



T ▲ K E

H E ▲ R T

D ▲ I L Y

DEVOTIONS

TO DEEPEN

YOUR F ▲ I T H

D ▲ V I D P O W L I S O N

Take Heart

Daily Devotions to
Deepen Your Faith

DAVID POWLISON

RUTH CASTLE, EDITOR



New Growth Press, Greensboro, NC 27401
newgrowthpress.com
Copyright © 2022 by Nancy Powlison

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided by USA copyright law.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are taken from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®). ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation. All rights reserved.

Excerpts taken from *God's Grace in Your Suffering* Copyright © 2018 are used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.crossway.org.

Excerpts taken from *Seeing with New Eyes* ISBN 9780875526089 are used by permission of P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ 08865, www.prpbooks.com.

Cover Design: Faceout Books, faceoutstudio.com
Interior Design and Typesetting: Gretchen Logterman

ISBN: 978-1-64507-273-7 (Print)
ISBN: 978-1-64507-274-4 (eBook)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data on file
LCCN 2022007649

Printed in the United States of America

29 28 27 26 25 24 23 22 1 2 3 4 5

Introduction

What a wonderful irony that I have the privilege of writing the introduction to this daily devotional. Little did David know that he would be publishing books posthumously! And little did I know that after all my grumbling and complaining about David pulling all-nighters for writing deadlines, this little book would shine redeeming light into my heart. God knows how I laugh now with Abraham's wife at the birth of this "impossible Isaac," the brainchild of Barbara Juliani and New Growth Press. It has been a long labor of love for Ruth Castle and Barbara J (as David used to call his longtime editor and friend) who listened to sermons, lectures, conference talks and interviews, combed through books and articles, and added prayers and favorite hymns, as they compiled 366 days of devotions. Now you can sit beside David with your coffee in hand, as I was privileged to do for forty-three years of our life together. And you can jump with him, as I did, into the living water of God's Word, finding strength and courage in weakness and friendship and faith for the journey.

By the end of his life, David felt as at home in the Word of God as he did in the Pacific waters of his childhood. Three months before his homegoing, we flew out to say goodbye to his family in Hawaii. One spectacular day we kayaked out to the off-shore islands near his home. Huge breaking surf wrapped the rocks that day, as we hiked around one of the islands to the lagoon on the other side to jump in. Due to the large break, it became too dicey for me and some of the others to continue, so we settled ourselves in the balcony of high rocks and watched the glory splash below. Our son Peter, his cousin CJ, and David continued to the lagoon. But when they reached it, the two strong, athletic young men raised their eyebrows and decided to sit out, while David prepared to jump in. His teenage surfing-self kicked

in, reading the wave action with an eagle eye, timing his moves until he was perfectly poised, waiting and waiting again until finally he took heart and flight into the foaming turquoise swirl below—trusting God to bear him up.

For David, jumping into God’s Word had a similar challenge and adventure to it. To know the living God—diving into his myriad nuanced Personality, stepping carefully into controversial passages and unpacking them with wisdom, waiting and waiting for insight before jumping to premature conclusions, trusting God to bear him up. David “took heart” in an ocean of suffering over the last twenty years of his life. Through open heart surgery, five cancer surgeries, sleep apnea, and chronic fatigue, he knew great weakness. But out of his weakness came sermons, books, blogs, lectures, conferences, curriculum, and journal articles. Through these devotional readings, you can join him as he works out his friendship with God. As the Beatitudes begin by recognizing weakness, so this devotional begins. And each devotional has one or two sentences italicized to encourage you throughout your day to “take heart.”

In the following journal entry, David faces his weakness, unbelief, discouragement, and negativity over the seeming impossibility of finishing his doctoral thesis. With 2 Corinthians 4:17–18 in mind, he moves from despondent weakness to victorious doxology.

Journal 1995

Nan and I spoke about understanding ourselves and each other last night. If I harbor resentment at the PhD process—is it residual sloth from the 60’s, pride that does not want to work on schedule, or am I afraid of the judgment of superiors and peers, the fear of responsibility and success or failure at being shown up as a fraud?? What of it?

All this is light affliction and mild darkness, and secondary confusion.

Maybe I'll never figure it out.

BUT in You, O God of glory, are riches of splendor—the disk of Andromeda, 100,000 light years to cross her billions of suns, the God whose raiment is incomprehensible light . . . I love You. My Savior who loved, who taught, who suffered, who died, who lives and lives and lives in the power of indestructible Life. You are truly what a human being is. Good beyond incalculable goodness, You bring life out of death, mercy instead of judgment. You have entered our lives, become one of us, the man Jesus, YAWEH in the flesh, in whom is found wonder upon wonder and all true. You have loved with exceeding long-suffering and overflowing generosity a wandering, confused, and distractible race; and You have placed Your life in substitution to make propitiation for us for whom sin is as breathing and heartbeat. You are merciful and Your beauty is radiant. I love You.

Resolved:

To do the dissertation for Love, Learning, Growth, Integrity, Joy, Partnership, and Excellence.

Post Tenebras Lux

“After the darkness, Light”

It is my deepest hope that as you dive into the light of God's Word with David, you take heart and go deep.

May God bear you up.

Nan Powlison

February 2022

January 1

As for me, I am poor and needy,
but the Lord takes thought for me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
do not delay, O my God! —Psalm 40:17

“**W**eakness” is a comprehensive description of our human condition. We are perishable. We are mortal. We face a multitude of afflictions in our lives. And we are sinful, bent from the heart toward pride, self-righteousness, fear of man, and a multitude of desires and fears that beset us. The mercies of God meet us in this comprehensive condition of weakness.

To admit weakness is so countercultural to people who want to say, “We are **STRONG!**” and “You can do it!” On the contrary, *we are fundamentally weak. That weakness is a most unusual door into all the ways God enables us to be strong.*

Being unafraid to be publicly weak was true of King David. The end of Psalm 40 has always resonated deeply with me. This psalm contains a great deal of fruitful ministry and joyful worship, yet David summarizes himself this way: “As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me.” David’s strength grew out of his comprehensive sense of weakness, and his confidence in God’s strength.

My deepest hope for you is that in both your personal life and your ministry to others, you would be unafraid to be publicly weak as the doorway to the strength of God himself.

January 2

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” —Matthew 6:33

God is very concerned that we seek him, his kingdom, and his righteousness. We are to pursue him and be oriented to him because we trust he’s going to take care of the other things.

What are you pursuing? What are you after? What are you obsessing about? *The answers to those questions will correlate with what you’re worrying about, because if you’re pursuing with your whole heart the wrong things, you’re going to worry about them. Only God can be pursued wholeheartedly without worry or anxiety.*

The biggest question cuts the deepest: What do you love? We’re simply turning the first Great Commandment on its head and letting it serve as a mirror into which we look. We’re called to love him with all that we are. What are you loving? Who are you loving? Are you loving pleasure, money, or control? Are you loving being liked? These questions cut deep, and your answers affect everything you feel and think, how you treat people, and the way you come into a conversation.

God speaks, and those who have ears to hear, hear that question. Which voices are you tuning into?

January 3

For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. —2 Corinthians 4:6

People change when the Holy Spirit brings the love of God to their hearts through the gospel. Whoever receives the Spirit of adoption as God’s child learns to cry out, “Abba, Father.” People change when they see that they are responsible for what they believe about God. People change when truth becomes clearer and brighter than previous life experience. We change when our ears hear and our eyes see what God tells us about himself (Psalm 103:10–13; Isaiah 49:13–16).

God is in the business of changing people’s minds; he is not hindered by distortions. He can reveal himself, “[shining] in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). Life experience is not supreme; neither are the lies that people believe. God is supreme, and he alone trumps what we bring to the table.

Your life experiences do not have to dictate your view of reality. On the contrary; disappointing people and experiences can make you long to know the real King, Shepherd, Master, Savior, and God! Ask the Lord to make himself known to you today.

January 4

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" —John 11:25-26

How do you know that the promises God makes to you are true? How do you know that the living God gives true, substantial hope? Because Jesus defeated death. As a willing and sinless substitute, he died in our place on the cross. And God raised him to life and joy. He is alive. Peter explains it this way: "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, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3-4). Your Father in heaven has great mercy. He makes us alive. He gives us realistic joy and hope.

Jesus is alive! His resurrection is his guarantee that you can live in real hope. *Your hope is not based on a pipe dream that changed circumstances, passing of time, a new set of friends, or even giving up will somehow cure how you feel. He gives living hope based on the physical reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.* Because the resurrection happened and Jesus is alive, well, and at work, your story can end in life.

January 5

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me. —Psalm 23:4

What will give you the most pleasure in life? What pleasure will not dim through all the changes in your life? The pleasure of knowing God and being known by him. You step into that pleasure by coming to Jesus for mercy and grace. You grow in your relationship with him by making that call for mercy a daily, lifelong habit. *Your own inability to deal with your habitual sins is God's mercy to you, because it forces you to go to God for the help you need.* As you go to God, use his Word to guide your relationship.

Psalm 23 has been my prayer for many years. Praying through it is one way to experience the pleasure of a growing relationship with God. Start by reading it out loud.

Notice how the psalmist takes hold of suffering. He looks the shadow of death right in the eye: “I will fear no evil” (v. 4). He knows the Lord is with him. Notice how he switches from talking about God in the third person (“he”) to the second person (“you”) in an amazing expression of intimacy with God. The last two lines say that goodness and lovingkindness are literally chasing him! “I am being pursued by your goodness and mercy all my life, and then I will live with you forever.” This is the supreme pleasure.

January 6

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

—John 13:34–35

The Bible gives us two pictures of loving relationships. The leading theme, the richer theme, involves the people you truly enjoy—your beloved brother, sister, wife, the child you hold in your arms, and dear friends. In heaven you will see face-to-face the One you love, the supreme Person. But heaven is also a place full of other relationships you enjoy. These people love you without pretense, competition, or manipulation.

But side by side with that call to joyous intimacy is a call to get out of your comfort zone. The harder call of the Bible is to love enemies, strangers, people who are different from you, and those who are needy, sinful, and broken.

This call comes for two reasons. First, it tests whether you are turning the innocent pleasures of intimacy into a stained pleasure. Are you and the people you enjoy turning into a clique? Second, the call tests whether we are willing to widen the circle of intimacy so that enemies become friends, strangers become like family, and someone you don't know becomes like a dear sister. The goal is always the simple, joyous relationship with others—the mutual affection and give-and-take. *God calls you to widen the circle of your friendships, and to avoid making a god out of those who bring you the greatest pleasure. Doing these two things will fill your life with the pleasure of relationships with others.*

January 7

The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

—Philippians 4:5-7 NIV

The Lord has something to say about what you are going through every single day. Scripture has been designed by God himself to connect to the reality of human experience. But how do you make those connections? Start with the pithy, straightforward passages of Scripture. Philippians 4:6, for example, says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” What promise could ever anchor you, so that you can make such a response? One of them is tucked in the little verse right before Philippians 4:6. Verse 5 says, “the Lord is near.” Anxiety is the experience that you’re all alone in a world that’s too big for you. You feel anxious because you can’t control your circumstances. But if the Lord is near, everything changes. You aren’t alone, and the one who is in control, to order and provide, he’s near and he cares for you and he is involved.

Starting with these basic promises reminds you in the midst of your day that the Lord is with you. *Simple promises, taken to heart, get you and God on the same page with each other.*

January 8

“Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’”

—Matthew 6:9-13

Broadly speaking, there are three emphases of biblical prayer: circumstantial prayers, wisdom prayers, and kingdom prayers.

Sometimes we ask God to *change our circumstances*: heal the sick, give daily bread, protect from suffering and evil, make our leaders just, convert friends and family, make our work prosper, provide me with a spouse, quiet this storm, send rain, give us a child.

Sometimes we ask God to *change us*: deepen my faith, teach us to love each other, forgive sins, make me wise, make us know you better, help me to sanctify you in my heart, don't let me dishonor you, help us understand Scripture, teach me to encourage others.

Sometimes we ask God to *change everything by revealing himself* more fully, magnifying his glory and rule. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven, be exalted above the heavens, let your glory be over all of the earth, come Lord Jesus.

In the Lord's Prayer you see examples of all three, tightly interwoven. The Lord's kingdom involves the destruction of our sins and sufferings. His reign causes a flourishing of love's wisdom and a wealth of situational blessing. *Prayers for God to change me and my circumstances are requests that he reveal his glory and mercy on the stage of this world.*

January 9

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. —2 Peter 1:3-4

The Spirit and the Word recognize that we are a tangled web, individually and together. We are dark even to ourselves, hard to understand, slow to change. Every one of us has stubborn inconsistencies and blind spots. Jeremiah says that our hearts are deceitful and wonders who could possibly understand it (Jeremiah 17:9). *The only one who does thoroughly understand us is God. Sometimes he helps us to change rapidly. But he usually intervenes slowly—to transform how a person thinks, loves, fears, wants, and trusts on a scale of years and decades, over a lifetime.*

The reorientation of our hearts is a slow road. We will only be made wholly right when we see Jesus face-to-face. Someone's behaviors matter and the deep waters of the inner person also matter. Complexities do not erase simplicities, and vice versa. The ability to attend to both is much to be desired, and calls for humility, patience, and an abiding awareness of need for greater wisdom and skill.

People tend to evade personal responsibility by blame-shifting and self-justification. The courage to face hard things grows slowly in people who suffer greatly. From many angles, our Father states and restates his love for us in Christ. People need to hear that because it is by promises that we change (2 Peter 1:4). God sympathetically describes and illumines the varied challenges of tough circumstances. He invites our faith. Because he is merciful and patient, we learn to relate our needs and joys honestly to him.

January 10

If your law had not been my delight,
I would have perished in my affliction.
I will never forget your precepts,
for by them you have given me life. —Psalm 119:92-93

Psalm 119 is personal prayer. It's talking to God, not teaching about God. We hear what a man says out loud in God's presence: his joyous pleasure, vocal need, open adoration, blunt requests, candid assertions, deep struggles, and fiercely good intentions. The various words for the Word appear once in each verse, but I-you words appear about four times per verse. That's a 4:1 ratio and emphasis.

So Psalm 119 is actually not about the topic of getting Scripture into your life. Instead, it is the honest words that erupt when what God says gets into you. It's not an exhortation to Bible study; it's an outcry of faith. Psalm 119 is the thoughtful outcry that rises when real life meets real God.

So this is what we hear in Psalm 119. A person who has listened opens his heart to the Person who has spoken.

How did the psalmist learn to be so outspoken to God? He listened to what God said in the rest of the Bible and lived it. *The Lord says who he is, and is who he says. The Lord says what he does, and does what he says. Faith listens, experiences what is true, and talks back in simple sentences.*

We tend to be busy, noisy, distractible people in a busy, noisy, distracting world. This psalm teaches us to say, "I need time to listen and think if I'm ever to converse with God."