

MORNINGS *with* JESUS 2018

DAILY ENCOURAGEMENT *for your* SOUL

365 DEVOTIONS

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MONDAY, JANUARY 1

Shout to the LORD, all the earth; break out in praise and sing for joy!

Psalm 98:4 (NLT)

NEW YEAR'S IS A BIG deal for our family. My brother and sisters and I rarely get to see each other as the years have scattered us far and wide. But each year we congregate at my parents' house for the week between Christmas and New Year's Day. There are about twenty of us including in-laws and kids. We look forward to our time together all year long.

On our last night together, we want to do it up right. We want to soak up every minute. Ringing in the New Year involves sparkling cider, delicious appetizers, and the end of the year countdown. If we are lucky, my brother, Chris, will serve up his gourmet pizza with imported olive oil and cheeses. My sister Jenny makes her famous meatballs that all the boy cousins fight over. We play games. We laugh hard. And we relish the fact that we are all together. The night's celebration ends with watching the New York City ball drop on TV amidst shouting and lots of hugging.

There are moments in life that need to be heralded with joy. Jesus is so good to us. There are a million reasons to celebrate this New Year—all of the obstacles we have overcome in the last year. The joy and healing that Jesus has brought about in our hearts. His faithfulness and bountiful provision. The cherished relationships He has brought into our lives. The goodness of being alive. The prospect of a new untarnished year in front of us. The promise that Jesus will be with us in every circumstance, no matter what. So many reasons to bring in the New Year with a shout of praise! —SUSANNA FOTH AUGHTMON

FAITH STEP: *Do a countdown of the top ten things you are thankful to Jesus for as you go into this New Year.*

TUESDAY, JANUARY 2

So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image. 2 Corinthians 3:18 (NLT)

“YOU ARE THE AVERAGE OF the five people you spend the most time with.” As I read posts from a favorite blog, this quote from author Jim Rohn jumped out at me. Trying to apply the concept to my life proved to be difficult since we had just relocated to a new city in a new state. I decided that, for now, I must be a combination of my husband, our Realtor, and—that’s it.

Although we each have our own inborn personality and character traits, we are influenced a great deal by those with whom we spend a lot of time. This is especially true when we’re young; our close relatives and friends influence the person we will become. And studies have shown that those around us affect our moods. That’s why as believers we want to make sure we spend plenty of time with Jesus. If we hope to love others unconditionally and reflect His character to the world, we need time with Him in prayer and Bible study, along with an intentional awareness of His presence and guidance each day.

Right now I’m eagerly anticipating a trip to visit family. My husband and I will see our moms, siblings, children, grandchildren, and any other relatives or old friends we can squeeze into our schedule. I’ll be spending time with some people who have been good influences on me. But since I want to be more like Jesus than anyone else, I’m looking forward to spending as much time as possible with Him every day. —DIANNE NEAL MATTHEWS

FAITH STEP: *Think about specific attitudes, habits, and behaviors that would change if you became more like Jesus. Commit to scheduling more time to hang out with Him.*

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 3

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Matthew 6:34 (NIV)

IN THE LAST YEAR MY husband, John, and I have adopted four girls from foster care, ages eleven to fifteen, bringing our total number of kids to ten. Through the adoption process there has been a lot to worry about, financial and emotional worries topping the list. But while it's easy to pay attention to the kids, it's harder to focus on each other. As a couple we used to have dedicated date nights, but the cost of childcare for so many kids has made that a thing of the past. Many times I found myself worrying about our relationship. I didn't want to neglect my role as a wife as my role of a mom grew.

I've learned over the years that instead of worrying I need to pray. It seemed silly to pray about date nights, especially when there were "bigger issues," like helping children who had past trauma, but I did. Then, my prayer was answered in an unexpected way.

One day I received a text message from a friend at church, "Tricia, I feel called to help foster and adoptive parents in our church. I'm organizing a once-a-month Parents Night Out, with other church members helping. Would you be interested in bringing your kids and enjoying a date night?" I couldn't write back fast enough to say, "Yes!"

I'm thankful that Jesus saw my need, and He used others in His body to help meet it—not because I asked for help, but because Jesus's Spirit put the need on someone else's heart. I'm thankful that as we help and support orphans Jesus has brought people to help and support us too. —TRICIA GOYER

FAITH STEP: *Consider gathering other friends to provide a date night. Even a monthly service will greatly encourage weary parents who need time together.*

THURSDAY, JANUARY 4

“With your unfailing love you lead the people you have redeemed. In your might, you guide them to your sacred home.” Exodus 15:13 (NLT)

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN SO full of relief and joy that a song burst out of you? Exodus 15 is that sort of song. The children of Israel, after 430 years in Egypt, were delivered and led out—only to face destruction as the pharaoh and his chariots chased them down. The Lord parted the sea, and they were saved—a beautiful foretaste of the redemption that would one day be provided by Jesus.

Yes, the Israelites were relieved to be alive. They were relieved they weren't being dragged back to abject slavery. But this verse also shows a new understanding of their Lord. He not only redeemed them, He is leading them. And He is not leading them randomly, but leading them to their home with Him.

We know that Jesus died to save us. We rejoice in being freed from slavery to sin and death. But Jesus also offers to lead us. He is willing to be involved in our lives. What a relief to know that we aren't in the wilderness of life alone! And there is a purpose to His leading. His goal is to bring us to our new home with Him.

A friend from Bible study recently graduated to Heaven, her body finally succumbing to cancer. As much as it hurts to know I won't see her smiling face or feel her warm hug here on earth, I can celebrate that she is home, restored, and joyful. Each person who goes to his or her eternal home is a reminder that Jesus is aiming us in the direction of our ultimate home. Knowing this can spur us to seek His guidance each day. —SHARON HINCK

FAITH STEP: *List the names of friends and family whom Jesus has led home, and thank Him for His faithfulness. Ask Him for guidance and leadership today.*

FRIDAY, JANUARY 5

*Then a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said,
"This is my dearly loved Son. Listen to him." Mark 9:7 (NLT)*

MY SON IS A COMPUTER guru. I do my utmost to listen and understand when he talks about his work, but honestly, he speaks a foreign language to me. I'm not the only one who needs a translation. On one occasion when he and my husband were deep in conversation about his latest software project, his wife looked at me, raised her eyebrows, and smiled. I immediately knew what she was thinking: I don't have a clue. Do you?

Without a doubt his knowledge about computers far surpasses mine. And so, I listen to him when he tells me how to handle computer issues. He's the expert; I'm not.

Peter, James, and John understood the benefits of listening to an expert when they ascended a mountain with Jesus. While on the summit, a cloud enveloped them and a voice spoke. The voice—clearly God's—said that Jesus was His Son and they were to listen to Him.

So many voices clamor for our attention today. Some try to lure us into temptation. Others say we're not enough, that we need to work harder to earn Jesus's love and people's admiration. Some tell us to pursue happiness regardless of the price. But those voices can't offer expertise on how to live a godly life. Only one voice speaks absolute truth, and that voice belongs to Jesus.

Jesus speaks words of truth, comfort, and wisdom. He guides His followers so we can have an abundant life, and we would do well to listen. He's the expert; we're not. —GRACE FOX

FAITH STEP: *Play a favorite praise and worship song. Close your eyes and focus on the lyrics. Sing along, or simply be still and listen, allowing the truth to remind you of Jesus's amazing love for you.*

SATURDAY, JANUARY 6

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Philippians 4:8 (ESV)

FOR A LONG TIME, I gave “positive thinking” a bad rap. I thought of it as some kind of godless hocus-pocus aimed at attaining all the wrong stuff for all the wrong reasons. I would roll my eyes at motivational speakers, affirmation-laden therapists, and preachers who “spoke things into being,” dismissing them as charlatans or worse. Of course, we do need to seek discernment about the source and content of positive thinking, but let’s not toss the baby out with the bathwater. The point is, what is truly positive?

Paul’s very practical, hopeful thank-you note to the people of Philippi ends with a rousing inspirational speech and a call to positive thinking. Verse 8 defines the nature of its content: True, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise.

I don’t know about you, but I know much of my thinking doesn’t automatically reflect those terms. Elsewhere, Paul describes taking decisive action to attain the transformed, positive mind of Christ, which is our re-birthright. We are urged to choose to focus on that which is truly positive by God’s definition.

That’s not as easy to do. In fact it can seem like a tall order from where I’m sometimes sitting, so then I can recall that Paul wrote this hope-filled book from prison. How about that? —ISABELLA YOSUICO

FAITH STEP: *Read the short book of Philippians three times. The first time, simply read it through. The second time, only read Chapter 4. The third time, use a highlighter to mark positive actions and thoughts in Chapter 4. Finally, write down three verses that speak to you today, and read them daily.*

SUNDAY, JANUARY 7

“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. . . .” Matthew 6:20 (KJV)

“DON’T MORTGAGE FUTURE GENERATIONS.” I chewed on the concept for days. I resisted the magnetic pull of wanting to know how other people might be setting up future generations to pay a huge price for the heart-purchases the current generation is making—pride, greed, excess, self-absorption.

Instead, I asked Jesus to do what David asked in Psalm 139. I said, “Examine me and see if there is any ungodly way in me.”

If I live beyond my means, I’m creating a habit in my children and grandchildren, mortgaging their futures.

If I speak unkindly about others, I’m mortgaging their future relationships. They’ll either have to fight off the pattern I established, or they’ll repeat it.

If I let disappointment become resentment, or allow an offense to take root in me, I’m mortgaging their souls’ health.

If I treat alone time with the Lord as an insignificant or a joyless duty, I’m mortgaging their spiritual futures.

If I say, “The check’s in the mail,” and it isn’t, I’m mortgaging the integrity of future generations.

Jesus told us that the seeds we plant today bear fruit long into the future, that those who invest in the spiritual futures of their children and grandchildren—laying up treasures that count in heaven—leave a legacy, not a mortgage. —CYNTHIA RUCHTI

FAITH STEP: *Consider the spiritual legacy you’re leaving for those who follow you. Will the patterns you’ve established feel like a burden or a blessing?*

