

Day 1

June 17



Pray | Thank God for the powerful influence of fathers.

INFLUENCE IS NOT ALWAYS IMMEDIATELY, NOR VISIBLY SEEN.

God in his infinite wisdom designed children to be best raised in a family with a mother and a father present. Our spiritual childhoods should be no different. Unfortunately, we live in a fallen world and the repercussions of sins past, present, and future have made for many less than perfect family situations where single parents, grandparents, and even siblings have had to valiantly step up and fill the void of a missing parent. Not everyone would agree that their parents (present or absent) were even an influence for good in their lives. Thank God that he provides people to be our spiritual parents for our faith journey and that they are willing to step up and shape us into God's image by loving us and teaching us; doing whatever they need to in order to be a part of our lives regardless of circumstances that could easily give them an out.



Read | 1 Timothy 1-2



Reflect | *Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:*

Paul and Timothy have a special relationship, likened to that of father and son. His past life as Saul “Persecutor of Christians”, his current status as prison “guest” would each have given Paul an out, made him an exemplary “absentee father” figure. As we study Paul think about the ways he actively engages with Timothy and others all while doing time.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ are you actively fulfilling God's call to being discipled and then being a disciple maker? Are you doing so in spite of any less than ideal circumstances you find yourself in?

Think for a moment about your relationship with God. Would you say you are spending more time learning about him or sharing about him by spiritually parenting (mentoring) others? Be wary lest God visit hardships upon your life to get your attention and make time in your busy schedule for his calling on your life.

Day 2

June 18



Pray | Ask God to strengthen your faith for difficult times.

IF YOUR CHRISTIAN WALK IS AN EASY ROAD THEN PERHAPS YOU ARE LOST.

American Christians are losing our way. We are soft from a lack of persecution for our beliefs. We are so good at making Jesus look cool that the Christian view of sin is often the same as the world's view, what sin?

Truth is stranger than fiction. Two high-school friends got together recently after years apart because it turns out one of them had been given a life altering, perhaps life ending, medical diagnosis. This person felt there was no longer any time to waste. They just had to convince people to act immediately on the environment, and social injustices regarding race, and inequality for homosexuals, as time was short and they could no longer live life not offending people with the "truth". This person claims a Bible believing Christian faith-and yet they are willing to overlook entire parts of what the Bible says about certain lifestyle choices because their own experiences and common sense tell them otherwise.



Read | [John 15:18-25](#)



Reflect | *Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:*

Really think about the following statements or questions for a few moments and deep repercussions they carry. Would there be a need for Black Lives Matter if all lives mattered (all races, born, unborn, healthy, special needs)?

If they say the Bible is not 100% God's inspired TRUTH then we undercut the validity of the parts we choose to believe. Why should anyone believe any of it unless it is exactly what it claims to be?

There seems to be a resurgence of open, raw, and volatile deep-seated hate on display in our world: on social media, available on the internet, in news headlines, and just the everyday conversations around us. How much of the hate currently directed at Christians is a result of the hateful way Christians have judged and hated on others in Jesus name?

Day 3

June 19



Pray | Ask God that whatever you do you are building his kingdom.

BUTTON PUSHERS GENERATE IMMEDIATE FEEDBACK.

If today's scripture was the only introduction you had to the Apostle Paul you could assume he was a master manipulator of people. If you did not know his pedigreed religious credentials from when he was named Saul and persecuted those who believed in Jesus by throwing them into prison, maybe you could see Paul as a button pusher. As you read the passage, focus on the ironies of God's chosen messenger to bring the good news of salvation through Jesus. Instead of seeing the narrative only describing outward things happening think about the inward things happening in Paul as reflected in his words. Paul was honest (v.1), prophetic (v.3), knowledgeable of scripture (v. 5) strategic (v. 6a) and confessional (v. 6b). Paul is not seeking to incite another riot but God uses that near eventuality to push Paul further on the road he must travel of long imprisonments and finally testifying before kings.



Read | Acts 23: 1-10



Reflect | *Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:*

When we find ourselves in confrontational situations where the gospel truth we are presenting is directly in conflict with the audiences' beliefs, how can these five things help us?

Riots and violence seem to precede, occur during, and after the Apostle Paul speaks. Is Paul an inciter of violence in Christ's name, or are these responses merely guilty consciences and high emotions responding to being called out for being what they are-sinners?

Situations we find ourselves in may not have the intensity or consequences that Paul's interrogation with the Sanhedrin did. Pre-Jesus Paul (Saul) knew the scriptures. He had to in order to live as a Pharisee. Paul who met Jesus knows the scriptures in a deeper way as revealed having a relationship with Jesus. Only by knowing the God of the scriptures can we then be empowered through him to share that knowledge with others.

Day 4
June 20



Pray | *Thank God that Jesus understands what you are going through.*

MEMBERSHIP IN A CLUB YOU NEVER WANT TO JOIN.

No parent wants to have a funeral for their children or grandchildren. No one wants to see a loved one destroy their life with drugs, alcohol, or another addiction. No spouse of a soldier, firefighter, or police officer wants that phone call or knock on their door. No one wants to witness a previously healthy person lose their health to illness and disease, or a parent lose their memory and personality to Alzheimers. All these things are a hard road to travel. Still they come unwanted to us all the same. For those futilely trying to be there for those who are now members of a club they did not want to join, which we have not yet joined, our sympathy, encouragement, and intentions fall woefully short of their needs. The needs are many when one becomes a member of this club. One need is to hear it will get better from someone who has personally experienced a similar circumstance and is living proof that it does get better. Another one is just the simple re-assurance that they are not in it alone, that others have felt their pain too.



Read | Acts 23:11; Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:14-16



Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

Consider for a moment all the similar things Jesus and Paul had endured and would endure as they share this miraculous moment. Think about times in your life where you have needed strength, support, and most of all empathy. God may have shown up personally or else through fellow believers who understood exactly what you were going through. What impacts did these times have in bolstering your faith?

There are many similar circumstances in both Paul and Jesus' experiences in the book of Acts. Jesus himself was uniquely qualified to be Paul's re-assurer. Take a moment to pray about how God may be calling you to use your experiences, even the painful ones, to minister to others whom only you are uniquely qualified to relate to.

Suicide is the devil's ultimate trick. How can the two Hebrews passages give you ammunition to fight the devil's lie that you are all alone and nobody can understand what you are going through when your life seems hopeless?

Day 5

June 21



Pray | Thank God that he holds the whole world in his hands.

THE CHRISTIAN THING TO DO.

Christian comedians have a unique take on life. They are often hilariously funny because they make good observations about people... especially the ones that attend their churches. It is not an exact quote or an attempt to plagiarize Thor Ramsey, but he does a bit about the religious fish bumper stickers. He talks about how Christians put them on their cars, and then how other people retaliated by adding feet and Darwin to the fish and putting them on their cars, and how not to be outdone the Christians then made new stickers with their fish eating the Darwin fish. The punch line essentially is: Because that was the Christian Thing to Do. The verses for today from Acts would make just as good of a comedic bit, or at the very least hopefully get mentioned in John Alan Turner's book *Crazy Stories, Sane God*. Spoiler alert, if you want to know who really ran the Temple (the pre-church Church) it was the thugs. No, seriously.



Read | [Acts 23: 12-24; John 10:39](#)



Reflect | *Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:*

Historically speaking the Jews were not very good with authority figures, God or otherwise, or even anyone who challenged the religious normal. It probably should not be a surprise that the very people who gave Judas money to turn over Jesus would partake in a murder plot but there it is. How do you usually respond when you are presented with a challenge to your religious normal, especially by God?

This may not be a complete list, but by following Jesus, Paul was stoned and left for dead, beaten, whipped, imprisoned multiple times, ship-wrecked, bitten by a poisonous snake, involved in several riots, and apparently was so popular he was assigned a more than forty person death squad. Moral of the story is that if you are in God's hands and doing his will, you will persevere! So what fears are holding you back from sharing God with others?

God thwarts the plans of men, especially when they are counter to his will. Life is filled with times where things go seemingly and scarily wrong yet ultimately the people, experiences, even the suffering, are all preparing you for a divine appointment that only you will be able to keep. Are you watching for the unlikely ways God is at work in your life?

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