

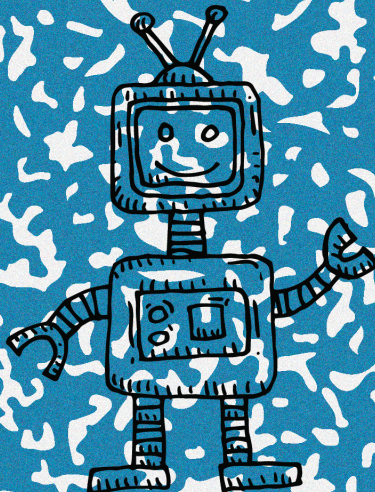
SOCCER PRACTICE @ 7

8



**EIGHTH GRADE**  
**LEADING THE WAY WITH THE**  
**"REAL YOU"**

30-DAY DEVOTIONAL



YM366

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A 30-DAY DEVOTINOAL  
**EIGHTH GRADE**  
**LEADING THE WAY WITH THE "REAL YOU"**  
BY YM360

PUBLISHED BY YM360

8th Grade

Leading the Way With the “Real You”

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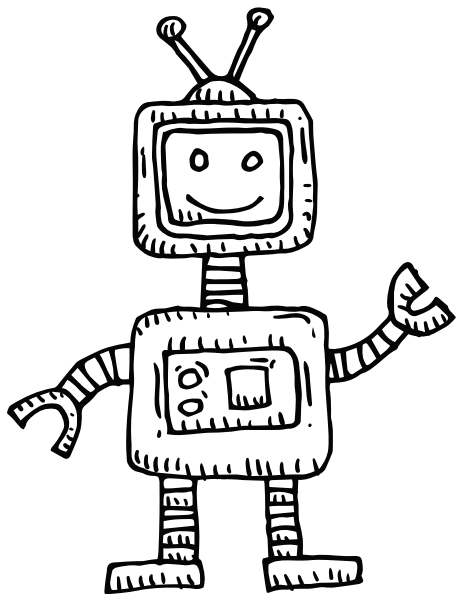
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# HOW THIS BOOK WORKS

Each reading includes a short story for you to consider—something from my own life and experiences. I hope that hearing about some of my teenage struggles, wins, and life experiences will help you. Maybe you can learn from my mistakes, or at least feel like someone actually understands a bit of what you are going through. After each reading you'll find some follow-up questions to consider. You can do these by yourself, but you also can benefit from discussing them with a small group of teenagers, a couple of friends, a youth worker, or your parents. This book might become 30 weeks of curriculum or simply provide 30 days of focus before the school year starts.

Each devotion includes a section called "God Thoughts"—simple truths that come from the Bible and give you something to think about. Pulling out your Bible and reading it is a good, beneficial habit that will help you build a great foundation for your life. I'm convinced that you need to consistently hear that God is stoked about you and that God cares deeply about you as you own your faith this year.

You'll also find an action step called "Now What" in which I will encourage you to do something to discover and explore key truths. These ideas are focused on leading. Often they're ideas that take some effort to accomplish and can help you grow. At the very bottom, there is even a "Notes" section for you to write down all of the wonderful things you learn!"

It's my hope and prayer that these devotions challenge you, encourage you, and put you in places where you will have the opportunity to prepare for the future. If you are doing these with other people, I'm praying you have great conversations and opportunities to talk, ask questions, and kick around what it means to be a follower of Jesus.



# SECTION 1

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FOLLOWING JESUS  
MORE FAITHFULLY

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I sometimes get overwhelmed with faith stuff. I find myself looking at people who seem to have it more figured out than I do, and I wonder why. I wish I didn't get caught up in comparing myself with others—but I do. When that happens, though, I know what helps: Instead of trying to be like anyone else, I simply ask Jesus to help me be a version of myself that is more focused on Him.

I don't know your faith story. You may be strong and focused and feel like you are in exactly the place God wants you right now. That's awesome, and I encourage you to stay focused. But maybe you feel like you are just missing something and want a stronger faith. Your eighth-grade year is a great time to make some focused steps in your journey of following Jesus. You have come through a year or two of middle school/junior high life and you have lots of that stuff all figured out. There aren't so many new things that happen in eighth grade, so it's a great time to focus on your faith and grow deeper as a Christ-follower.

What does it look like to follow Jesus more? It's kind of simple. Wherever you are right now, you can choose to go deeper. Just to be clear, though: When I'm encouraging you to take steps and go deeper, it's not because where you are right now isn't good enough. That's not the deal here. If you're already a follower of Jesus, that's a reason to celebrate—God loves where you are right now. My encouragement to follow Jesus more is simply to take a step in building a deeper, stronger relationship. It's similar to how it is with your friendships: There are always ways that you can grow closer to and build a deeper connection with your friends.

Eighth grade is a great time to focus a bit more on your faith because you have such a great opportunity this year to connect it to your life as the top grade in your school—and youth group, if your church has separate ministries for junior highers and high schoolers. Other younger students are looking up to you as they try to figure out how this faith journey works. You are a leader whether you recognize it or not. This is a great year to focus on this, too, because you will soon take that step to high school, where everything takes on a much greater seriousness—decisions you make will have an even more lasting impact on your life.

So here we go. Let's focus on some simple choices, habits, and steps that can help you follow Jesus more deeply.

# No. 1 WHY ARE YOU FOLLOWING JESUS?

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I wasn't really sure how my faith and life worked together when I was in eighth grade. I'd heard a lot about how it was supposed to work, but on a practical, everyday level, I'm not sure if I had "experienced" what that meant. I was a fairly common youth group kid who knew a whole lot of Bible stories and had a pretty good foundation of faith. But I hadn't really been given many opportunities to live it out or to see how it could be real to my everyday life.

I wish I could say that eighth grade gave me a whole bunch of those experiences and I really understood it all, but that wasn't the case. No one pushed me to go beyond where I was to see if it would help me to grow to better understand what it meant to follow Jesus. I wish my friends and I had been given the opportunity to serve our church and community. I think that would have helped me understand what it meant to follow Jesus. I think it would have given me a practical understanding because I would have been doing the things Jesus told his followers to do. Jesus cares about hurting people. He cares about those who don't have food or places to live. I know now that following Jesus means I need to care about those things, too.

Following Jesus gives meaning and purpose to your faith and life. Growing deeper in that journey takes the "stories" you know and makes them more real. It allows you to think about the world from Jesus' perspective. It is why I tell eighth-graders that we want to give them "more" of Jesus because I want them to experience this and see why it will strengthen and deepen their faith.



## *Think About:*

1. So, why are you following Jesus? Or if you aren't yet, what is holding you back from making that decision?
2. How has your understanding of what it means to follow Jesus changed in the past year or two? How might it still need to change?
3. What are two specific habits or actions that might help you to make your faith a bit more "real" in your life?

## *God Thoughts:*

Read Matthew 14:25-32. In this passage we watch as Peter takes steps out of the comfortable boat to follow Jesus. What does this event tell you about your journey of following Jesus?

## *Now What?*

Talk with a youth leader, parent, or other trusted adult about something you could do in the community to help people. Maybe you could serve at a food bank, shelter, or day care. Research it and plan an event where you and some friends can experience what it means to care for people.

## *Notes:*

## №. 2 HOW IS JESUS INVOLVED IN YOUR DAILY LIFE?

---

The adventure of following Jesus and seeing His presence in your daily life is helped by being focused and having some good patterns. I've seen some pretty amazing eighth-graders who've had this figured out pretty well—they truly have Jesus at the center of their lives. They have seen Jesus give them direction to understand how to love their friends, respect their parents, and care for the world. They share super practical examples of how their Christ-following friends encourage them to be solid examples and to have a good witness at their school. They text with friends and youth leaders and seem to really care about how their faith and life are connected, interwoven, and inseparable.

All of this plays out in how you lead, how you care about people, and how you set an example on the sports fields, in your classroom, in your extracurricular clubs, and in your neighborhood. It means you “live it” in your world—people can see that there is just something different about how you go about your life. It becomes more obvious because you are living for something other than yourself. When people look at you and wonder what you are all about, they just see Jesus living in you.

## *Think About:*

1. What are three specific ways that your faith in Jesus impacts your daily life?
2. Is there anything you would like to add or change that might help you follow Jesus more deeply in your life?
3. Identify a couple of people that you know who seem to be doing this well—how are their lives impacting others?

## *God Thoughts:*

Read Luke 9:23-27. What can you learn from this passage about how Jesus might want you to live your daily life as one of his followers?

## *Now What?*

Think about one thing you could do at school tomorrow that would be a step for you in following Jesus more consistently and allowing him to impact each day. Write it on a notecard and then do it.

## *Notes:*

## No. 3 ARE YOU DRIVING, OR IS JESUS?

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I've found this to be a great question to ask middle school and junior high students—if you were in a car with Jesus, where would He be sitting? This is one of those questions that can produce a ton of insightful thoughts and answers. I raise this question once with a small group of guys I was leading, and we ended up having some of our deepest and most insightful conversations.

Most of us spend a lot of time in cars. My first car was a green Volkswagen Bug. It was rusty, it didn't have a stereo, and the interior was mostly falling apart. But it was mine and I was pretty proud of it. I used to wash it and vacuum it out, which didn't really make much of a difference but felt good to do.

That car was similar to how my faith journey has been. It's not perfect. I've got some rust and tears, I'm not really flashy, and I don't have it all figured out. But I know that God has been with me the whole time and that God likes who I am and is proud of me, just like I was of my car.

Now back to where Jesus would be sitting. (You thought I'd forgotten my point, didn't you?) Many times in my life I was definitely the one driving. I wanted full control of where I was going. But there have been other times when I have released control and moved into the passenger seat and allowed Jesus to take over. That ride just always seems to go better. And sometimes I've moved to the backseat, just allowed things to happen, and wasn't really concerned. That has led to other problems because I was disengaged.

I know you don't drive yet, but think through this analogy and how you can let Jesus truly be in charge. It'll help make your ride a whole lot smoother.

## *Think About:*

1. Where is Jesus sitting in your car right now?
2. Where do you want Him to be?
3. What's getting in the way?

## *God Thoughts:*

Romans 8:14 tells us to be “led by the Spirit of God.” That whole chapter (really, most of that New Testament book) gives insights on how to follow Jesus. Go sit in your family’s car (seriously, go do it—though you may want to ask for permission first) and ask Jesus how you can allow Him to take the wheel and lead your life.

## *Now What?*

At some point today, take an inventory of how much you believe Jesus has been leading your life and how much you’ve been the one taking charge. Write down three areas where you want Jesus to lead more than He is right now. Pray and focus on those areas. An additional challenge: Tell someone else what you are trying to do. This will give you an opportunity to lead others as you allow Jesus to lead you.

## *Notes:*



## No. 4 HOW CAN YOU LISTEN TO JESUS?

---

I've never been a good listener. Ask my mom, friends, teachers, and my wife. They will all tell you that I'm just not that good at it. A regular occurrence in our house: I'm getting ready to go to the grocery store and my wife and kids are telling me what to get, and then I forget what they said as soon as I walk out the door. I've learned that I either need to have them text me a list or I need to write it all out before I leave the house.

I'm a visual learner, which means I have to see it to learn it. This can make it tough for me to "listen" to Jesus. I get distracted when I'm trying to listen, which can make me frustrated and give up. Fortunately, I've learned some tips that have been helpful in this area. I know that for me to truly listen, I need to "look" so I can "hear" in places like the Bible. I will visually connect with what Jesus is trying to tell me by reading about Him and asking God to teach me.

Let me tell you about a couple of specific ways that "looking" helps me to hear and recognize what God is revealing. First, when I read my Bible, I ask God to speak to me through it. Sometimes that happens when a particular passage or verse really seems to be right what I am dealing with at the time. Other times it's just a word or image from a Scripture that feels like God intends it just for me.

Second, because I am such a visually driven person, it often helps me to write or draw when I'm trying to listen. I'll either have my laptop open to a blank document or have an actual blank piece of paper in front of me, and then I'll just try to type or write or draw what I hear. It doesn't always make sense, but sometimes I get a stronger idea of what God is revealing.

I've also learned to listen through worship music because it draws me into a better focus. There are a whole bunch of other things you could do, such as going for a walk outdoors and asking Jesus to reveal things about Him through nature and beauty. I don't think I've ever heard an audible voice from Jesus. Life sure would be easier if I had! But I'm still convinced that He speaks to me through reminding me of what I need to do, putting the right Bible passage in front of me, and through other people sharing truths with me.

## *Think About:*

1. Have you ever felt like you heard Jesus? If so, what was that experience like?
2. If you haven't, in what ways have you tried to listen?
3. How could you remove some "noise" today as you seek to hear or understand or listen to Jesus?

## *God Thoughts:*

In John 6:45 Jesus tells the people that if they "listen" to God the Father, then they will come to Him. What Jesus is saying here is so important to us because it means that when we truly listen, God will reveal more about Jesus to us, and those truths will help us to understand better how to live a life that's centered on Christ.

## *Now What?*

This idea may not be easy, but I think you will benefit from pushing yourself. Take a piece of blank paper and set it in front of you (or you can just use the space below). Now take five minutes and try to just listen. You might start out by simply praying, "Jesus, please show me what You want me to see." After those five minutes, write down what you saw, heard, or felt. Then share what you've written with a parent, friend, or trusted adult. Lead by sharing and being vulnerable.

## *Notes:*

## No. 5 WHAT LEADERS DO YOU ADMIRE?

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I read a story once called No Compromise, about this musician named Keith Green. The book told all about his life as a Christian, and it really impacted me because it showed that you could be a follower of Jesus and experience success without having to compromise. I read this book at a time in my life when I was really trying to figure out my faith. Keith Green's story challenged me to be more aware of what kind of example I was setting.

Around the same time in my life, my youth group started going on more retreats. I loved to be around a couple of leaders who came with us on all those camps. They lived what I thought to be exciting lives: working during the week and hanging out with us eighth-graders on the weekends. Their faith was appealing, and they always seemed to be having fun. I wanted to live that kind of life, one of adventure and excitement. They showed me that faith didn't have to be boring.

## *Think About:*

1. Identify three specific people whose faith you admire. Why do you admire them so much?
2. What characteristics do you find yourself most wishing that you had in your faith journey?
3. How can you find more people with great faith stories to learn from?

## *God Thoughts:*

Hebrews 11:1–12:2 gives us an amazing list of faithful people from the Bible. Read through this Scripture and identify one or two specific things you can learn from them. To go even deeper, dig back into the Old Testament to read the full stories for one or two of those incredible people.

## *Now What?*

Hebrews 12:1 tells us to “throw off everything that hinders.” What things do you need to “throw off” because they’re keeping you from growing in your faith? Take a piece of paper and write those things down on it. Then take that piece of paper and wad it up into a ball and literally throw it away. It may not fully get rid of those things in your life, but it is a great reminder of the decision you’re making today.

## *Notes:*

