had saved her when no one else could.

Jesus paid attention to Mary and had given her life value; He delivered her from torture. Jesus showed Mary that she was accepted, no questions asked.

Mary Magdalene wasn't rich. She wasn't cultured. She didn't have power or authority or much to give Jesus and she knew it. But what she did have, she gave Him: her heart and life. When Jesus rose from the dead, the first person He saw was Mary, because she was waiting by the tomb. Her passion was all-consuming and logic-defying. When Jesus fulfilled the most impossible promise through His resurrection, Mary's faith was proved right.

Worship is part of building a healthy heart. Mary was able to remember Jesus' past acts of love when considering her future devotion. We don't worship hoping that Jesus will do something to show us that He loves us. The truth is that He's already acted long before we ever made the decision to love Him in return. His death on the cross is reason enough for us to come to a place of devotion and worship. It's healthy for Christians to take time to reflect on God's previous victories. What has God set you free or delivered you from? Chances are that if you'll take the time to experience it all over again, it will bring you back to the place of worship.

### **REFLECT:**

- What has Jesus healed you from?
- When it comes to the thousands of decisions you make each day, are you motivated by what others think or what pleases God? Why?
- What's the craziest thing you've ever done in the name of Jesus?

# DAY 19

## NICODEMUS

JOHN 3:1-21; JOHN 19:38-42

Nicodemus thought he was doing everything right. He was a Pharisee, a religious leader of the time, and upheld every Jewish law in the book. He had Scripture memorized and was a part of the prestigious Jewish council — a group of leaders who made important decisions for the religious community. He was revered for his knowledge of the Bible.

Nicodemus was doing all the right things and knew the right information about God, but he didn't know God. Nicodemus saw Jesus teaching at the temple and, regardless of the other religious leaders' opposition of Jesus' teaching, Nicodemus wanted to know more.

In John 3, Nicodemus snuck out in the dead of night to meet Jesus and hear more about what Jesus was teaching. His curiosity and desire to understand Jesus' teachings led to more than he bargained for. Jesus boldly told him that only through being born again could he truly know God.

Though Nicodemus had an encounter with Jesus that night, it wasn't until he and Joseph buried Jesus' body that he went public with his faith. Change for Nicodemus happened steadily over time, and that's OK! God isn't looking for instant perfection in our relationships with Him. God is after our growth, and growth takes time.

Growth is part of building a healthy heart. God does not care for us to be perfect, but he does desire us to grow and become more devoted followers than the previous day. In this life, we're either getting better or getting worse. Where are you in your walk with Jesus and how can you grow today?

### REFLECT:

- Relationships take time and effort. How intentional are you about getting to know Jesus?
- Are you growing in your relationship with Jesus? How has your faith grown since you first met Jesus?
- What steps can you take today to continue growing in your relationship with Jesus?

# DAY 20

## JAMES

### JOHN 7:1-5, I CORINTHIANS 15:1-7

James, Jesus' half-brother, grew up under the same roof as the Messiah, but did not initially believe in Him. As Jesus started to gain celebrity status, his family attempted to get him out of the public eye, saying, "He is out of his mind" (Mark 3:21).

After Jesus rose again, He appeared to James, and that encounter changed James forever (1 Corinthians 15:7). From then on, James devoted his life to Jesus. James was no longer a naysayer. Instead, he became a leader of the church at Jerusalem (Galatians 2:9).

Like James, we will never do what Jesus wants until we recognize who Jesus is. Even if our encounter with Jesus goes against all we've ever known, when we see Him for who He really is (the Son of God and Savior of the world), our lives will be changed.

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**ENCOUNTERING  
JESUS IS PART  
OF BUILDING A  
HEALTHY HEART.**

Encountering Jesus is part of building a healthy heart. When was the last time you truly encountered Jesus? Attending a church service or spending a few minutes in prayer is certainly an important thing—

but genuine encounters with God were often what moved people into new lives throughout the New Testament. So when was the last time you sought an encounter with Jesus? When was the last time you were intentional to seek him so that you could find him?

#### **REFLECT:**

- When was the last time you changed your mind on an issue? What prompted the change?
- What has most influenced your view of who Jesus is?
- Why is it dangerous to allow our view of God to be shaped by what we've always heard?

# DAY 21

## PAUL ACTS 9:1-19

Paul had an outstanding resume for a Jewish person in the first century. Not only was he devout and upstanding in his faith, he was also a Roman citizen and a Pharisee. When we first meet Paul, he's holding coats for the mob of Jews who stoned the apostle Stephen (Acts 7:58).

Paul's Jewish upbringing taught him that we are made right with God by following a strict set of rules. If you followed the rules, you were righteous. If you didn't, you weren't.

After encountering Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul's view of righteousness was forever changed. Paul had been killing Christians for preaching Jesus as the son of God and the only way to heaven. Turns out, they were right. We're made right in God's eyes by accepting Jesus as our savior, not because of anything we do or have done (Ephesians 2:8-9). When Paul began preaching this message saying that salvation came from Christ and not our own behavior, it rocked the religious world. He would go on to share the gospel with thousands of non-Jews all over the known world. Only a change of heart can lead to a lasting change in behavior.

Change is part of building a healthy heart. Healthy things grow, but growing things change. Our prayer for you over the last 21 days is that you have experienced an abundance of God's love, but also that you would allow God to change your heart. Perhaps there are parts of you that you are realizing need to be surrendered. It's also possible that you have a habit or an issue that's plaguing you into the same unhealthy routine. Ask Jesus to be the Lord of your life and then ask God to help you to pursue something different. Ask him to make you different.

### REFLECT:

- Are you a rule follower at heart? What is it about following rules that we find so attractive?
- Do you struggle with the idea that you can't earn Salvation? Why or why not?
- Grace changed Paul forever. How has God's grace already changed you?

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