



THE VILLAGE CHAPEL

Walking
IN THE
Spirit

1 CORINTHIANS 12-16

21 Days to a Fresh Start

A Daily Devotional

By Chuck Musselwhite

1. A Fresh Start

The New Year is a great time to start something new, for a fresh start. The old year is done, and the new one is just beginning. It's also a perfect time to start fresh with Jesus. To begin a new routine of getting in his word. When we realize that he wants to do a new work in our lives, it makes it even more exciting. Look at what the prophet Isaiah said:

Isaiah 43:18-19 *Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.*

In all reality starting points like the new year are a good motivation but we can get a fresh start anytime we want. That's what so great about God! He wants us to start fresh with right now. It doesn't matter where we are at or what we've done, a new beginning can happen right now. Three simple steps can get the process going. It They can clean the slate and prepare us for everything that God has for us.

The first step to a fresh start is to to get right with God. This means asking for forgiveness of our sins. Starting with clean slate means "*forgetting the former things.*" Asking for forgiveness means that God forgives and forgets our past. Take a moment and get right with God. Confess your sins and ask Jesus to forgive them. This will allow you to move forward.

The second step is to receive the Holy Spirit. We are filled with the Holy Spirit at salvation but a fresh filling is needed to solidify this fresh start. Simply ask Jesus to fill you with the power of the Holy Spirit. D.L. Moody was asked why he needed to be refilled with the Holy Spirit. He replied: "Because I leak." Many of us are running on the fumes of the Holy Spirit filling and not overflowing in his power.

The final step is that we need to get moving forward. If we dwell on the past, there will be no new work in our life. Start to establish new habits in your life. Experts say that it takes three weeks to establish a new habit (hence the 21 day devotional). Read your Bible daily, spend time in prayer, attend a local Bible teaching church, and start to give of yourself. Write your thoughts in the journal pages provided. As you do these things repetitively, you will begin to see a change in your life. A fresh start is waiting for those who want it today.

2. A New Day

One of this earth's most beautiful things is the dawn of a new day. The colors and majesty that are portrayed as the Sun rises can be breathtaking. Dawn signals a new beginning and new life. Yesterday is over and today is a fresh start. When we start new with Christ, it is the dawn of new day spiritually. The old life is put behind us, and a new life is in front of us. Start this new day by realizing what Jesus has done for you.

Lamentations 3:22-24 *The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."*

Do you need a fresh start in your life? Are you ready for a new day to dawn? When we decide to start over with Jesus the darkness of the past is removed. That doesn't mean we won't still have struggles, but those struggles that bound us before have been defeated, and we have a new beginning.

Begin your new day by jumping into the Word of God. Fill your heart with his wisdom. Part of a fresh start is changing what we focus on and what we put into our hearts and minds. We need to change what goes in. When we change the content that we are putting into our minds, it will eventually eliminate and push out that which holds us back.

Jeremiah the prophet was the writer of Lamentations. He knew what it was like to struggle with hard times and a bitter heart. He is known as the weeping prophet. Through the gentle hand of the Lord, he was able to overcome it. We see in this verse what he has learned; the Lord's love is steadfast, and he never stops loving us. That means he doesn't give up on us. He looks at our failures and moves toward us, not away.

The Lord's mercy is new every morning. What a great encouragement! Everyday, when we wake up his mercy, is there for us. When we blow it he doesn't give us the punishment we deserve; he just continues to love us. If yesterday was horrible, we have the confidence that God is still there to love us the same today.

Finally, we see Jeremiah tell us that God is our portion. When we put our faith in Christ, He is enough for us. We don't need anything else. That portion comes with a hope that sustains us. That's enough to make us get up in the morning. Walk into your new day in Christ right now. Ask Jesus to forgive you for your past sins, verbally speak out that you believe He is the son of God, and ask for the Holy Spirit to fill you. A new day will dawn on you once you do.

3. Wake Up!

The key to a fresh start is to answer the wake up call God is giving you. We have become a sleep deprived generation that sleep-walks through our days. This leaves us in a haze spiritually. Over a long period of time it is necessary for God to give us a wake up call. If God is trying to get your attention I ask that you a rise up from your slumber and start walking with him on a daily basis.

Ephesians 5:13-15 *But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. 14 This is why it is said: “Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” 15 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.*

When Jesus exposes our heart, our initial reaction is to hide or deny what has become evident. He doesn't expose us to humiliate us but to eliminate those habits and vices that cause a spiritual malaise in our lives. It is a wake-up call to turn from those sins and turn towards the love of Christ. He wants to shine on your life and illuminate the saving work he has done for you. Don't run from the light and hide in the shadows (**John 3:19**). Come out and let that redeeming work transform you.

If we sleepwalk through life it easy to fall into temptation. Because we are tired we take the easy well-worn path that everyone else does. That often leads to spiritual malaise. We need to be wake up, and sober up to the reality that Satan is doing his best to trip us up, and make the most of every opportunity Jesus gives us. **1**

Corinthians 15:58 tell us: "*Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*" We are to stand firm (**Eph 6**) and not retreat but keep our mind focused on things above and our hands and feet busy with the work of the Lord. What are your eyes focused on? What are your hands and feet busy with? This will tell you how you are living.

4. **The Dawn is Near**

The early morning hours before the dawn are usually the darkest and coldest. It seems like the new day is never going to arrive. It is usually at that moment that the first light appears. That is eerily similar to what happens in a person's life before Jesus shines into our life. Many people are in that dark place feeling distant from God wondering if there is any hope. Hold on the dawn is near.

Rom 13:11-13 *And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. 14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.*

We are to put on the Armor of light as a Christian. The armor of God is described further in Ephesians 6. When we walk with Christ on a daily basis, we put on the armor of God. That armor illuminates the light of Christ. It is repulsive to the world. It is important to understand that we can't walk in this world without the armor. Paul warns us in Romans that the present time is dangerous and we need to wake up.

In any discussion of a fresh start, there needs to be a discussion about removing those habits that hinder us from following Jesus. We can't sleep-walk through life anymore. The time of Christ coming back is almost here. We need to put aside the deeds of darkness and behave in a manner that glorifies Christ. Carousing, which means to act in such a way as to cause a riot at a banquet, needs to be put away. The Romans loved their feasts, and all kinds of lewd acts would happen during them.

Our public behavior is important as Christians. We need to act in such a way that we don't embarrass ourselves or diminish our witness. Public drunkenness and sexual excessiveness are to be put behind us. At the same time, those secret sins like dissension and jealousy need to stop as well. Sometimes these sins, done in secret, can do more damage than the public ones. Either way, they are both unfitting for someone who calls themselves a disciple of Christ.

We need to clothe ourselves with Jesus. That means our lives need to be marked by the fruit of the Spirit. Love, peace, and joy should be evident for everyone to see. These are also signs of a life surrendered to Him and led by the Holy Spirit. Put on the armor of light. Let your salvation, faith, righteousness, and peace be so evident that when you take up the sword of the Spirit, it will be powerful and effective.

5. **Keep Your Eye on the Prize**

What does it take to be successful? Studies have shown those who push through the difficulties and challenges and keep their eyes on their goal are the ones who succeed. They are able to shut out all of the distractions and focus on the prize. The same can be said for our faith. Peter encourages us to stay focused.

1 Peter 1:3-5 *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time*

What if a lawyer showed up to your house to tell you that you have inherited millions of dollars? The only catch would be that you don't get it right now but in five years. Immediately all of your focus would be on those one thousand eight hundred and twenty-five days until you got your money. Everything else would take a back seat to that magical day.

Peter is telling us the same thing, except we are inheriting so much more. We have been born again through the mercy of Jesus Christ and given a whole new life. We were plucked out of a life that was speeding towards death, but in his infinite mercy we were spared that penalty. We were then placed into a family that has riches that can't be counted. The one catch? We won't inherit this until Jesus returns for his church.

What do we do in the meantime? How do we go about our days waiting for this inheritance? We walk by faith and not by sight. (**2 Cor 5:7**) We walk under the power and protection of the almighty God. We keep our eyes on the horizon looking for the returning Son while at the same time abounding in the work of the Lord. Keep your eyes on the prize that awaits you. The days can get long and tiresome, but that is why we rely on the Strength of God not on our might (**Zech 4:6**).

6. Focus on the Fundamentals

On the first day of practice every year Vince Lombardi would walk out, look at his

football players, hold up a football and say: "Gentlemen, this is a football." Seem too simple? Not to Lombardi. He always focused on the fundamentals. He was standing in front of professional athletes who had been playing the game since they were kids but he didn't care. He knew the success of his team depended on his team having the fundamentals down. It didn't matter if they were Super Bowl champions the year before or not, it was a new season and focus was essential. There are fundamentals that every Christian needs to focus on and repeat over and over.

Colossians 3:1-3 *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God*

Keeping your mind off of unhealthy distractions is today's biggest challenge. We have so many devices and apps that are designed for holding our attention for long periods of time. This is a danger to Christians because we are to keep our minds on things above, the things of God. If we are worried about how many likes we have or how high we can score on a game we are diverting attention away from the Lord. The battle between heaven and earth is a struggle for most. The reason you may want a fresh start is that you are distracted by your gadget and you are feeling disconnected with God.

Paul tells us that we have been raised with Christ. This is a reference to the resurrection. When we receive Christ as our savior, we die to our old life of sin and are raised into a new life with Christ. We are new creations. That means Christ is at the center of our life. From that point, Satan will do everything to distract and discourage you from serving Jesus. If he can keep your eyes off of Jesus, then he has rendered you powerless.

Our eyes are directed by our heart. What is important to our heart our eyes will follow. Then it will be difficult to take our focus off of that. What you fill your heart with is essential. For our eyes to focus on things above we have to fill our heart with the worship of our Lord. Worship comes from our love of Jesus. When you realize what Christ has done for you your love for him will grow. Fill your heart with the Word of God and watch your love grow.

7. **Don't Give Up Now**

They say it takes three weeks to form a new habit. After twenty-one days of repeating the same action it becomes automatic. Unfortunately, most people ditch their

resolutions, diets, and budgets within the first seven days. Maybe you began this plan and started strong the first few days, and then life got busy, and you forgot about it. You are just now picking it up again. Let me encourage you to keep going. There is a reward for those who learn to walk daily with the Lord.

2 Chronicles 15:7 *But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded.*

King Asa in 2 Chronicles had a daunting task before him. The kingdom of Israel had split after Solomon and the people had fallen into idol worship. There were some corrupt kings before him so he was faced with the job of reforming Israel. Here he is encouraged by the prophet Azariah to stay strong and keep going.

Sometimes when the change in our life seems insurmountable, we want just to give up. It is at that moment we need to stay strong and keep going. No change happens without struggle and difficulty, if it didn't everyone would make changes. Growth happens in the struggle. We learn a lot about ourselves in the midst of difficulty. It shows us where we need to get better. Keep going; you won't regret it.

The great thing about our faith is that we don't have to do it alone. God gives us two great resources to help us along the path. The first resource is the Holy Spirit. Jesus tells us in the Gospel of John that he is going to send a helper who will instruct us in the way of the Lord. We need to lean on him in our daily walk. The second resource that we are given is the church. God has gathered his people together to act as a spiritual family. We are there to support and encourage one another. Lean on both of these as you continue on your journey towards a fresh start.

Don't give up now! You have gotten this far. Put in the daily work and you will reap a great reward; a renewed relationship with Jesus. Ask him to strengthen you as you continue on this journey.

8. Hitting Your Stride

The beginning of any workout plan is always the hardest. The muscles in your body are resisting the effort. For runners the lactic acid in your legs needs to be worked out. That pain is a signal your muscle is using to let your brain know it's running out

of energy. This pain signal typically comes well before your body is actually tired. Once you push through it you will begin to hit your stride. Then you will experience the best part of running, the Runners High. It is that euphoric feeling that energizes every part of your life. We can experience a similar feeling as we hit our stride in walking with Christ. As we push through the early resistance we feel closer to him. That in turn affects other areas of our life.

Psalm 25:10 All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

Psalm 16:11 You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

The runners high doesn't come until you have some mileage behind you. The same is true for our walk with Christ. At first, it is difficult to establish a rhythm, we don't feel like we are making progress, but after a couple of weeks it becomes part of the norm. If we miss a day it feels like there is a void in our day. As we travel the path to a fresh start, we will become more aware of the unceasing love of God. This is greater than any runner's high. The fruit of God's love in our life is joy.

Be steadfast in your journey with Christ. Some mornings you will wake up and not feel it. Push through the fog and discover what God has for you. You will find his steadfast love and faithfulness. A daily walk that is filled with the joy of the Lord is greater than anything you can experience here on earth.

9. **Prayer that Works**

It's not enough To point yourself in the right direction and start taking steps, you need to equip yourself with skills that will ensure perseverance. Over the next few days, we will look at a few simple skills that will help you finish well. The first one we will look at is prayer. No other discipline in the Christian life is more essential

than developing a prayer life. It is one act that produces far more results than effort. Paul gives us several areas to focus our prayer life.

Philippians 4:6-7 *The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

We have the assurance, as a child of God, that our prayers are heard. God loves to hear from us. When we go to him, he is at hand, and we don't have to be anxious about anything. In fact, we can go with boldness to the throne of God because we are one of his own. Many people don't pray because they think that their prayers are not heard. So we consume our time with worrying about our problems. God wants us to bring our anxiety to him.

When we pray, it is important that our time with God isn't us just reading a list of things we want him to do. Jesus, in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus shows us that we need to have a time of praise, thanksgiving, and confession along with our requests. We need to praise Jesus for who he is. This takes our focus off of our problems and onto him. David's Psalms are filled with wonderful examples of what it's like to praise God, even when things are not going well.

We also need to have a time of confession of our sins. This gets our heads right and consecrates our heart to God. After we have had a time of praise and confession then, and only then, should we bring our requests to him. I'm not trying to be a legalist by expecting this order but what I have found is that if I don't do the praise and confession part of my prayer time before the requests, I won't do it all.

Spend time in prayer each morning; it will equip you for your daily walk. Do it early during your devotion time. Start a journal and write your prayers down. Watch as they get answered, and your heart is drawn closer to the Lord.

10. Deeper in the Word

The second skill that we want to equip you with is daily scripture reading. The Bible is like a road map for life. Some people refer to the Bible as Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth. Devotions like this are important, but they place second to reading your Bible. Reading God's word encourages and equips you for your day. It always amazes me how I can read a passage of scripture, and it will address an

struggle that I am dealing with. God uses it to convict me and to strengthen my resolve.

Psalm 119:10-12 *With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes!*

Let's look at the heart of the Psalmist. He wants to know God's word; he wants to be transformed by its power. God's word is all-powerful, able to pierce even the hardest of hearts. This verse shows us several important principles that come from daily Bible reading. The first principle is that daily reading of God's word produces a desire to obey what it says. If we approach it with an open and ready heart, it will speak to us.

The second principle we see is the importance of memorization. Storing the word in our hearts not only makes recollection easy but it guides our decisions. Knowing the word can direct our actions. We can recall a scripture in a time of discouragement, draw from its wisdom in tough decisions, and use it to minister to a hurting heart.

Finally, diving into God's word creates a heart that wants to know more. When we realize that the scriptures are living and powerful and that applying them to our life produces Godly results, it increases the desire within us to know more. Cultivate a desire to dive deep into God's word. There are so many great resources that get God's word in our hands. Download an app on your phone that will set up a Bible reading plan.

11. The Key to it All

The third skill you need to be equipped with is giving. Giving is the ability to sacrifice what we have for the benefit of others. It takes a piece of us and leaves it with someone else. This is one of the most life-changing steps we can take. Learning to give transforms our heart in ways that nothing else can. Do you want a fresh start that has long-lasting impact? Learn how to give without expecting anything in re-

turn.

Matt 6:1-4 *Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

One of the secrets to a satisfying daily walk is to learn how to give properly. Jesus lays it out very clearly in Matthew by showing us true unconditional giving. Our giving should never be done for other people to see. Our giving should be completely led by the Lord and focused on those we are serving. It should become so natural that it becomes an automatic reaction from our heart. That is what will be rewarded when we stand before God.

Give in such a way that your left-hand does not know what your right hand is doing. We live in an age where appreciation and attention are demanded. The simplest act of helping someone is posted on social media and everyone cheers. Jesus goes countercultural on that by saying that we should avoid any attention when it comes to giving of ourselves. Jesus should get the glory, and the focus should be on those being served.

Lasting change happens in our life when we deny our self, take up our cross, and follow Christ. Jesus came down from heaven and took the role of a servant. He washed his disciples feet, the lowest form of work at that time. Jesus was exalted before his father because he gave everything he had for us. When we implement the principle of giving into our daily walk we will see our life change in ways could never imagine.

12.The Path to Health

The final tool you need for your daily walk is strong Bible teaching. This comes from a pastor at a church that teaches God's word. God has set his church up to meet on a frequent basis to learn scripture. We have to be instructed in what the Word says. A trained pastor can explain difficult passages and unearth nuggets of encouragement that will help us through the week.

Psalm 119:102-105 *I have not departed from your laws, for you yourself have taught me. How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path. Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.*

Listen to the importance of biblical teaching in your life. It strengthens obedience, it is sweet to your soul, it increases understanding, it gives discernment, and it lights the path we are walking. What a list! Who doesn't need that in our life? For the believer, we can't walk with Christ without constant biblical teaching.

A good pastor is one who takes God's Word and rightly divides it. That will be a congregation that is well fed and well lead. These people will grow in their faith and have the wisdom to make the right decisions. They will be encouraged by the goodness of God and be in awe of all that he has done for them.

If you aren't involved in a church that teaches the Bible, I want to encourage you to join one. Many believers are weak because they are being fed weak sermons. They should've grown out of that a long time ago. Paul chastised the Corinthians for being spiritually mature. They should've been teaching the Bible to new Christians but instead they needed to be reminded of the basics.

Spiritual weakness makes us easy prey for the enemy. We need strong Bible teaching in our life on a consistent basis in order for us to mature in our faith. Maybe you aren't near a church that teaches through the Bible. There are thousands of podcasts you can listen to on your mobile device that will feed and equip you with the word. This isn't a substitute for the church but an addition that will help you mature in your faith.

13. Make It Stick

Daily consistency in our devotional life increases the possibility of making this fresh start stick. We won't know if the change is permanent until we go through our first test. Often, it isn't until the first sign of trouble appears that we realize something isn't right. It's only then that we realize there are areas in our life that are hindering our growth. They are preventing the seed of God's Word from properly growing. We need to remove those so our hearts are fertile soil.

Matthew 13:4-8 *“A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop — a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.*

The parable of the sower is really about the state of the soil in our hearts. The seed is the Word of God. When it enters our heart, it either falls on a hardened heart, shallow rocky soil, in the middle of weeds, or on fertile soil. Each of those types of soil represents our readiness to receive the good news of Jesus Christ.

The harden path shows a heart that is closed to anything of God. It has become hard because of something in our past has closed our hearts. This soil isn't hopeless, but it will take a work of the Holy Spirit to soften it. The rocky soil represents a heart that is open to the gospel, but it can't go too deep. Rocky soil is preventing the word from fully developing a deep root system. Seed is planted and starts to sprout, but the trials of life makes it wither quickly due to a weak support system. Finally, you have seed that falls on soil and takes root, but the competition from weeds make it impossible to produce fruit. The thorns represent the love of the things of this world. Our heart is divided between the things of God and the cares of the world. That chokes out any hope of true growth.

The final soil is what we want our heart to be, fertile soil that is free from rocks and weeds. It is deep rich soil that can produce a crop that produces one hundred times what was planted. How do we get our heart to be this fertile? It starts with allowing the the Holy Spirit to work on us. When he shows us rocks that need to be moved or weeds that need to be pulled we do it. This will allow the seed of the word to take root and grow.

14. Getting it Right

Everyone has that co-worker or family member who doesn't pull their weight. They sap off of everyone else or play dumb when they don't get their work done. The early church was rife with people like that too. They weren't working, and that idleness was disrupting the normal life of the church. Paul is crystal clear that they work at getting it right.

2 Thessalonians 3:11-13 *We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive.*

They are not busy; they are busybodies. 12 Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat. 13 And as for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good.

If you do not eat, you will go hungry, or at least that is how Paul sees it. We can't be a busybody in everyone else's business and not do our own work. Once we get to adult age, it is our responsibility to provide for ourselves. What does this have to do with a fresh start? First, coming to Jesus doesn't eliminate our worldly duties. Second, coming to Jesus doesn't mean that we get a free ride through life. In fact, Jesus expects that we work in such a way that it honors him. Our bosses shouldn't complain about hiring Christians, they should be coming to you asking if you have any more friends like you.

God says several times in the Bible that he will never leave you nor forsake you, but he has also equipped you with abilities to make a living for yourself. Many people get off track with God because they focus on everything besides what they are supposed to be doing. We are created to work. Sin made that work a painful effort, but we are still supposed to work.

We can walk our daily walk with Christ and go about our normal daily activities. Do what you do to the glory of the Lord. Let your work speak for itself and keep your eyes focused on him. If your boss is unbearable ask Jesus for the grace to make it through each day. Work in such a way that your employer is afraid to lose you. You will also find that when we are excellent workers it increases our witness.

15. Walking in Love

Some days are just a grind to get through it. It doesn't matter what we do to make it better, nothing works. We can try all of the positive thinking we want, it amounts to nothing. Keep walking. Some days we just need to put one step in front of the other. Those days Paul instructs us to walk in love.

Ephesians 4:1-2 *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,*

Whether the day is going good or bad, our walk should always be worthy of being called a Christian. Some of the best testimony we can give for God is how we handle difficult times. Those who don't follow Jesus are watching to see how we will handle difficult situations. When they notice a difference in us, they will start to seek us out for counsel. They will want what we have inside of us.

There are three keys to walking in a manner worthy of Christ. Paul shows us that we should exhibit humility, patience, and love. These three together pack a powerful punch. They allow us to get through the difficult days and they keep us grounded through the good one.

Humility is that character trait where we realize that we are a sinner saved by grace. We understand that there is nothing good in us outside of the atoning work of Christ. We aren't impressed with ourselves but are very sober to our shortcomings.

Patience is a spiritual fruit that the Holy Spirit produces in us. It is rooted in our humility because we understand that we have no right to be impatient with others because we need patience just as much as they do. The Spirit often produces patience in us through our trial and error.

Finally, we need to exhibit love. This is the greatest of all attributes a believer can show. To love like Jesus means that our heart has been transformed and that we understand the love Christ has for us. We freely give this love because Christ loved us first. Love often means that we need to with bear with unbearable people using all the humility and patience we can scrape together. Our faith is a long journey and exhibiting these three traits will make it more enjoyable.

16. **Winning the Mind Game**

When you look at an iceberg, you only see ten percent of its mass, ninety percent of it is underwater. That is similar to the battle going on in most people's lives. You only see a small percent of their struggle. I would go so far to say that most of the struggle people have is mental. When I played tennis in college, my coach would tell me that "tennis is ninety percent mental and ten percent physical. You have to win the mind game." We have a game plan to win the mind game.

Rom 12:1-2 *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual*

worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect

We are in a spiritual battle whether we like it or not. This isn't something we can sit out; it's real. 2 Corinthians tells us that our battle is not with carnal weapons but with spiritual ones. The battlefield often takes place in our minds. Satan would love to plant seeds of doubt, discouragement, and defeat in our minds and render us completely ineffective for the kingdom of God.

Paul shows us how to win the mind games. He tells us to live as living sacrifices whose minds are being renewed daily. A living sacrifice is someone who gives up their agenda and submits to the leading of the Holy Spirit. We no longer care about our reputation but are fully committed to what God desires. We live as one who has given up everything fully trusting God to provide everything.

He also tells us to renew our minds. On a daily basis, we are being bombarded with images and messages from the world. There has to be a process where we unload all of that garbage and process it through the word of God and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. This happens in our prayer closet as we fill our minds with the word of God and connect with God through prayer. It continues as we forsake ourselves and live to serve others.

The mind game has rendered many Christians helpless. Their thoughts so control them that they are paralyzed with doubt and bitterness. You can be set free from all of that baggage by letting your mind be transformed.

17. Overcoming Obstacles

There are great stories in the Bible of people overcoming obstacles. Think of Zaccheus who was short and scaled a tree to see Jesus or the blind man who yelled "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." They didn't let their obstacles get in their way of getting to Jesus. We need to possess the same desire. Too often we let the slightest obstruction get in the way of our walk with Christ. We can overcome these obstacles.

1 John 5:3-5 *In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,⁴ for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This*

is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

Obstacles can be something as small as a mean look or hurtful comment from someone, or it can be destructive like an addiction. All of these have a possibility of obstructing our faith. They can get our mind off of the love of Jesus and onto our problems. From there, we become consumed with the obstacle and miss out on all that Christ is doing in our life.

We have already overcome the world through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. From there, our job is to be obedient to his word. The victory has come not through our will power but our faith. Our belief in Jesus brings us victory in our life. We are overcomers. We continue to walk in that victory through obedience.

When someone hurts us, the Bible tells us to forgive them and to love them. It may be hard to overcome our feelings, but when we do, we experience victory over the mental game. For obstacles like addiction, the path is much more difficult. It necessitates the involvement of many people who will walk with you through the process.

Whatever obstacles that are keeping you from following Christ it is time to remove them. There are too many Christians who are sidelined from God's work. Take action today. Recognize the obstacles in your prayer time. Ask for forgiveness for letting them distract you, then start on the path of obedience. You will find that over time, with practice, you will start to see progress in your heart.

18. Putting it Into High Gear

Ever wish you had another gear where you could shift your life into overdrive? Maybe a turbo button that gives you an extra boost when your energy is running low? You could take a bottle of five-hour energy and use the caffeine for a temporary boost, but you eventually will come crashing down. We have another gear available as a believer, the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised a helper who would teach us all things (**John 14:26**), and who would empower us for daily life.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules*

The Holy Spirit is that special ingredient that empowers the believer's life. He can resuscitate a spiritually dead heart, put new life into us, and lead us on the path of obedience. On top of that, He equips us with gifts and works to produce spiritual fruit in us. When we are submissive to the leading of the Spirit, there is life in us that can't be replicated anywhere else.

We are given the gift of the Holy Spirit at salvation. He is God's presence inside of us. He is what believers have that the world doesn't understand. He guides us in the way of the Lord. Without the Holy Spirit, we wouldn't be able to live for Christ on a daily basis.

Paul tells us to walk in the Spirit. **Galatians 5:16** *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.* If you want to put your faith into high gear start walking by the Spirit. What does that look like? It means you are filled with the Word of God, you surrender yourself in prayer, asking for His leading, and you follow His leading in faith. You will find that after a period of doing this your daily walk will take on a whole new life.

19. Growing Where You Are Planted

Someone once told me "Grow where you are planted." It was one of those clichés that stopped me in my tracks. The truth behind it was so profound. Be content with where you are at right now and let God produce the growth in you he wants. Don't be so focused on your next step or the next place you want to go that you miss what God is trying to do now.

Phil 4:11-13 *Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do all things through him who strength-*

ens me.

Contentment isn't one of the most popular Christian subjects. We often only speak of it when we are dissatisfied with what is going on in our life and we can't change it. Only then do we quote this verse from Philippians. Paul knew how to be content wherever God had him. He was born into a wealthy family and was given the best education money could buy. He also knew persecution, poverty, and disaster. Through it all, he had learned how to be content.

We like to say "We can do all things through Christ," but does that include going through hard times? Does it include going without? If our faith is based on using God to get ahead, we are going to go through stretches in our life where nothing seems to be happening. It is during those times where God is trying to teach us contentment. He wants us to stop focusing on the next move or the next promotion and instead learn how to grow where we are currently planted. This is God teaching us how to trust him in all circumstances.

20. The Secret to True Growth

The state flower of California is the Poppy. It is a beautiful orange wildflower that only grows in certain parts of the state. When it is in season they cover whole hillsides with a blanket of orange. People load buses and drive hours just to visit a field full of this tiny flower. God created these beautiful wild flowers. It is a beautiful picture of what Jesus told us in Luke 12.

Luke 12:27 *Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.*

At creation, God created everything, even down to the blossom of a flower. He did

it so well that their beauty surpasses anything humans can produce. The key here isn't the beauty but the effort. No flower works at its beauty; it just comes naturally. Contrast that with the wealth and splendor of Solomon. He had more than anybody else ever had but it wasn't as beautiful as God's creation.

Jesus wants us to know that all the effort and worry we put into ourselves produces very little results. In fact, he asks us what amount of worry has added an hour to our life? (**Luke 12:25**) If God spends so much time on a flower that is here today and gone tomorrow how much more will he spend on us?

The secret to true growth in a Christian's life is to abide in Christ. A branch doesn't produce grapes unless it remains attached to the vine. Abiding means to dwell or remain. We are to dwell in Christ. Instead of spending time on self-help and self-improvement programs spend time reading the Word of God, in prayer, living in the community life of your church, and giving of yourself. These acts attach you to Christ and help you remain with Him.

21.Keep Walking

In 1997 Sian Welch and Wendy Ingraham were battling for first place in the Hawaiian Ironman. After 2 miles of swimming, one hundred twelve miles of biking, and twenty-six miles of running they were neck and neck. As they approached the finish line, Sian started to slow down and weave back and forth before eventually collapsing. Wendy came running up behind her but she collapsed also. They were only a few feet from the finish line, but both were laying on the ground, unable to get up. Their bodies were shutting down from the long race. Wendy started to crawl towards the finish, and soon Sian followed. The cameras showed these two crawling to with everything they had. Wendy crossed first, but both ladies won that day because they kept going

Col 1:9-10 *And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, ask-*

ing that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;11 being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy;

The Christian faith is a long race. There will be times we feel we can't go on. Most days will come and go and it feels like we are getting nowhere, some days will just be discouraging. It will be easy lose interest and give up. My encouragement to you is to keep walking. You haven't reached the finish line yet, and there is still a prize waiting for you.

Paul shares the prayer he had over the Colossians. He asked the Lord to fill them with knowledge and understanding, that their walk would be glorifying and fruitful. Finally, he asked that they would be strengthened so that they would possess the endurance and patience that produces joy. I pray the same thing over you. I hope this devotional has encouraged you in your walk with Jesus. Keep walking even when you don't feel like it. One step in front of the other may not seem like much, but eventually, you will mature in your faith and discover that fruit is growing out of it.