

JOURNEY FORWARD

AN EIGHT-DAY DEVOTIONAL JOURNEY

Journey Ministries

EIGHT-DAY LEAD DONOR DEVOTIONAL

DAY ONE

Hosea 14:3
English Standard Version (ESV)

*"Assyria shall not save us;
we will not ride on horses;
and we will say no more, 'Our God,'
to the work of our hands.
In you the orphan finds mercy."*

Tears streamed down Steve's face as he stood before the congregation and shared his stewardship story. Steve is a physician who literally came up the hard way. Steve's mother was bipolar and self-medicated with drugs and alcohol. As an infant, Steve was often rescued from bars and street corners. Steve survived. Against all odds, he went to college and on to medical school. He successfully completed his residency as the first African-American in the program. Steve now has his own very successful practice. If anyone ever had the right to say they were a self-made man or woman, it would be Steve.

And yet, as I heard Steve tell his story, it was never about Steve but always about gratitude and God. Steve recognized it was the hand of God that had saved him, not his own. Steve somehow knew that everything he had was a gift, a gift from the hand of a loving and compassionate God. Because Steve realized everything was a gift, he was therefore willing to give back in amazingly generous ways.

Take a moment and look at your hands. Are these the hands that have created your life? Are these the hands that have made you successful? Is your life and all that you have and all you've accomplished the work of these hands? In gazing at your own hands, can you somehow see the hand of God? Right now as you gaze at your hands, say Thank You! All that I am and all that I have are the result of Your hands. Thank You!

Pray:

Oh God, I confess it is so very easy to look at my hands and think of all that I have accomplished and done. Help me, Oh God, to see Your hands. Help me, Oh God, to recognize You as the source of all that I have and all that I am. And help me to give back in gratitude. Thank You God! Amen.

EIGHT-DAY LEAD DONOR DEVOTIONAL

DAY TWO

Romans 13:8

English Standard Version (ESV)

"Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law."

Mortgage

Car loan

Student loan

Credit card

Business loans

... and what about love? Do we spend time thinking about our obligation to love one another, the debt of love we owe?

The truth is this: none of us are self-made. Each of us has been loved into the people we have become. We all owe debts of love. Our debt of love is so much greater than a house loan or car loan. A car will be paid off or traded in; a home mortgage will someday come to an end. The debt of love ... NEVER. This debt of love begins with a God who loved us before we even knew He existed; who loved us in spite of who we are or were. This debt of love continues with a mother, father, in-laws, youth workers, friends, spouse and children, aunts and uncles, pastors and Sunday school teachers: all who helped make us who we are. These debts of love can never be repaid in full. All we can do is continue day-by-day and moment-by-moment making payments of love – living out love - to the people we live with, work with, worship with, play with, and the strangers we meet.

Spend a few moments reflecting on your debt of love. Who do you owe? Will you be making any payments today or only withdrawals?

Pray:

Thank You God for Your amazing gift of love. Thank You for the people who have loved me into who I have become. Help me Lord to make payments of love, loving You better, loving others more, living out love today and every day. Amen.

EIGHT-DAY LEAD DONOR DEVOTIONAL

DAY THREE

John 10:10

English Standard Version (ESV)

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

Her name is Jamie and she is a walking, talking, breathing miracle. Jamie is 20 and a few years ago was in a serious automobile accident. Jamie was declared dead at the scene. On the ride to the hospital, she had a seizure and her heart stopped beating. While technically alive, Jamie was in a deepcoma with no real hope of recovery. The doctors told her parents there was a one in ten to fifteen million chance Jamie would ever recover. Clearly, someone forgot to tell God. Jamie will tell you that she met Jesus and Jesus told her she could go back home to her family. Jamie came back, slowly.

While Jamie still has challenges to overcome, her face radiates joy. Jamie is likely, at any moment, to break into a loud praise to God. Who can blame her? Jamie reminds me that the abundant life is not found in the things that I own or the money that I make. The voices whispering in my ear, "Abundance is found in things or stuff" are the voices of robbers and thieves. Jamie reminds me, the abundant life is simply a life filled with gratitude and joy for this moment, the only moment I truly have. Have I listened to the voices of the "robbers and thieves"? What does the abundant life mean to me?

Pray:

Oh God, far too often I listen to the voices of thieves and robbers whispering in my ear about what I need for the abundant life. Forgive me. Help me to live like James. Help me to live in this moment with gratitude, joy, and faith. Amen.

EIGHT-DAY LEAD DONOR DEVOTIONAL

DAY FOUR

Philippians 1:27

English Standard Version (ESV)

"Only let your manner of life be worthy^{of} of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,"

He was a World War II veteran living in a tiny Russian village on the outer edges of Siberia in 1995. He wore a tattered blue blazer with a chest full of medals. No American had ever set foot in their village, and she had not seen or met an American since the battle to capture Berlin over fifty years before. As he spoke through the interpreter, it soon became apparent that in her eyes, the American standing before her represented and, in fact, spoke for the entire United States, its people, its government, and even its president. The American chose his words carefully and tried to convey genuine respect and gratitude. Before the American left, they hugged and cried. The American prayed he had represented his country well.

"Only let your manner of life be worthy^{of} of the gospel of Christ"

We represent Christ to the world. By our words, by our actions, by our Facebook posts, by the jokes we tell, the places we invest and spend our money; we represent Christ. Our friends, family, and co-workers will learn about God's love and grace through us. The look on our faces, the tone of our voices, where we spend our money, all speak of God. The question is, what are they saying?

Pray:

Oh God, help me today to represent You and Your unconditional love and grace. I pray that through my words and my actions people might see and know Your amazing grace and love. Amen.

"Only let your manner of life be worthy^{of} of the gospel of Christ"

EIGHT-DAY LEAD DONOR DEVOTIONAL

DAY FIVE

Mark 9:43-48

English Standard Version (ESV)

And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell,^[a] to the unquenchable fire.^[b] ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'

What a positive and uplifting message!

Clearly Jesus is not literally telling us to chop off a foot or pluck out an eye. He is, however, asking us to take inventory and consider what in our life separates us from God or prevents us from living as God wants us to live. Brian owns a private plane, but rarely flies it. However, Brian enjoys the satisfaction of knowing the plane belongs to him. For about eighteen months, Brian had this nagging thought that he should perhaps sell the plane. Brian even began to get the strange thought that maybe God was the One doing the nagging.

Brian wrestled with God daily for over a year and finally gave in. Not because having a plane was wrong, but because for Brian, it was a possession getting in the way of his relationship with God. Coincidentally, (if you believe in coincidences) this occurred in the midst of his church's capital campaign. For Brian, there were no fireworks and no miracles ... just a quiet act of obedience and generosity. Brian will be the first to tell you there may be another plane in his future, but this plane will NOT get in the way of his relationship with God.

We all have those things that separate us from God. Like Brian, it might be our "stuff." For some, it might be pride, fear, a grudge, a refusal to forgive, a job, or a relationship. Spend a few minutes asking God, "What keeps me from loving You with all of my heart?"

Pray:

Oh God, thank You for Your divine patience. Thank You for loving me even as I stubbornly cling to my way and my stuff. Help me to name my sin and selfishness, and help me to surrender.

Amen.

EIGHT-DAY LEAD DONOR DEVOTIONAL

DAY SIX

Mark 10:21-22

English Standard Version (ESV)

²¹ And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." ²² Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

The most important phrase in our scripture for today is *Jesus looked him hard in the eye—and loved him!* We often think that Jesus really just loves the poor, the sick, and the downtrodden. And He does. But Jesus also has a very special place in His heart for those with resources and, yes, even those with wealth. Jesus wants those with wealth and resources to know Him, love Him, and follow Him.

The real question being asked by Jesus is, "What do you love more than Me?" For this young man, the answer was clear. He loved stuff, money, and wealth more than Jesus. And so, the young man turned away. And Jesus let him go. Can you imagine this scene in your head?

The man's face clouded over. This was the last thing he expected to hear, and he walked off with a heavy heart. He was holding on tight to a lot of things, and not about to let go.

Jesus looks us hard in the eye and with a heart overflowing with love Jesus asks, "What do you love more than Me?" "What are you holding tightly and not about to let go?" For a mother or father, it could be children. For someone else, it could be a parent or even a spouse. For others, the answer may be found in a job, a career, a home. For many of us, it may very well be our wealth and our stuff. Maybe it's the sense of pride and accomplishment that comes with having wealth and all the right "stuff." Maybe it's something very different like anger, bitterness or an unwillingness to forgive that we refuse to release. Jesus stands in front of you, looks you hard in the eye with love and asks, "What do you love more than Me?"

Pray:

God, I want to love You with all my heart. But there always seems to be stuff that gets in the way. Help me now, today, to let go, to release whatever my stuff is to You, Your love and Your care; to put You ahead of myself; to have my will imbedded in serving Your Will in all ways.

Amen.

EIGHT-DAY LEAD DONOR DEVOTIONAL

DAY SEVEN

Romans 4:19-21

English Standard Version (ESV)

¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness[Ⓞ] of Sarah's womb. ²⁰ No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

Don't you just love these verses from Romans? *No unbelief made him waver ... fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.*

When it comes to getting into the water, there are typically two kinds of people; those who plunge and those who tiptoe. Some just hate swimming in cold or even slightly chilly water and will tiptoe around the edge of a dock or along a beach. Then there are those brave or crazy souls who just stand back and, with a shout, run and take the plunge.

Sometimes the same is true for our faith and certainly for our giving. Sometimes we tiptoe around God and His promises saying "when I am a bit more comfortable, or when God makes things a bit more clear, when my return on investments is higher or my kids are done with school, then I will take the plunge of generosity." Unfortunately, we are never quite comfortable enough and things are never quite clear enough. We never seem to have enough; there is always something else to buy or in which to invest. The water is never quite warm enough and so we tiptoe and refuse to take the plunge.

Is God calling you to take the plunge of generosity? Have you perhaps been tiptoeing around the edges waiting until the water is just a bit warmer? Today, take the plunge! Claim the promise of Abraham who ... *didn't tiptoe around God's promise asking cautiously skeptical questions. He plunged into the promise and came up strong, ready for God, sure that God would make good on what he had said (Romans 4:20-21, the Message).*

Pray:

God, I don't want to keep tiptoeing around You. Grant me the courage to take the plunge and leap into the water of Your promises in gratitude, prayer and faith. Amen.

EIGHT-DAY LEAD DONOR DEVOTIONAL

DAY Eight

Genesis 32:24-28

English Standard Version (ESV)

²⁴ And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. ²⁵ When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. ²⁶ Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." ²⁷ And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." ²⁸ Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel,^[a] for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed."

I watched as Ben slowly and painfully pulled himself out of the car and began shuffling with his two canes to the front door. After the home gathering, I was determined to meet this gentleman who had clearly made a concerted effort to get to what was, in essence, a meeting designed to ask people for money. As I approached Ben, he put one cane down and with an iron-like grip grasped my forearm saying, "Hey Preacher! Are you the one who's leading this campaign?" Hmmm. Do I admit it or not? "Yes, Ben, I am helping your church with this campaign."

Ben continued, "Let me tell you something, Preacher." Now I was truly worried! With his firm grip on my forearm and a twinkle in his eye, Ben then said, "I am 92 years old and I spent most of last night wrestling with God. You see, I've already helped build two churches and at 92, I can't tell you how excited I am to help build one more." Ben let go of my arm and slowly shuffled out to the car. I was stunned, almost speechless. Ben could have so easily said "At 92, I've done my share. I've done enough."

When I am 92, I hope and pray I might spend the night like Ben wrestling with God, asking, "God what do You want to do through me?" No matter our age or circumstance, God always calls us to reach and stretch, to move out of our comfort zone. And as we wrestle with God, like Jacob and like Ben, we will indeed be blessed!

Pray:

Oh God, give me the courage of Jacob and Ben to wrestle with You. Give me the courage to ask, "God, what do You want to do through me?" Guide and grow me to faithfully live and give generously, grounded in gratitude to You, seeking Your wisdom and direction as You reveal through your Word and prayer. Amen.