

## February Devotions

### “Come Boldly”

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God.” (Philippians 4:6 NIV)

Prayer is communing with God, and he wants to hear our prayers. Scripture gives us an invitation to pray. “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16) Prayer brings us closer to God. Isn’t that what we want...to be closer to Him? He is our rock, and he is waiting with open arms to comfort us and guide us through prayer. During his earthly ministry, Jesus would often withdraw to a secluded place and pray. God hears our prayers. A prayer of David is recorded in Psalm 5:3 “In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my request before you and wait expectantly.” God hears our prayer. “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are open to their cry.” (Psalm 34:15) If you don’t know what to pray, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you. “Come Boldy.” (Philippians 4:16) “But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge: I will tell of all your deeds.” (Psalm 73:28 NIV)

Isaiah 65:24, James 4:8, Luke 5:16

### “He Leads Me”

“He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.” (Psalm 23:3)

In Psalm 23 we see the shepherd leading the way, not we, ourselves stumbling to find the right way, but the Lord leading us. The Lord is our shepherd who will teach us and even guide us with his eye “The Lord says, “I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.” (Psalm 32:8 NLT). God gave us His word to lead us “...and for training in righteousness.” (2Timothy 3:16B NIV) God’s word is “.... a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.” (Psalm 105:19) God knew you before you were born, and He has planned your days before they ever came to pass. I find that amazing. Don’t you? So, then, what is our part? To trust the shepherd to lead because He knows what is best for us. “For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.” (Psalm 48:14 NIV)

Psalm 32:8, Jeremiah 1:5, Psalm 139:16

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, I just want to thank you for leading me and helping me make the right decisions. I want to learn to trust you more and more because you have all wisdom and know the best path for me. Amen.

## **“The Way of the Cross: Seven Invitations to True Life”**

### **Series on Matthew 16:24-27**

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. 25 If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. 26 And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul? 27 For the Son of Man will come with his angels in the glory of his Father and will judge all people according to their deeds.”

#### **Part 1: The Cross — God’s Foundation for True Freedom ~Matthew 16:24~**

Jesus begins the call to discipleship with the cross—not as punishment, but as the gateway to freedom. To understand the cross rightly, we must view it through the whole biblical story: creation, fall, and redemption.

Before the fall, humanity lived in freedom—fully aligned with God’s will, identity, and authority (Genesis 1:26–28). There was no striving, shame, or bondage. Freedom was rooted in trust and obedience. When Adam and Eve chose independence over intimacy, the fall introduced bondage—sin, fear, separation, and death (Genesis 3; Romans 5:12). The world system was corrupted, and the enemy gained influence through deception (John 8:44).

Jesus entered this broken system not to manage it, but to break its power. The cross became the place where sin was judged, shame was stripped, and Satan’s authority was disarmed (Colossians 2:14–15). What the enemy meant for death, God transformed into the doorway of life. The cross restores what was lost in Eden—relationship, authority, and freedom.

When Jesus says, “Take up your cross,” He invites us to align with His victory, not to earn it. The cross becomes our guideline for living free—dying to the lie that we must save ourselves and trusting fully in Christ’s finished work.

Freedom is not found in self-effort or religious striving, but in surrender to the One who overcame the world (John 16:33).

#### **Steps to Apply:**

Identify world-system values (control, pride, fear) that conflict with the cross.

Declare Christ’s victory daily over these sins and deceptions.

Choose surrender over self-protection.

### **Prayer Points:**

Father, thank You that the cross restores what was lost and sets me free.

I renounce agreement with the world's systems and align with Christ's victory.

Jesus, teach me to live from Your finished work, not my own striving.

### **Part 2: Deny Yourself — Freedom from the False Self ~Matthew 16:24~**

“Deny yourself” is often misunderstood as self-rejection, self-hatred, or extreme self-denial. Biblically, Jesus is not asking us to deny our God-given identity, but to deny the false self—the self shaped by fear, sin, and independence from God.

Self-denial is not about suppressing needs or desires; it is about refusing to let the flesh rule. Scripture contrasts the old self with the new self in Christ (Ephesians 4:22–24). The old self seeks control, validation, and comfort apart from God. The new self lives from truth, sonship, and trust.

Religious self-denial says, “I must punish myself to please God.” Biblical deny-self says, “I surrender my will to receive God’s life.” Jesus Himself modeled this: “Not My will, but Yours be done” (Luke 22:42). His surrender was not weakness—it was authority rooted in love.

Denying self breaks the bondage of performance, people-pleasing, and fear of rejection. It silences the enemy’s lies and opens space for the Spirit to lead. True freedom comes when Christ defines who we are, not our past, wounds, or achievements (Galatians 2:20).

### **Steps to Apply:**

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal false identities you’ve carried.

Replace self-driven goals with God-led obedience.

Practice surrender in daily decisions.

### **Prayer Points:**

Lord, show me where I’ve lived from a false self.

I choose surrender over self-control and trust Your leadership.

Thank You that my true identity is secure in Christ.

### **Part 3: Take Up Your Cross Daily — A Continual Choice ~Matthew 16:24~**

Luke 9:23 “Then He said to the crowd, “If any of you wants to be My follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow Me.”

Jesus adds one vital word—daily. Taking up the cross is not a one-time event; it is a daily posture of surrender. Each day presents opportunities to choose between flesh and Spirit, self-will and God’s will, fear and faith.

Daily cross-bearing is not about enduring misery; it is about dying to whatever competes with Christ’s rule. Paul explains, “I die daily” (1 Corinthians 15:31), referring to his continual surrender to God’s purposes. This daily choice keeps us free from drifting back into bondage.

The enemy thrives on unexamined habits, unresolved offenses, and unchecked desires. Daily surrender exposes these areas to God’s transforming grace (Romans 12:1–2). As we bring our thoughts, emotions, and reactions to the Lord, the cross becomes a place of renewal rather than restriction.

Jesus promises that His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matthew 11:28–30). The cross is not heavier than bondage—it is lighter than chains.

#### **Steps to Apply:**

Begin each day with a prayer of surrender.

Invite God into moments of tension or temptation.

End the day with reflection and gratitude.

#### **Prayer Points:**

Lord, I choose daily surrender to Your will.

Help me recognize moments where I need to take up my cross.

Thank You that Your way leads to freedom and rest.

## **Part 4: Follow Me — Freedom Through Relationship ~Matthew 16:24~**

John 10:27 “My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me.”

Jesus does not say, “Follow rules” or “Follow religion,” but “Follow Me.” Freedom flows from relationship, not regulation. To follow Christ is to walk in step with Him, listening to His voice and trusting His leadership.

Bondage often begins when we substitute intimacy with information. The Pharisees knew Scripture but missed the Savior. Jesus invites us into a living relationship where obedience is motivated by love, not fear (John 14:15).

Following Christ requires leaving familiar paths. Like the disciples, we may have to step away from nets, boats, and old securities (Matthew 4:19–20). But what we gain—His presence, peace, and power—far outweighs what we release.

The Good Shepherd leads us away from danger and into abundant life (John 10:10). As we follow, He reshapes our desires, heals our wounds, and restores our calling.

### **Steps to Apply:**

Spend daily time listening, not just speaking, in prayer.

Ask, “Jesus, where are You leading me today?”

Obey promptly, even in small things.

### **Prayer Points:**

Jesus, help me recognize and follow Your voice.

I release control and trust Your leadership.

Thank You for leading me into life and freedom.

## **Part 5: Losing the Lower Life to Gain the Higher Life ~Matthew 16:25~**

“For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for Me will find it.” At first glance, this feels backward. Yet Jesus is revealing a spiritual law that leads not to loss, but to true freedom.

Scripture helps us understand by distinguishing between two kinds of life. The Greek word *psuchē* refers to the natural life—the self-centered, survival-driven life shaped by fear, control, and temporal priorities. This lower life is constantly striving to protect itself, seeking comfort, approval, and security apart from God. Though it promises safety, it quietly enslaves us to anxiety and exhaustion. In contrast, Jesus offers *zoē*—the very life of God. *Zoē* flows from union with Christ and is marked by peace, purpose, and spiritual power. Paul describes this higher life when he writes, “For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3–4). The higher life is not about self-preservation but Spirit-dependence. It is rooted in trust, not fear.

When we cling to the lower life, fear becomes our motivator—fear of loss, rejection, failure, or suffering. Fear keeps us bound. But when we surrender that life to Jesus, something miraculous happens: resurrection life begins to flow. What feels like death to the flesh becomes freedom to the spirit. We discover that God is far more trustworthy than our self-protective instincts.

Paul captured this revelation in a single statement: “For to me, to live is Christ” (Philippians 1:21). This was not resignation—it was victory. Paul understood that surrendering the lower life did not diminish him; it anchored him in unshakable life. Jesus does not ask us to lose life for loss’s sake. He invites us to release what cannot save us so we can receive what never fades.

### **Steps to Apply:**

Identify areas where fear, not faith, is driving your decisions.

Choose obedience over self-preservation, even when it feels costly.

Speak God’s promises aloud, especially when fear tries to take control.

### **Prayer Points:**

Lord, I release the lower life and receive Your higher life.

Break fear-based patterns that keep me bound.

Thank You for the fullness of life found in Christ alone.

## **Part 6: Surrendering Lesser Pleasures for True Joy ~Matthew 16:26~**

Hebrews 11:25 “He chose to share the oppression of God’s people instead of enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin.”

The world offers temporary pleasures that promise satisfaction but deliver bondage, leaving the soul restless and unfulfilled. Jesus invites us to exchange these for the pleasure of true life—joy rooted in His presence (Psalm 16:11), where lasting satisfaction is found, peace replaces striving, and the heart learns to rest in God.

Moses chose to forego fleeting pleasures for eternal reward (Hebrews 11:25–26). Likewise, we are called to discern what feeds the flesh versus what nourishes the spirit. True joy is not found in excess, approval, or escape—but in communion with God, where our desires are healed, reordered, and aligned with eternal purpose rather than momentary relief.

### **Steps to Apply:**

Ask God to reveal counterfeit pleasures.

Replace unhealthy habits with life-giving practices.

Cultivate gratitude and worship.

### **Prayer Points:**

Lord, realign my desires with Your heart.

I release counterfeit pleasures and receive lasting joy.

Thank You that Your presence satisfies my soul.

## **Part 7: Trading the Temporal for the Eternal ~Matthew 16:26–27~**

2 Corinthians 4:18 “So we don’t look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.”

Jesus lifts our eyes beyond the moment to eternity. Bondage thrives when we live only for the now. Freedom grows when we live with eternal perspective.

What we surrender in obedience is never lost—it is transformed into eternal reward. Our choices echo into eternity, shaping our legacy and impact (Galatians 6:8–9).

Jesus reminds us that He will return, and eternal value will be revealed. Living for eternity brings clarity, courage, and peace today.

### **Steps to Apply:**

Evaluate priorities through eternal lenses.

Invest time and resources in God’s kingdom.

Live intentionally as Christ’s ambassador.

### **Prayer Points:**

Lord, help me live with eternal vision.

I choose what lasts over what fades.

Thank You for the hope and reward found in Christ.

### **Closing The Series**

Jesus, You have invited us into a life that is both surrendered and free. You call us not to cling to what cannot save, but to release the lesser so we may receive the greater. In laying down our self-driven ways, our fears, and our need for control, we discover that Your way leads to true life. What feels like loss in the moment becomes freedom in Your hands. You remind us that nothing we surrender to You is ever wasted—every act of obedience carries eternal weight and purpose.

## **Fixing Our Minds on Christ: Guarding the Battlefield of Thought**

Philippians 4:8–9

The mind is one of the primary battlegrounds of spiritual life. Scripture does not tell us to ignore difficulty or deny hardship—but it does instruct us where to fix our focus. Paul writes, “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Philippians 4:8).

When our thoughts remain fixed on fear, injustice, loss, or the weight of the struggle, those things begin to shape our perspective. The enemy exploits this space through deception—distorting truth, magnifying problems, and drawing our attention away from Christ. While Satan has no authority over the believer’s life, sustained focus on darkness can give his lies influence in our thinking. In that sense, what consumes our attention begins to rule our peace.

Paul offers a clear pathway to freedom. First, we address the issue honestly in prayer. Scripture invites us to bring our anxieties to God, not suppress them (Philippians 4:6). We acknowledge the pain, fear, or challenge before the Lord, placing it in His capable hands. Then, we intentionally lift our eyes to Jesus and align our thoughts with truth.

Fixing our minds on Christ is not denial—it is discernment. When we declare God’s Word, we interrupt the enemy’s narrative and reinforce heaven’s perspective. What we meditate on shapes what we believe, and what we believe shapes how we live. As we choose to dwell on what reflects God’s character, His peace guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).

Paul concludes with a promise: “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:9). Peace is not merely felt—it is experienced through obedience.

Freedom begins when we stop rehearsing the problem and start declaring the truth.

### **Prayer:**

Lord, I bring every anxious thought to You. I choose to fix my mind on what is true and praiseworthy. I reject deception and receive Your peace. Guard my heart and mind as I set my eyes on Jesus. Amen.

## **Restored**

“He restores my soul.” (Psalm 23:3)

So, what does that mean? The internet gives several words as a definition of the word restore. Such as, repair, return; bring back, renovate but here's what stood out: GIVE (something previously stolen, taken away, or lost) back to their original owner or in this case, person. Jesus, as our shepherd, wants to give us back what was stolen from us when we were lost and walking in darkness. When we receive Christ into our life, we are born again by the Spirit and our old sin nature dies. Our soul is renewed and restored in the Spirit. In Christ we have a new nature. We are told in Romans 6:6 “We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin.” (That is not to say we never sin, but we have lost the desire to continue in sin.) We who have received Christ as our Savior are restored. “This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! (2 Corinthians 5:17 NLT) Our new, restored life, is all because Jesus sacrificed his own life on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins.

John 10:10, 1 Peter 1:23 (ESV), John 3:3, Isaiah 53:5

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, you have restored my soul, and I am so thankful that you have given me new life through your son Jesus Christ. Help me to live a life that brings you glory. Amen