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WUP

ENDED

HOW GOD UPENDS OUR EXPECTATIONS
FOLLOW-UP DEVOTIONAL JOURNAL

THIS BOOK BELONGS TO: _____

DATE STARTED: _____

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**FOR MY THOUGHTS
ARE NOT YOUR THOUGHTS,
NEITHER ARE YOUR WAYS
MY WAYS, DECLARES
THE LORD.**

**FOR AS THE HEAVENS
ARE HIGHER THAN
THE EARTH,**

**SO ARE MY WAYS HIGHER
THAN YOUR WAYS AND
MY THOUGHTS THAN
YOUR THOUGHTS."**

- ISAIAH 55:8-9

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GETTING STARTED

If you're holding this book, you may have just spent a few days going through Upended with your youth group. Maybe you did this during a weekend retreat or at a camp. However you came to start your journey with Upended, this book will help you continue it.

It's not a secret: God upends the way we see the world. As people, we have our own rules for navigating our lives. We have unspoken rules for how we present ourselves to others. We have ideas of what success and failure look like. We have certain expectations for how the world works. The unfortunate thing is that left to ourselves, many of these expectations are wrong.

God upends everything we think we know about the world around us and how to get by. All through the Bible, we see God radically flip the wisdom of the world on its head. We learn that God has a different idea about strength, freedom, life, and purpose. And this is barely scratching the surface.

God's plan for you to thrive is an upended version of the world's plan. And this journal is going to help you hear all about it.

HOW THIS BOOK WORKS

Here are a few things you need to know to put this book to good use.

START WITH THIS ADVICE

Whether you read your Bible each day or struggle to read a few verses a couple of times a week, the key to sticking with this through four weeks is commitment. Your routine may change, but your commitment to meet God each day has to be there. Tell yourself that whether you read this journal at the same time each day, or if you read it whenever you get a few extra minutes, you'll make it a priority in your daily life.

HAVE YOUR BIBLE OPEN

Resist the urge to ignore the spots where this book will tell you to read a passage of Scripture. The close relationship with God that you want only happens by reading and doing what's in the Bible. Have it open as you go through this book.

EACH WEEK IS STRUCTURED THE SAME, BUT IS DIFFERENT

Each week's content works in similar ways. But each day is different. And there are a lot of different kinds of activities. Some will take 3-5 minutes, some 10-15. Some will ask you to look at two or three passages of Scripture; some will ask you to think about a concept. The variety will make it easier to stick with the book and help you learn in different ways that are suited to you.

WHAT IF I MISS A DAY OF READING? OR THREE?

Don't give up! Take this at your pace! The goal is for you to grow closer to God. Don't throw in the towel if you miss a day or two (or four). Pick this book back up and start where you left off. You can do this! And by doing it, you'll show the world that God makes an incredible difference in the lives of His followers. So, hang in there! You've got this!

Well, that's what you need to know to get started! Turn the page to read the introduction to Week 1.

WEEK 1 INTRO

Before you start Week 1, read this short intro.

Expectations can be a funny thing. We create them because they help us get by. They keep us from getting too high or too low. There is a comfort in thinking we know how things will go, even if we really don't.

God changes all of this. He flips our expectations like you'd flip a coin. It's awesome and amazing and life-changing. But if we're honest, it's also kind of scary. Why? Because we don't like surrendering control, even when the cruelest joke is that we have very little control over anything.

And yet, in life and faith, real freedom only comes when we give it all up to God and embrace His upended way of doing life.

This first week, you're going to be reviewing the concepts you covered when you and your group went through Upended. After all, maybe it's been a few days, and maybe you missed some of those concepts the first time. This first week will set the stage for the rest of what you'll be learning.

Are you ready to jump in? Turn the page, and let's get started.



Read the following devotion and answer the questions on the next page.

When you read the book of Isaiah, and I hope this is something you do from time to time, you are reading a message from God through one of the most influential prophets in Israel's history. Isaiah's story is powerful, and God's words to and through him still challenge us today. But the setting for Isaiah was not exactly a happy one.

God's people had strayed from Him. They had largely turned away from worshipping God, or at best, worshipping only God. They were being led poorly by kings who didn't seek to lead like God wanted them to. In other words, things were a mess. As a result, God allowed His people to experience some really tough times. Isaiah's prophecies were kind of on the front end of this. It would worsen for the Israelites, but it was starting to get pretty rough. God spoke through Isaiah and warned the people of what was coming, the punishment they had well-deserved. But He also did something unusual and very God-like: He promised hope.

God being the loving, compassionate God that He is, promised a future where things would be made new. Of course, we know this was a message that predicted the coming of Jesus, God's Son, as the true source of life and hope. This contradiction, coming judgment and also coming hope, is interesting. How can God tell the people that they are going to have to answer for their sins and also promise a future that is brighter than they could imagine? The answer lies in Isaiah chapter 55.

Read Isaiah 55:8-9. This statement is so much bigger than this one moment in Israel's history. Yes, it's a timely word for the original audience. But for us, it is a foundational truth about God and how we stand in relation to Him. God's ways are not our ways. His ways are better. They are higher. They are perfect. They are true and right and unique in how they lead to life. This is the truth that is the foundation for Upended.



Spend some time working through the following questions.

1. What does it mean for you, day-to-day, that God's ways aren't your ways and that your ways aren't God's ways? How does this truth impact your life?

2. God's character matters. If God's ways were different than ours, but He was imperfect or untrustworthy, it would be a bad thing. But God is perfect in every way. Why does this make all the difference in the world?

3. You have a choice. You can choose to try and navigate your life by looking at it through the lens of your understanding or looking at it through the lens of God's understanding. Which is the better way? More importantly, why?

4. You're going to spend the next few weeks seeing how God upends the way we often think the world works. But it starts with the truth from Isaiah 55. Spend some time right now in prayer, thanking God that He is infinitely greater than us and yet, still loves and cares for us.

Work through the following activity to be reminded how God upends our definition of strength.

We all have things about ourselves that we could celebrate. Even if you are super hard on yourself (you really shouldn't be, you know), there are things about you that are worth pointing out. Since you were a child, you've likely been taught not to brag or boast about yourself. And whoever taught you that is correct; we are turned off by people who constantly tell the world how great they are (though you could make the argument that this is really all social media is, but I'm getting off track). BUT, just for today, I want to permit you to brag on yourself.

See the space provided below? I want you to list a few things about you that are worth celebrating. It's OK. This is a safe space. No judgment. Take a second and boast a little. This is your chance!

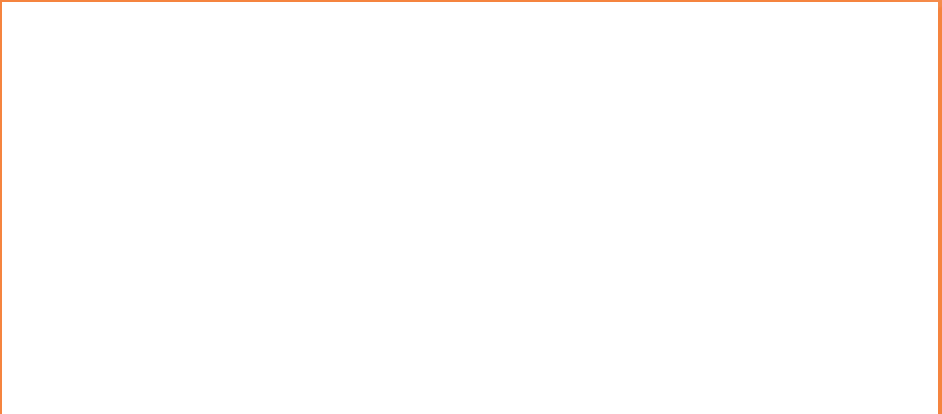
Did that feel good? I hope it did. After all, you are worth celebrating. But I have to admit that I'm somewhat walking you into a little bit of a trap. (Sorry.) Look back up at your list. Among the things you've bragged about, did you happen to list any form of the word "weakness"? Did you list your weakness as a strength? Did you celebrate your brokenness? You didn't? Why not?

While you may be one of the few people who listed your weakness as a strength, it's a safe bet that you didn't because, as human beings, we don't think like that. We don't celebrate our weaknesses. But in God's way of doing things, acknowledging our weakness is the pathway to strength.

Take a few seconds to read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. Let's quickly set the stage. God allowed Paul to experience some sort of a vision of heaven. That's what Paul is talking about in 12:1-4. It was a powerful experience, and when you add that to all that God was doing in Paul's life, it would have been easy for Paul to become prideful in how he viewed himself. But God allowed some sort of hardship in Paul's life, what Paul calls a "thorn in his flesh," to humble Paul. Paul prayed for God to take this away, but God didn't. What did God do instead?

Pay close attention to verse 9. Here is a great truth about how God views strength and weakness. God basically says to Paul, "You don't need to find your identity or purpose in elaborate visions. You don't need to be known as the guy God is powerfully working through. You just need me. You just need my grace. That and that alone is enough for you." Paul took this message to heart, but he went further. He understood that this is true strength. Real strength is embracing your weakness so that God's power is the only power source you can point to.

When we are weak, God's power in us becomes unmistakable. So let's do something different. In the space below, I want you to think about three areas of weakness that are actually opportunities for God's strength to shine through. Write them down. When you've done this, spend some time in prayer telling God that you're ready to embrace His upended definition of strength. Then, get ready for God to use you in ways you can't imagine.



WEEK 1

DAY 3

Work through the following activity to be reminded how God upends our definition of freedom.

We tend to define freedom as not being under the control of anyone. No rules! No restrictions! When we are free, we set the agenda. We plot our course. "No way I'm EVER taking the trash out again, Mom. I'm free!" The funny thing is that freedom is the exact opposite in God's eyes.

Take a look at page 15. It's from Psalm 119, the longest psalm in the Bible, and pretty much a love letter to God's Word. Read the passage. Did you catch how the psalmist feels about God's Word? It comes to life in verse 16. Here, we see the psalmist say something many people have difficulty understanding. He basically says, "the rules of God make me super-duper happy. I love God's rules!" Wow. If that isn't a thought that is the opposite of the world around us, I don't know what is.

Here's a question for you: Can you say the same thing? Can you say that you think of God's rules and get excited? Maybe you can. Maybe you have discovered what the psalmist knows: God's ways lead to life and peace and purpose. Embracing God's standards is not embracing a life of restriction but a life of freedom. Or maybe you're not there yet.

Your challenge today is to do something we don't get to do enough in our world. Your challenge is to think. Make some space to think for a few minutes about your attitude toward God's Word, specifically what you know it to say about your thoughts and actions. Do you embrace God's standards? Or do you rebel against them? How would your life be different if you found real freedom by following God's ways? What work do you need to do on your heart to get in a better place?

1.3



9

How can a young man keep his way pure?
By guarding it according to your word.

10

With my whole heart I seek you;
let me not wander from your commandments!

11

I have stored up your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.

12

Blessed are you, O LORD;
teach me your statutes!

13

With my lips I declare
all the rules of your mouth.

14

In the way of your testimonies I delight
as much as in all riches.

15

I will meditate on your precepts
and fix my eyes on your ways.

16

I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word.

Read the devotion below and answer the questions on the next page.

Take a few minutes and read John 11:1-54. That's right. 54 verses. Maybe this will be the most verses of Scripture you've ever read at one time. But go ahead. Jump in. It's a story, so it's not that hard, and it's an amazing story at that.

(Seriously, read it. Don't skip over this part. It's important.)

Wasn't that an amazing story? Let me help set the stage for what you just read. First, this is near the very end of Jesus' life on this earth. Just a few days after this encounter with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, Jesus would enter Jerusalem for one of the last times, riding on a donkey, with crowds of people saying, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" Within a week or so of Lazarus' death and resurrection, Jesus would also die, be buried, and arise from the dead. But as you read this story, none of these things have happened yet. As you read the story, it's just Jesus dealing with the pain and the sorrow and the loss in the faces of his friends.

What was the result of Jesus' encounter with these siblings? A miracle of the highest order! Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. A man who had lost his life was given it back by the very Author of Life Himself. This story is one of the richest passages in the Bible. There is so much to learn here. But for our purposes, let's focus on the simple yet profound upending that Jesus initiated.

According to the world, death has the final say. When you die, that's the end. But not according to God. You see, God's plan is life for anyone and everyone who comes to saving faith in Him. A meaningful life on this earth and an eternal life with Him after they die. Death has no place in the life of a Christ-follower. It didn't for Lazarus, and it doesn't for you (if you have been saved from death by your faith in Jesus). It's just another way that God upended our expectations.

Now, take what you've read in the Bible and what you just read on page 16 and apply it to your life. Think through the following questions. If you want, write your answers in the space provided.

1. What feelings does the world around you associate with death and dying?

Why do you think this is the case?

2. Why should we as Christians view death differently?

Why is this the case?

3. In the chapter right before the chapter you just read, Jesus said that part of why He came to earth in the first place was so that our lives would be full-to-overflowing with meaning and purpose and, well, life! How does this change the way you think about the life you live on this earth?

Why should we see our lives differently than the world around us?

4. Go to God in prayer, thanking Him for the life He's given you on this earth and the one you will spend in eternity with Him after you die.

WEEK 1 1.5 DAY 5

How do you make an impact? Read today's devotion to find out.

How do you make your mark in the world? What are you supposed to do in order to live a life that matters? These are interesting questions, and maybe you've even considered them before. There are a few ways you might answer this, and I'm curious to see how you respond. So, in the space below, take a second to put your thoughts on paper.

What does the world around you say about how you present yourself to others?

What does the world around you say about how you are to spend your time?

What does the world around you say about how you're supposed to interact with others and what goes on in their lives?

What examples do you see around you about how you should engage with social media?

Last one: Why do you think people (both teenagers and adults) say the things they say and act the way they act? In other words, what do you think most people's motivations are?

If we're honest, we get lots of messages about HOW to act. We see people who have bent their entire life around putting themselves out there on social media. It's like they are their own brand. Many people seem to think that what the world needs is to hear their thoughts and opinions on every subject. And how many times have you seen people use their social media accounts to amplify other people's (or their own) bad behavior? These examples seem to summarize the world's expectations about how we live our lives. But God's Word has a very different definition.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12. Paul is giving the Thessalonians some final words of advice. Contained in these verses is an amazing example of God's upended expectations for what it means to live our lives.

Paul drops an absolute bomb in vs. 11. He says three things that we should all strive for. What are those three things? Fill in the blanks below.

First, we are to aspire to live

Second, we are to mind our own

Third, we are to work with our

Live quietly. Mind your own business. Work hard. Three things that God values. Three things the world around you have completely lost track of. To live quietly doesn't mean that you aren't supposed to talk, lol. It simply means that your life shouldn't draw unnecessary attention to yourself. Living quietly means living humbly. A loud life is a life that points the spotlight on you. A quiet life is a life where you serve God and others. Minding our own business is an amazing challenge! It doesn't mean that we don't engage with our friends, help them out, or give them advice. It simply means that we don't invest time worrying about or getting involved in things that don't involve us. And working hard? That's simple. Our lives aren't wasted being lazy or binge-watching TV or playing video games all day. We are to work hard and then rest. That's God's way. What an incredible example of upended expectations.

Don't miss Paul's reason why in verse 12. He says living this way is the proper, or right, way to live according to God's ways.

So, answer this: Do you live a quiet life? Do you mind your own business? Do you work hard?

If you can't answer "yes" to all three of these, spend some time asking the Holy Spirit to work on these areas of your life.