

Thank you for sampling,
**WAKE UP: REDISCOVERING A PASSION
FOR GOD AND THE BIBLE**

Are you like a lot of Christians who feel like they've lost their excitement for the Bible, or for pursuing God in general? Guess what? It doesn't have to be that way.

"Wake Up: Rediscovering a Passion for God and the Bible" is a 31-day devotional designed to help you learn new and fulfilling ways of interacting with the Bible. Wake Up will help you meet God in the Bible in ways you never have. And in doing so, your passion for God will be rekindled.

If you have any questions about
**WAKE UP: REDISCOVERING A PASSION
FOR GOD AND THE BIBLE,**
please don't hesitate to call us
at 1.888.969.6360.

REDISCOVERING
A PASSION
FOR GOD AND
THE BIBLE

A 31-DAY DEVOTIONAL EXPERIENCE



ANDY BLANKS

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INTRODUCTION

“O GOD, YOU ARE MY GOD; EARNESTLY I SEEK YOU; MY SOUL THIRSTS FOR YOU; MY FLESH FAINTS FOR YOU, AS IN A DRY AND WEARY LAND WHERE THERE IS NO WATER.”

- PSALM 63:1

Can you say this?

Can you read these words and honestly say that they represent your true feelings about your desire to know God?

If you can, if you can say that David’s words here describe your day-in, day-out feelings and practices toward knowing God, you probably don’t need this book. Oh, this book would be beneficial to you, for sure. Or at least I certainly pray that it would be. But if you find yourself with a longing and thirst for God that leads you to seek Him earnestly each day, the angle this book takes may not hit you as squarely as it will others.

Because here’s the deal: I can’t read that verse and say that it has always described my feelings or actions when it comes to seeking to know God more.

Scandalous, right? After all, I’ve given my life and vocation to ministry. I’ve been to seminary. I’m an author and a speaker. I have taught the Bible

to teenagers and adults alike vocationally for the nearly two decades. If anyone should have the whole “thirsting for God” thing down it should be someone like me.

How is it possible that I can’t always see myself in the words of this verse?

To be sure, there are times in my life when I can relate to the verse. There are seasons when I feel like God’s Spirit is right under my skin, compelling me and propelling me to soak up as much of Him as I can. In these moments or periods of time, I can barely contain the feeling of wanting to be with God. These seasons impact my purpose, my creativity, my teaching, my parenting, and my marriage. These are great times.

But there are also seasons when I read the verse above and it is condemning. It reminds me of how far away I can feel from God.

THE DISTANCE BETWEEN GOD AND YOU

The reasons we feel distant from God are myriad. Some of it is cultural. The lives many of us choose to live have very little space for God. We are booked solid. Our pace is frantic. And when we have those little snippets of downtime that could be spent snatching moments of communion with God, we’re face down in a smartphone playing a game, browsing SB Nation or Reddit, or catching up on Instagram or Twitter.

Much of why we feel distant from God is spiritual. Scripture makes it clear that all of us are born with a sin nature (Rom. 3:23). We are naturally inclined to seek “self” and not God. Often we don’t seek God because we won’t seek God. The words of my favorite hymn, “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” come to mind:

“Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, / Prone to leave the God I love.”

For whatever reason, many of us will go through times in our lives when God simply feels far away. We don’t sense His presence. He doesn’t feel near. We see the way other people talk about their faith, and it seems as if they are describing an entirely separate journey than the one we’re on. If this describes an experience you’re familiar with, let me speak some encouragement to you for a moment.

Here is a foundational truth, a life-changing statement: God is always near. He is never not near. God’s nearness to you is intertwined with His very character. His presence in the lives of His children is a theological fact. God

is not distant. If you have been born again through a saving faith in Jesus Christ, God is literally with you, within you, every moment of your life (Rom. 8:8-11). It is impossible for God to be any nearer to you.

And yet, there are periods in our lives when God indeed does feel distant. What do we make of this? The unfortunate truth is that when God feels distant from us, the root of the problem is not with God, but with us. If God feels far away, we must look within ourselves for what is causing the distance. I share this with you to encourage you, knowing that on the outset it may feel like anything but an encouragement.

And yet, be encouraged. God is not far from you. He is never far from you. If this is true, it means that it is possible to feel close to Him again. There is great hope here.

There is a wonderful promise in the New Testament, one I have clung to at times throughout my life. It is the foundational premise behind the writing of this little book. James 4:8 says, “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.” Maybe you need to read that again. Read it 100 times if you need to. Do whatever you need to do in order for this powerful truth to take hold of your heart and mind. God is near. He is never not near. If you draw near to Him, He will reward your steps of faith, and He will remind you of His nearness.

If you feel far from God and take action to feel closer to Him, God’s very Word promises us that you will feel God’s nearness once again. Surely there are more comforting promises in Scripture, but there have been times in my life when this promise has sustained me like few others. Maybe this truth is a life preserver tossed to you in the midst of a stormy sea. However, there remains a question. We know that God will honor our efforts to draw closer to Him, but what does drawing closer to Him look like? How do we do it?

THE WAY BACK TO GOD

If you are like many people, you desire to know God more and better, to feel an intimacy with God, a passion for Him. But if you are honest, you don’t feel like your tried-and-true methods of seeking God produce these feelings. It’s OK to admit it. I believe many people find themselves here.

As Christ-followers, much of our lack of passion for seeking God is practical. For many of us, it boils down to this: we really don’t know HOW to seek God.

Read that last sentence again. It’s important. What I am proposing here

is not a lack of desire, but a lack of expertise. That may sound crass or oversimplified. We like to think that we know all we need to know to seek after God, especially those of us who have grown up in church or who have been Christians for a long time. We have a sort of instinctual understanding of what it means to read our Bible and pray. But I have come to believe that the average Christian has never been adequately taught more than one or two ways to interact with the Bible. And it shows.

Study after study shows us a disappointing truth: American Christians live their lives largely separated from God's Word. The majority of Christians in the US don't read their Bible very much. Whether it's Barna, or Lifeway Research, or the American Bible Society, or others, the findings all paint a similar picture. Barna looked at the habits of all American adults and found that over 50% report reading their Bibles only three or four times a year. Only 14% of adults report reading their Bibles daily. Lifeway Research surveyed Christian adults, asking how many times they read their Bibles outside of church. Only 20% reported that they read it daily, while another 20% reported that they never read their Bible outside of church.

As a people, we are trying to live as Christians yet we are disconnected from the God-given source of what it means to live as a Christian.

I find myself asking why this is the case. I believe most Christians WANT to live in connection with God through His Word. But at the same time, I believe most Christians don't really have a grasp of how to read the Bible in a way that unlocks an emotional or even a personal engagement with God. Most of us have simply never been taught, and so it's easy for us to neglect the primary way that God chooses to relate to us: His Word.

What do I mean when I say that we have never been taught how to read the Bible in a way that speaks to our emotional engagement with God? Let me explain. Most people have only ever been taught to interact with the Bible in one way, a way that in laymen's terms we might call "Bible Study." This is where you read a specific passage of Scripture and begin some level of textual analysis. The primary goal is what we might call "understanding." We want to know what a particular passage says. And so, we read for general knowledge. Depending on the resources we have at hand or our level of expertise, we may do some level of historical or contextual analysis. We may look at the original language to gauge a shade of deeper meaning or intent. If we're good at Bible Study, we take the knowledge we accumulate (the "what") and we seek to ask how it applies to our lives (the "why"). All in all, it's a rather academic exercise.

Now let me be clear: there's nothing wrong with this. Textual analysis on this

level is useful, beneficial, and necessary. We need to know what God says. We need to be able, in the words of Paul, to "rightly divide" Scripture. We need to know how to apply the teachings of the Bible to our lives. Studying the Bible in this way is a good thing. It's just not the only thing.

If we're honest, engaging with the Bible in the manner I just described doesn't always satisfy the longing of our soul. When God feels distant, when we're spiritually or emotionally tired, when we need to rediscover our passion, excitement, or joy for God, it's important to know that there are ways of interacting with God's Word that feed our emotional and spiritual needs. But so many people don't know how to do this.

I want to change this.

I believe that the key to rediscovering your joy for God comes through rediscovering, or discovering for the first time, your joy for meeting Him in the pages of His Word. You see, the Bible is the primary way we meet with God. It's where we see Him giving us all that He believes we need to know about Him and His ways.

In this book, I want to teach you how to interact with your Bible in ways that will lead you to pursue God more and more. I want to help you see that reading the Bible doesn't have to be boring, dry, or academic. And more than anything, through approaching the Bible in ways that maybe you never have before, I want to help you rediscover your passion for God. That's my purpose in writing this book. I want to equip you to partner with the Holy Spirit to awaken your deep joy for God and for His Word.

Throughout Scripture, in the Old and New Testaments alike, when God is about to do something in the lives of His people, there is a cry to come awake.

"Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean." - Isaiah 52:1

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you." - Isaiah 60:1

"But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall." - Malachi 4:2

"Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first

believed." - Romans 13:11

"For anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, 'Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'"
- Ephesians 5:14

My prayer for you as you start this journey is that your soul would awaken. God is near you. He is always near you, if you can but see it.

Maybe you are in a dark season when more than anything you crave God's presence in your life.

Maybe you find yourself simply longing for a fresh approach to encountering God in His Word.

Regardless, my prayer is that the practices in this book will ring like a bell in your life, awakening you to a renewed love and joy for God and for who He is in your life.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

First, this book is designed to be read over the course of a month. Some of you will work through this book in exactly 31 days. You are most likely the people who also organize their sock drawer by color. I am not making fun of you. You are amazing, and I am thankful for you even if it's solely because you serve as a hopeful reminder, amidst trying to manage the schedules of four children and two working parents, that there is indeed order in this world.

Most of you will need more than 31 days to go through this book. This is OK. Take your time. Go at your own pace. The important thing is to stick with it even when you don't feel like it. That's one of the wins in a book like this. If you've been struggling to meet with God on a regular basis and are making a commitment to do so, God will honor you. He is faithful. He will meet you where you are. Along the way you will find a new joy for meeting God in the pages of the Bible that you may never have experienced before.

Many of you will find that this book actually provides you with well over a month of content. Some of the experiences in this book are repeatable approaches to engaging with the Bible that can be applied to almost any passage of Scripture. If one of these approaches proves especially meaningful, you may choose to apply it to other passages of Scripture not suggested by this book. Additionally, many of the Bible Study experiences contained in this book offer several options to choose from within that specific day's content. If you find that you really connect with a specific activity and that activity has a few different options, you may want to come back to that day's devotion and work through the options at your leisure.

Next, I would strongly encourage you to have a journal handy. I know that Kindle and other e-readers have note-taking capabilities. And I know that Evernote and similar tools are wonderful tools for jotting down your thoughts. I love technology. But I am a firm believer that the act of writing is a key component of spiritual growth. The tactile practice of writing down your thoughts forces you to slow down a bit and process information differently.

You will be prompted in many ways throughout this book to write things down. I would encourage you to get a journal or a notebook to do it.

Finally, while I put a lot of thought into the progression of the various days in this book, and while I do believe that the optimal way of utilizing this book is to start on Day 1 and read in order through Day 31, you definitely don't have to do this. You can peruse the table of contents and pick specific days that look the most intriguing to you and do them in the order you choose. That's definitely an option available to you. If you choose to do this, let me ask you two favors:

- First, you'll notice Days 7, 14, 21 and 28 are slightly different days. These days are more action oriented and are designed almost as a Sabbath of sorts from the other devotions. If you are going to read the book out of the suggested order (which is, again, fine to do), I would strongly encourage you to make it a point to do these days on the suggested timeline. (In other words, on your seventh day of reading, read Day 7, no matter what order you have read Days 1 through 6. Do the same with Days 14, 21, and 28.)
- Second, if you bounce around, commit yourself to reading each of the 31 days. You're reading this book because you have a desire to reconnect with God through His Word. The very premise of this book is that there are exciting ways of connecting with God through the Bible that you may very well be unaware of. If you only cherry pick days with titles that appeal to you, you will most likely miss out on a new way of meeting God in His Word that could very well be just the thing to inspire a more personal interaction with God.

There will no doubt be days in this book that hit you better than others. I have tried every single one of the methods I propose in these pages. Some moved me greatly. Others not so much. But each of them is valuable in its own right. You never know how God will choose to speak to you. Be brave. Be open-minded. Give every day in this book the chance to make its mark in your life.

As you prepare to jump in to Day 1, I want you to know that I am mindful of you. I do not know you. But this book was written prayerfully with you in mind. There is nothing special about this book. It is merely a resource that points to THE Book.

My prayer is that over the next 31 days or so, you will experience God and His Word in new ways and that through this you will awaken inside of you a renewed joy for God.

Now, let's get started.



THE NAMES OF GOD

PART 1

Do you know what your name means? I'd bet most people do. (In case you were wondering, my name, Andrew, means "strong and manly." I'm just tossing that out there.) The better question is whether your parents named you what they did because of its meaning or because of another reason. Maybe you share a name with a family member, or maybe your parents just liked the sound of your name. Whatever the reason, your name has come to mean something very specific. When someone close to you hears your name spoken, they immediately associate your name with the person you have come to be. Your name tells people who you are. Your name has a certain meaning that has been established by the life you have lived.

It is no different with God's name. Interacting with God through the names He is given in Scripture is a powerful way to draw closer to God and to rediscover our passion for Him.

Today we're going to start with one of my favorite ways of interacting with Scripture to engage with God. I've found great benefit personally in this activity and have led others to find meaning in it as well. We're going to focus our time of Bible reading by interacting with some of the different names of God.

One of the beautiful things about the Hebrew culture we see in the Old Testament is its rich use of names for God. The Hebrew authors used different names for God to describe the many different roles He played in their lives. For instance, in Judges 6:23-24, God came to Gideon in peace. And so, Gideon built an altar to God and named it "The LORD Is Peace," or in Hebrew, "Jehovah Shalom." The cool thing is that God's nature is unchanging, and so He still plays these roles in our lives today.

As we seek to rediscover our passion for seeking out God through engaging with the Bible, contemplating the names of God is a powerful and meaningful practice.

In a moment, you'll encounter several names for God used by His people in the Old Testament. This grouping of names builds off the Hebrew word YAHWEH, the name God gave Abraham when God was initiating His covenant. These names combine God's name with some of His attributes. The English translation of YAHWEH is "Jehovah." And so you'll see God's name, Jehovah, paired with one of His attributes.

HERE'S YOUR CHALLENGE FOR TODAY:

FIRST, set aside a time to read over this list. Pray so that you may get your mind and spirit in a reflective, peaceful state, preferably free from distractions.

THEN, read through the list a couple of times.

NEXT, choose one of the names of God from the list below that makes an impact on you. This could be a role God has fulfilled in your life in the past, or it could be a role He is playing now. Then, read the Bible verses where that name is mentioned and reflect on that aspect of who God is.

Here's a list of a few of the names of God:

Jehovah-Jireh: "The LORD will provide." This was the name used in conjunction with God providing a ram for Abraham to sacrifice in the place of Isaac. This name is a testimony to God's deliverance.

- Read Psalm 73:21-26.
- Consider: How has God provided for you in times of trial? How is He providing for you now?

Jehovah-Nissi: "The LORD is my banner." Moses ascribed this name to God after a victory over the Amalekites. The name of God was considered a banner under which Israel could rally for victory. The Lord's name was the battle cry.

- Read Proverbs 2:1-8.
- Consider: How has God provided you victory in some area of your life? Where do you need that victory today?

Jehovah-Shalom: "The LORD is peace." This was the name of the altar that

Gideon built at Ophrah signifying that God brings well-being, not death, to His people.

- Read Psalm 4:1-8.
- Consider: When has God been your peace in the past? Do you need His peace today in some way?

Jehovah-Rohi: "The LORD is my shepherd." God is the One who provides loving care for His people.

- Read Psalm 23:1-6.
- Consider: What provision has God given you that you are most especially thankful for?

Jehovah-Rapha: "Jehovah Who Heals." Jehovah is the Great Physician who heals the physical and emotional needs of His people.

- Read Psalm 103:1-5.
- Consider: How has God healed you in the past? What do you need healing from today?

Yahweh-Mekaddesh: "The LORD sanctifies." Holiness is the central revelation of God's character. God calls for a people who are set apart from the world to be used for His purposes.

- Read Psalm 40:1-3.
- Consider: Express your thanks to God that you've been set apart by God, cleansed of your sin, and made to be His child.

Yahweh-Sabaoth: "The LORD of Hosts." This can also be translated "the LORD Almighty." It represents God's power over the nations. The title sees God as King and Ruler of Israel, its armies, its temple, and of the entire universe.

- Read Psalm 66:1-7.
- Consider: How do you see God's power displayed in the world around you? In your life?

FINALLY, pray to God using that specific name. (It's OK if you don't pronounce it perfectly! God knows what you mean.) Thank God for realizing this role for you. Or, ask Him to help you see Him in this role.

The most important thing is keeping this concept in front of you throughout the day. As you can, reflect on this name. Consider writing it on your hand or on a note card. Do whatever you can think of to remember to focus on this name and how God relates to you in this way.



THE ART OF DEVOTIONAL READING

PART 2

I could barely hear my phone ringing. My beloved Auburn Tigers had just finished knocking off the second #1 ranked team in as many weeks. What made this victory more special was that this was the Iron Bowl. We had just beaten Alabama in a game that was never really in doubt. The clock was winding down. Soon the fans would rush the field. My wife and I were screaming and cheering along with nearly 90,000 other Auburn fans. I felt my phone vibrating and I saw that my mom was calling me.

I answered the phone knowing that I couldn't hear a word she was saying, and as I suspected, I couldn't. But I knew she would be screaming as loud as I was, and so I screamed back and let her hear the roar of the Jordan-Hare crowd for a moment. I hung up the phone and laughed. I could barely hear my wife next to me, much less my mom on the phone. It was simply too much noise.

Sometimes the distance we feel between us and God is caused by the noisiness of our lives. We have so much going on that even when we try to connect with God, we can't always hear Him over the "noise" we surround ourselves with. This devotion aims to help teach us how to pursue God by quieting the noise in our lives.

Today's time of encountering God in the Bible embraces one of my personal favorite methods of engaging with Scripture. It's an ancient practice that comes from a time when most people in the Church were illiterate and relied on hearing the Word. I have found that as much as any one way of interacting with the Bible, this method speaks to my heart. Furthermore, for me personally, I seem to be able to latch on to truths learned using this method. The echo of God's words stays with me longer if I can make the time to practice this approach.

The fancy Latin phrase for this way of reading the Bible is “lectio divina.” (Try to work the phrase into a random conversation today to impress your friends.) It is devotional reading, an experiential, heart-driven way of meeting God in the Word.

When we read the Bible in this way, we’re not trying to do anything particularly scholarly. We’re not taking an exegetical approach (a critical interpretation of a text). The sole point of devotional reading is to foster a relational, intimate interaction with God through the text. It asks the question, “What does God want to show me in this text?”

If you’ve never engaged with the Bible in this manner, if you’re thinking it sounds too emotional or mushy for you, I’d ask that you give it one chance. If you really pour yourself into it, I promise you will be moved by what you get out of it.

HERE’S YOUR CHALLENGE FOR TODAY:

FIRST, find somewhere quiet. Quiet your mind. Prepare your heart. Slow down. Get yourself ready to meet God in His Word. Start with a prayer to God, asking Him to reveal to you what He has for you in this passage.

THEN, read the passage. You can use the one I have included below or choose your own. Read it slowly, almost word by word. The idea is to read as if God is going to stop you and show you something at any moment. As you come across words or phrases that seem to speak to you, pause and focus on them. Think about what it is about them that speaks to you. But most of all, listen to what the Spirit is trying to show you.

NEXT, contemplate the passage even deeper by reading it one more time, but this time, read it out loud. (This might feel strange at first, but it’s an important part of processing the passage in a way that allows you to pick up on different cues rather than simply reading it to yourself.) This time, really soak in the words and ideas you’re encountering. If God is wanting you to think on certain principles, do so. Allow the words to guide your interaction with God.

THEN, you need to consider your response. This is your chance to engage in a conversation with God. Pray to Him, asking Him what He wants to show you. Express to Him how the truths He led you to reflect on made you feel.

FINALLY, summarize to yourself what you have learned. Some people like to jot these thoughts down in a journal. Some can do this mentally. But the idea is to spend some time — however much you spend is up to you — just thinking about what God has showed you and how it changes who you are. Try to hone in on specific concepts that you can take away.

I’d like to challenge you to give this method an honest try, even if it feels new or a little unusual. The passage I’ve chosen for you to read today is Romans 8:31-39. Go ahead and jump in to this time of devotional reading.

“[31] What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? [32] He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? [33] Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. [34] Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. [35] Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? [36] As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’ [37] No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. [38] For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, [39] nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” — Romans 8:31-39



A DIFFERENT TAKE ON PRAYER

Prayer is the language of our relationship with God, but for many of us, our prayer lives are often lacking passion or feeling. We pray to God and maybe we thank Him for the blessings He has given us. Maybe we remember to pray for the needs of others. But if we're honest, many of us are all too quick to pray for our own needs and the things that concern us most. None of this is wrong in itself. But too often, we don't approach God with the passion that He desires us to approach Him with.

Have you ever felt like your prayers bounce off the ceiling? Like they don't even make it to God? If you do, you're not alone. I believe many people find prayer to be something they struggle to know how to fully engage in, and yet, meaningful prayer to God is oftentimes linked to encountering Him in His Word. When we can see God clearly in the Bible, we should be moved to speak to Him in ways that communicate the awe and wonder of who He is. This exercise will help you begin to do just that.

This day's exercise will blend the two main ways God has given us to come to know Him: prayer and Scripture reading. Today you're going to use the Psalms as a way of reaching out to God in prayer.

Praying through the Psalms is a powerful way to seek God utilizing the words of Scripture. There is such a rich vault of powerful thoughts and emotions in the Psalms. When we pray to God using the words of the Psalms as our own, it helps us connect with God in a way that maybe we haven't before. So today you're going to pray through a specific psalm, personalizing it as a way of speaking to God in the language of His Word. Some of you will have done this before, but I'd encourage you to embrace this practice as you seek to rekindle your desire to seek and find God.

This approach can be applied with any passage of Scripture, but I'll provide one for you for the purpose of this time of prayer. After engaging in the

practice, try it out on another passage or two.

HERE'S YOUR CHALLENGE FOR TODAY:

FIRST, start by praying to God to help you clear your mind and heart.

THEN, begin reading the psalm below as it appears in your Bible.

NEXT, pray through the psalm as if it were your own words, slowly and earnestly expressing the thoughts as your own. Think about what you're saying to God. Take your time. (If you want, pray it all over again!)

What does this look like? Let's use Psalm 100 as an example. Start by reading Psalm 100 slowly. Then, pray through it, personalizing it as you go. This is an example of what I mean by personalizing it. It might go something like this:

*"God, I shout for joy to you. I join all the earth in praising you.
I worship you with gladness; I come before you with joyful songs.
I know that you, LORD, are God. It is you who made me, and I am yours;
I am the sheep of your pasture.
God, I enter your gates with thanksgiving and your courts with praise;
I give thanks to you and praise your name.
For you, LORD, are good and your love endures forever; your
faithfulness continues through all generations."*

THEN, listen. As much as time will allow, just sit and reflect in silence, focusing on being in God's presence.

FINALLY, close your prayer as you see fit.

Try this with Psalm 100 or try it with another one of the psalms. (You may find that Psalm 29 and Psalm 46 are particularly meaningful for this exercise.) When you're finished, grab a journal and record your thoughts. Did this prayer experience feel different? Did you feel like your prayers were more meaningful? What was positive about it? What about it did you not feel comfortable with?

The Lord longs to communicate with us. Prayer is how we do this. As you go throughout your day, be sure to make time to meet with God in prayer.



MEDITATING ON WHO GOD IS

PART 1

As you start another day's devotion, I pray that you are finding that your hunger to know God through His Word is growing. I pray that you have found some new, heart-focused ways of encountering God in the Bible. And I pray that you are beginning to be excited about meeting God in Scripture. This is a sure sign that you're growing in your passion for God.

Today's activity is fun. Today you're going to do two simultaneous things: meditate on one of God's attributes and use Scripture as a guide to praise God.

If I asked someone close to you to describe you to me, how long would it take them to move past your physical description and begin to describe your characteristics? Would your children say you were funny? Would a friend tell stories of your generosity? Would a spouse tell me about how faithful you've been in tough times? Our attributes define who we are. Or maybe who we are defines our attributes. (Tough to say exactly how the order works.) Regardless, the point is this: because they know us and our characteristics, other people in our lives have a sense of how to engage with us. It is the same with God.

When we encounter God, we do so with a sense of His attributes in mind. We come to Him with certain expectations because of who He is. We may not always realize it, but this knowledge flavors every aspect of our interactions with God. We have expectations because we understand certain aspects of God. We are comforted and assured in large part because we understand who God is.

What do we mean when we say "God's attributes"? God's attributes are simply the various characteristics of who He is. There are two pretty cool truths about God's characteristics: He is perfect in all of His attributes, and His attributes are unchanging.

First, God is perfect in who He is. So when we say that God is loving, we

mean that He is perfectly loving. When we say that God is good, we mean that He is perfectly good. As we seek to rediscover our joy for knowing God, it's important to know that He is worthy of our affection. Worthy in every way.

Second, God is unchanging. He is eternal. The way He is, He has always been. In his book *The Attributes of God*, Arthur Pink wrote, "Everything about God is great, vast, incomparable. He never forgets, never fails, never falters, never forfeits His word." I love this repetition at the end of that quote. It speaks to the fact that God is unchanging.

Reflecting on God's character and knowing that it is perfect and unchanging is such a powerful way to rediscover our passion for God. The great 19th century Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon once wrote:

"The word, the character, and the actions of God should be evermore before our eyes; we should learn, consider, and reverence them. Men forget what they do not wish to remember, but the excellent attributes of the Most High are objects of the believer's affectionate and delighted admiration."

Reflecting on God's nature through encountering Him in His Word leads us to affection and admiration.

HERE'S YOUR CHALLENGE FOR TODAY:

FIRST, look below. There you will see some of God's attributes accompanied by verse references. Then, choose an aspect of God's character that jumps off the page at you. Here's a partial list of God's attributes (we'll do this again with the rest of God's attributes on Day 17):

God's Goodness

· Psalm 16:2, 31:19, 86:5, 119:68, 143:10, 145:7, 145:9

God's Truthfulness

· Psalm 25:5, 26:3, 40:10-11, 43:3; John 14:6

God's Faithfulness

· Exodus 34:5-7; Deuteronomy 7:9, 32:4; Psalm 36:5, 89:5, 115:1, 117:2

God's Holiness

· 1 Samuel 2:2; Psalm 22:3, 30:4, 99:3, 99:5, 145:21; Revelation 15:4

God's Forgiveness

· Psalm 25:11, 32:1, 79:9, 86:5, 130:4; Matthew 6:12; Ephesians 1:7; Daniel 9:9

God's Righteousness

· Job 37:23; Psalm 7:17, 11:7, 35:28, 36:6, 103:17, 111:3

NEXT, look up of some of the verse references. You can certainly read them all if you want, but identify two or three that are especially meaningful to you.

THEN, use these verses as a guide to praising God. How? Speak these verses back to God using His Word to bring praise to Him. (It's similar to how we prayed through the psalms earlier in the week, but this is praise.) The actual biblical phrase for this is "ascribing praise to God." Ascribing praise is telling God something about Himself that He already knows and owns.

Here's an example of how this might look: if I chose God's Goodness as the attribute I wanted to focus on and I looked up Psalm 31:19, it would say, "Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of the children of mankind!" My prayer might sound something like this: "Father, I praise you because you are good. I praise you that your goodness never runs out. Your goodness is abundant! Thank you for storing it up for me. You are my refuge. I praise you that you are good in your love and care for me." Or something like that.

FINALLY, be mindful of this aspect of God's character as you go through your day. This is important: let these verses be on your heart and mind. Praise God throughout the day for this specific attribute. Remember Him for who He is.