

SEASON OF PREPARATION DAILY DEVOTIONALS

MARCH 20, 2023

MONDAY

Scripture: *“Be still, and know that I am God.”* Psalm 46:10

Devotional: Solitude—a time set apart where the rush, noise, and anxiety of the world fall mute on the ears and heart of a child of God completely lost in the peace and presence of the Creator. Solitude is a time to be with your heavenly Father, free from the distractions the world offers us at seemingly every moment. We are made for consistent time spent in solitude.

C.S. Lewis wrote in *The Weight of Glory*, “We live, in fact, in a world starved for solitude, silence, and private: and therefore starved for meditation and true friendship.” Most of us have grown accustomed to what truly does amount to being “starved” for solitude. We never fully realize how great our need is to be alone with our Sustainer. Let’s take some time today to recognize our need for solitude and then learn how to best practice solitude on a daily basis.

You can know that you need solitude for one reason—Jesus needed it. All over the New Testament we see examples of Jesus going off on his own to pray. One example, Mark 1:35, tells us that Jesus, *“rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark . . . departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.”* Jesus, who practiced perfect communion with his heavenly Father while here on earth still needed to spend time in solitude. Jesus, who loved parties, loved people, and was God and man simultaneously, needed time alone. If he needed it, you and I can be sure we need it. When God incarnate was up against his hardest task, the Crucifixion, he didn’t just toughen up and get through it. He spent time alone in the Garden of Gethsemane in conversation with his heavenly Father. He needed solitude to accomplish his purpose here on earth and so do you and I.

Solitude is life-giving. It’s necessary to the Christian spiritual life. Richard J. Foster said, “Loneliness is inner emptiness. Solitude is inner fulfillment.” Solitude is one of the most important and life-giving spiritual disciplines. If you want to hear God, you must practice solitude. If you want fortitude in your life, a steadfastness that surpasses your circumstances, you must practice solitude. You are designed for time spent in the quiet, simply being with your heavenly Father.

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So how can you best practice solitude? The first step is finding a place where you can spend time with God free from distractions. Find a place where you know you won't be interrupted. If you live with others, find a time when they will not be around or awake. If you live alone, designate a place and time that you will spend in solitude free from any distractions. Second, give yourself an amount of time to spend with God just being in solitude. It could be ten minutes or an hour. Spend this time free from reading, free from worship or prayer unless solitude leads you to those things. Madeleine L'Engle said, "Deepest communion with God is beyond words, on the other side of silence." Solitude is a point of deep communion where words aren't required in light of God's glorious nearness.

Take some time today to practice the incredible discipline of solitude. Be patient with yourself. Be patient with God. Fill the emptiness of silence with the satisfaction of God's presence. Your heavenly Father loves just simply spending time with you, enjoying deep communion with his crown of creation. You are his child. Climb into the comforting and sustaining arms of your heavenly Father today as you enter into a time of solitude.

Guided Prayer:

1. **Find a place free from distractions.** Ask the Spirit to calm your heart and mind and help you to spend time in deep communion with God.

2. **Spend a few minutes simply resting with God in solitude.**

"And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed." Mark 1:35

3. **Write down how solitude made you feel.** If you felt uncomfortable or frustrated, that's alright! Solitude and silence is something most of us have never practiced. Have patience with yourself.

Solitude is a practice. The more you do it the better and more fulfilling it will become. Once you connect with God's heart free of words and just look at him face to face, his gaze will become one of the most important parts of your life. Knowing experientially that your heavenly Father sees you and loves you is meant to be at the foundation of everything you do. Commit yourself to spend time in solitude with God and learn what it is to be a child simply enjoyed by the Father.

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MARCH 21, 2023

TUESDAY

Scripture: *“For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.”* James 1:23-25

Devotional: Faith and action go together. Understanding and works are tethered—joined together at salvation through the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. James 2:14-17 asks us,

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

The poor, orphaned, widowed, and lost don't just need a word from God. They need us to act on our beliefs and love and serve selflessly with the help of the Holy Spirit. Gathering together as believers to worship is just a part of what God intends for us as his children. If we are to receive all that God has for us, if we are to walk in the abundant life God intends, we must resolve to be doers of the word.

James 1:23-25 gives us a window into the life of a believer who never puts action to his faith. Scripture says,

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

Your identity as a disciple of Christ undoubtedly comes from relationship with God, but it is meant to be lived out in your deeds. God longs for you to live a life of good works in response to the unconditional love you've been given. He longs for you to live in selfless humility sharing with others what he's done in you.

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We've separated Christianity from the world. We've separated Sunday from Monday, the sacred and secular. Jesus lived in line with God's love every minute he was here. He broke the rules in healing on the Sabbath. He ministered almost completely outside of the walls of the synagogue. He brought the good news of God's grace to all who would believe everywhere he went. His life was in no way segregated. Jesus's turning the water into wine at a party was just as holy and spiritual as his reading of Isaiah in the temple, proclaiming his fulfillment of the prophecy regarding the Messiah. His love was put into perfect action through every word, miracle, step, glance, and prayer.

With Jesus as our perfect example, let's live in accordance with God's will. Let's blur the line of faith and works until the two become one. Let's regard meals, conversations, rest, family time, and parties as important and holy as worshipping inside the walls of our churches. Let's live as Jesus did and make love an action instead of just an idea we talk about on Sunday.

Guided Prayer:

- 1. Meditate on God's desire for your faith to produce good works.**
- 2. Ask God where he would have you put faith into action.** It could be buying flowers for your wife, finding a new way to honor your husband, taking your children on a special trip, or offering encouragement to someone around you at work or school. Ask the Spirit to give you specific ways in which he desires you live out the love you have received.
- 3. Ask God for the strength and courage to live out his word.** Follow the leadership of the Spirit into the good works he has prepared for you today.

The Spirit has an incredible ability and power to guide a willing heart into action for God. Receiving the knowledge of God's love for the people around you will open up doors in your own life to better know the fullness of God's heart. You will be more deeply blessed by serving others than you could ever be blessed in being served. God pours his love and grace out on those who minister in line with the leading of the Spirit. It's truly an honor to be used by God to further the advance of his kingdom in the earth. You were made to live out the truth of the gospel. So, choose today to act upon the leading of the Spirit. Choose to be a doer of the word.

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MARCH 22, 2023

WEDNESDAY

Scripture: *“For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”* James 2:26

Worship: Song: “The Wick” by Housefires II

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_cX0-wBoGs

Devotional: God has designed the Christian life to be one filled with adventurous and redemptive action—action that is fueled by the love and work of Jesus in our own lives. So great is God’s love for us that he would leave the glory of heaven, take on flesh, and destroy the power of sin and death with his loving sacrifice. God's love was so great that he gave himself up for us who are undeserving and could never repay him. And he longs for his love to be the foundation for all we do, think and feel.

As Christians we are to reflect the love we’ve been shown in Christ through the way we offer compassion and love to those around us. God has appointed us as the sole carriers of his message of redemption for all. He longs to use you to share and exemplify the hope that comes solely through relationship with him. Love doesn’t mean all that much just as an idea. The power of God’s love comes through action. It comes through helping a stranger, showing compassion and mercy to those who wrong you, serving someone while expecting nothing in return, and sharing the hope of Christ through word and deed. Jesus proved that love isn’t just an idea. Love does.

Bob Goff champions the cause for putting action to love in his book, *Love Does*. In it he writes, “He says to ordinary people like me and you that instead of closing our eyes and bowing our heads, sometimes God wants us to keep our eyes open for people in need, do something about it, and bow our whole lives to Him instead.” In his book he articulates an important spiritual principle—your faith was never intended to be limited to hearing. Your faith was never intended to be limited to conversation. James 2:18 tells us, *“But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”*

What does your love mean if it isn’t demonstrated? What would the love of God have meant if he stayed in heaven and never suffered for us? How would you feel about God if he could have saved all of humanity but didn’t? Jesus would have been completely justified to stay on his throne. God would have been completely justified to wipe out humanity and start over every

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time we chose idols over him. But instead he put action to his love for us. He committed the most incredible act of love possible in sending his Son to die for you and me. Jesus didn't just talk about love. His love was demonstrated in every crack of the whip on his back, in every taunting word, in every nail that pierced his body and in every excruciating gasp for air in which he prayed for us rather than end the torture. He lived out his love for you and me, and he calls us to do the same. 1 John 4:9-11 says,

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Spend time with God today asking him how you can put your faith into action. In what ways has the love of God been demonstrated to you? In what ways can you share with those around you the incredible gift that's been given to you? Oftentimes, we think of the big things: leading someone to Jesus or selling everything we have. But putting your faith into works could be as simple as a phone call, a cooked meal, a kind word, or a hug. Whatever God shows you, choose to live life as a believer whose faith and works are tethered, bringing redemption to a world desperately in need of God's grace.

Guided Prayer:

1. Take a minute to meditate on God's love put into action. Choose to make Jesus your example.

2. Now ask God how he would have you put action to love today. What can you do to show the Father's love to those around you?

3. Ask the Spirit to fill you with the strength and courage to do the works he has planned for you today in love. Let him empower you with his presence.

The Holy Spirit longs to help you connect with God and live out of the fruit of your relationship. He longs to empower you to love others. By his power and grace you can do incredible, eternal and impactful things with your time on earth. You are the child of God, made in his image and filled with same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead. Lean on God, ask for his help and have the courage to submit to his leadership today.

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MARCH 23, 2022

THURSDAY

Scripture: *“Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?”* Psalm 139:7

Devotional: One of the most comforting aspects of God’s character is that he is present. Jesus made clear God’s desire to be present when he left his throne and took on humanity. God has never desired distance with his children. He fights to have close relationship with us every day. This week we’re looking at how we can not only receive God’s word, but experience more of God through being doers of his word. So, today let’s explore how we can follow the example of Jesus and be present for those around us.

Being present in people’s lives always requires sacrifice. It requires stepping outside of what will solely benefit you in order to live for the benefit of others. Philippians 2:3 teaches us, *“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”* Jesus counted you and me as more significant than his own life. He died so that we might live, and he calls us to do the same. Luke 9:23 says, *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”* John 12:24 makes it clear that in order to bear fruit in this life we must die to ourselves: *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”* Choose today to be a doer of the word, and die to yourself that you might better love others.

You see, before people need your advice they need your presence. Before our need to be fixed we simply need to know we are loved and cared for. It’s in the giving and receiving of love that healing takes place. Being present creates space for them to thrive, heal and be transformed.

Who in your life needs you to be present for them today? In what ways has God been present in your own life? In what ways has he demonstrated his nearness to you? And in what ways could you be his reflection today? I promise you there is someone around you that just needs you to be present in their life. There is someone who simply needs to know that somebody would love them enough to think about them—to be near to them. Take time today to let someone know you are there for them. Listen, love, and watch as God works through you simply being present in the lives of others.

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Guided Prayer:

1. Take a moment to reflect on God's nearness to you. Receive his presence. Encounter his closeness.

"Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,' even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you." Psalm 139:7-12

2. Now ask the Spirit to show you someone who needs you to be present for them today. Spend some time thinking about and praying for that person.

3. Ask God how he would have you be present in their life. How can you be a reflection of God's love to them today?

Have the courage to humble yourself before people around you. Count them as more significant than yourself. You being present isn't about what they can give you in return or even how they appear to receive your love. Love selflessly today the way Jesus did, and experience the joy and peace that comes from serving rather than seeking to be served.

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MARCH 24, 2023

FRIDAY

Scripture: *“Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him. And there came a man named Jairus, who was a ruler of the synagogue. And falling at Jesus' feet, he implored him to come to his house, for he had an only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she was dying.”* Luke 8:40-42

Devotional:

There's a story in Luke 8:40-42, 49-56 that gives us insight into Jesus's love for those in need. Luke writes,

Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him. And there came a man named Jairus, who was a ruler of the synagogue. And falling at Jesus' feet, he implored him to come to his house, for he had an only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she was dying. . . While he was still speaking, someone from the ruler's house came and said, “Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher any more.” But Jesus on hearing this answered him, “Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well.” And when he came to the house, he allowed no one to enter with him, except Peter and John and James, and the father and mother of the child. And all were weeping and mourning for her, but he said, “Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But taking her by the hand he called, saying, “Child, arise.” And her spirit returned, and she got up at once. And he directed that something should be given her to eat. And her parents were amazed, but he charged them to tell no one what had happened.

Jesus made time for those in need. He wasn't too busy to leave what he was doing, which happened to be ministering to a large group of people, to make time for a single girl. Jesus displayed the heart of the Father in going after the one. Throughout his ministry, Jesus consistently made time for people around him. Whether it was eating a meal with his disciples, going to the house of Zacchaeus, or spending time with little children, Jesus was there for those around him.

God is the same way with you and me today. Through the death of Jesus we have been given an opportunity to have conversation with God all day, every day. God's desire is to make time for us. He counts our needs as important. Jesus's ministry exemplified God's heart to make time for his children.

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This week as we are looking at what it means to not only be a hearer of God's word but a doer, let's ask God how we could be more like Jesus. In what ways could you make time for those around you today? Will you choose to spend time with someone in need even if it doesn't fit in your schedule? Will you put those around you above yourself? If you will choose to be a doer of God's word today, you will experience the joy of not living just for your own goals and pursuits, but for the benefit of others around you. Spend some time with God in prayer today, and ask him to help you know when and how to make time for those around you in need.

Guided Prayer:

1. Reflect on Jesus's heart to make time for those in need. Choose to make Jesus your example.

"While he was still speaking, someone from the ruler's house came and said, 'Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher any more.' But Jesus on hearing this answered him, 'Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well' And when he came to the house, he allowed no one to enter with him, except Peter and John and James, and the father and mother of the child." Luke 8:49-51

2. Who needs you to make time for them? Ask God to bring someone to mind you can love well today.

3. How can you spend time with someone in need today? How could you make time to listen to, help, or simply be there for someone?

Love is powerful. It has the power to lead someone to Jesus, heal a wounded heart, and even help someone on the path to restored relationship with God. It's worth your effort to make time for those around you today. Jesus never wasted a minute. He did everything in perfect accordance with the Father's will. You won't be missing out if you make time for someone today. Follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit as you seek to love others well.

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MARCH 25, 2023

SATURDAY

Scripture: *“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”* Hebrews 10:23-25

Devotional: When was the last time someone really encouraged you? Maybe it was a family member or friend. How did it make you feel? How did you view yourself afterwards? If you haven't been encouraged in a while, how greatly do you long for it? Encouragement is powerful! It has the ability to change emotions and trajectories. It has the power to fill someone with courage and boldness to say yes to the plans and heart of God.

Encouragement is truly a gift we've been given for edifying each other. We are meant to encourage one another. The Bible makes it clear that as brothers and sisters in Christ, we are meant to both give and receive encouragement. Hebrews 10:23-25 says, *“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”*

Have you ever thought about how you could change the day of a complete stranger with just a few kind words? Jesus knew the power of encouragement. He loved to use the tool of encouragement to direct his disciples into the life God intended for them. Jesus spoke life into the people he encountered. He encouraged the outcasts, the downhearted, the needy. A perfect example of the power of encouragement can be found in the story of Zacchaeus. Luke 19:1-10 reads,

He entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” And

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Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Jesus encouraged an outcast tax collector and changed the trajectory of his life. He simply told Zacchaeus that he wanted to spend time with him, followed through with that commitment, and the entire town was blessed. Zacchaeus got his income through overtaxing his own people for the benefit of Rome and himself. He was cast out from society and hated by those around him. Jesus, to the dismay of the others, encouraged Zacchaeus, spent time with him, and changed his life. You can live like Jesus today. Who needs an encouraging word from you? Who needs to be encouraged by you simply wanting to spend some time with them? There’s grace on your life to minister to the hurting and lonely around you. There’s grace to minister like Jesus. Walk in relationship with your heavenly Father, live with the knowledge that you are fully loved, and love others through the power of encouragement.

Guided Prayer:

1. Take some time to meditate on what the Bible says about encouragement.

Read Ephesians 4:29

2. Ask the Lord whom he would have you encourage today. Maybe it’s a co-worker that’s seemed down lately, a family member going through a hard time or even a stranger that just needs a kind word.

3. Ask God how he would have you encourage that person. It could be as simple as sending a text message or taking someone out for a meal. Maybe it’s a few kind words or help financially. Ask the Spirit to help you follow his leadership.

The Bible makes it clear that the tongue wields incredible power. Proverbs 18:21 says, *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.”* Choose to speak life today. Choose to honor those around you instead of condemn. Choose to see the grace God has placed in people around you—to see past the façade and tough exterior people put up and speak to the heart. God intends for you to both give and receive encouragement. Who will you speak life into today?

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MARCH 26, 2023

SUNDAY

Scripture: *“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”* Ephesians 4:32

Devotional: We’re promised forgiveness from our Father because his forgiveness is offered in complete grace. Ephesians 1:7 says, *“In [Jesus] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.”* We have done nothing to deserve the forgiveness God so freely lavishes upon us. God offers us forgiveness because he is love; it is his very nature. And as Jesus demonstrated through his death, *love forgives.*

Christianity is the only religion where salvation is based on grace instead of works. God, in his love, has laid before us a path founded on mercy, and he calls us to do the same for others. As the children of God, brought into his family solely by his grace, we must forgive as God has forgiven us.

Colossians 3:13 says, *“[Bear] with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, [forgive] each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”* Jesus modeled forgiveness perfectly in laying down his own life for you and me. In order for us to forgive others, we must be like Jesus and die to our own rights for the sake of the person who has wronged us. Forgiveness requires humility. It is a decision to offer unmerited grace because *“as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”*

Think about your own life for a moment. Who in your life do you feel has wronged you? It could be a small wound. It could be a life-altering sin committed against you. Maybe a parent left you. Maybe you were abused. Maybe you lost a job opportunity that should have been yours. Maybe it was a word someone spoke against you that hurt you. Whatever sin was committed against you, large or small, call it back to mind. Feel the injustice over it.

Now reflect for a minute on the sin of the world committed against God. The story of humanity is a fall from perfection because of pride. In every age thus far, man has chosen his own way over God’s and has thereby perpetuated the cycle of sin and destruction we live in today. God placed his judgement over the sins of all humanity, past and present, on the person of Jesus because he couldn’t take being separated from you and me. We have all been wronged, but no one more than God. Every day humanity turns away from God.

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God weeps over what's been done to you. He knows your pain because people wrong him every minute of every day. But He still chooses to forgive because there is no love without forgiveness. There is no abundant life apart from restoration of relationship. There is no joy for God or us when we harden our hearts and live for what is fair rather than what is good.

We aren't called to forgive because someone deserves it. We forgive because love requires it. We forgive because abundant life requires it. Choose love today over your own sense of fairness. Choose to be like your heavenly Father and forgive those who have wronged you. Choose to be a doer of Colossians 3:13 and "[forgive] each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." You weren't made to live with the weight of unforgiveness, so don't bear it any longer. The Spirit will help you. He will give you the strength and courage to do what seems impossible. Spend some time in God's presence today and forgive as he guides and directs you.

Guided Prayer:

- 1. Meditate on God's heart to forgive.** Allow God's forgiveness to be the foundation for your own.
- 2. Ask the Spirit who you need to forgive.** Whether the wound was small or big, to whom do you need to offer grace today?
- 3. Forgive that person.** Forgive them in your heart right now. If you can, set up a meeting with them to talk through what happened. The awkwardness or pain of the conversation will never outweigh the lasting peace you will experience from offering grace and forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a process. But it is a process worth going through. Assess your heart immediately after you've been wronged. Go through the process of forgiveness instead of allowing the wound to be reopened time and time again. The French proverb says, "*Write injuries in sand, kindnesses in marble.*" It's ok to be hurt. It's only harmful if you write your wounds in marble and let them linger longer than they should. God has designed you in his image and has given you his Spirit. You have the strength to forgive. So choose love today and every day. Allow the Spirit to work in your heart, healing the wounds people and life have caused you through the wonderful gift of forgiveness.