

DEVOTION ↗ Perfection Myth



READ



The Book: The Preface (vii-xiv)

The Word: Philippians 1.3-6

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

REFLECT



- What part of the perfectibility paradigm (see page vii and xi) remains a current challenge for you? In other words, what part of your life do you still wish were “more perfect”?
- How do you respond to this quote on page ix: “Perfection is impossible but transformation isn’t”? How do you connect that to Philippians 1.6? What from your own life experience influences your reaction?
- What does “good enough” faith mean to you?

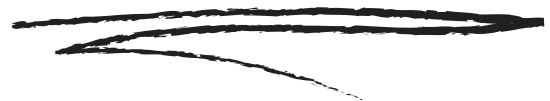
A Blessing: “Blessing for a Joyfully Mediocre Journey” (xiv)

RENEW

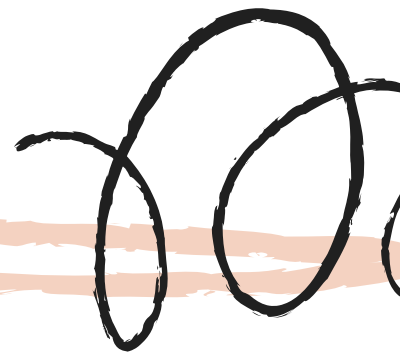


A Prayer: *God of grace and glory, thank you that your perfect love is sufficient for our imperfect lives. Increase our trust in your strength made perfect in our weakness,*

Amen.



Spiritual Hunger



READ



The Book: Chapter 1, Regula (pp. 3-8)

The Word: Hebrews 12.1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.

REFLECT



- How do you relate to this: “We start to hope for more, but we don’t always know how to begin” (p. 3). Do you agree with this?
- The authors say if “we want our spiritual appetite to stick around...we need encouragement...community...a hot minute alone...and a regula (regular pattern of spiritual practice)” (p. 3). Which one of these do you most need right now? [Here are some examples of spiritual practices: prayer, fasting, meditation, Bible study, service, joy, giving, solitude, attending church regularly, confession]
- What do you need to “set down or let yourself off the hook for” (see examples on pages 7-8) right now? See how your answers may connect to Hebrews 13.1.

RENEW



A Blessing: “A Blessing for Beginning a New Spiritual Practice” (p. 6)

A Prayer: *God, we want to be the kind of people who turn to you regularly, resting in the comfort of your unchanging presence. Meet us in this gentle way. And allow us self-forgiveness when we forget. And the courage to start again,*

Amen.

Balancing Joy and Grief

READ



The Book: Buoyed by the Absurd (pages 9-14)

The Word: Habakkuk 3.17-19

*Though the fig tree does not blossom,
and no fruit is on the vines;
though the produce of the olive fails
and the fields yield no food;
though the flock is cut off from the fold
and there is no herd in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the LORD;
I will exult in the God of my salvation.
GOD, the Lord, is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
and makes me tread upon the heights.*



REFLECT



- How do you respond to: “You are capable of a whole range of emotions that can coexist. Joy and sorrow. Grief and delight. Laughter and despair. Sometimes, the absurdity even keeps us afloat” (page 12). How do you connect to Habakkuk 3.17-19?
- Share a moment you experienced unexpected joy in the midst of sorrow.
- Joy might come unexpectedly, or it can be a discipline. “Joy is the oxygen for doing hard things,” said Gary Haugen. Describe a time the practice of doing something joyful has buoyed you.

RENEW



A Blessing: “Prayer for Finding Joy in Sorrow” (p. 13)

A Prayer: *God, somehow joy and sorrow can coexist. Remind us that every moment can contain a wide range of experience. Thank you for the capacity to hold both at the same time,*

Amen.

DEVOTION

Living the Day to Day Life

READ



The Book: Building a Good Day (pp. 28-33)

The Word: Psalm 37.3-7

Trust in the LORD, and do good;

so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.

Take delight in the LORD,

and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Commit your way to the LORD;

trust in him, and he will act.

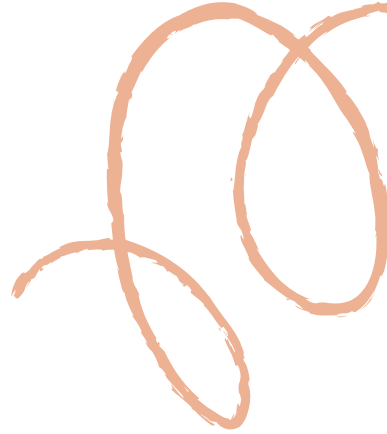
He will make your vindication shine like the light,

and the justice of your cause like the noonday.

Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him;

do not fret over those who prosper in their way,

over those who carry out evil devices.



REFLECT



- Imagine that you have a completely free day. No clutter, no pressure. I know, that's hard to picture. But just rest in that thought for a moment and breathe. What would it look like?
- Now imagine that you could choose to do what is truly life-giving, joyful, and meaningful, including something that brings you closer to God, if you'd like. You in particular, not anyone else. What might those things be? What memories, thoughts, hopes, or awarenesses are surfacing, about what makes you feel most spiritually alive?
- How might you make these life-giving things more a part of your everyday life and less of a someday or when-I-get-less-busy? How does the Psalm help you keep that perspective of "committing your way to the Lord"?

A Blessing: "A Prayer at the Start of the Day" (p. 32)

RENEW



A Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for the inbreath of hope that our lives could become a richer and truer expression, an outbreath of Your Spirit in us, and through us. Help us build this beauty, this goodness into our lives, one gentle day at a time,*

Amen.

Faithfulness in Small Ways

READ



The Book: Small Things, Great Love (pp. 34-38)

The Word: Mark 12.28-31

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.

REFLECT



- Like Little Thérèse or Kate's beloved music teacher Adeline Muller, who comes to mind when you think of quiet faithfulness?
- Love isn't just in the grand gestures, it is—perhaps even more so—the small moments. What small act of great love is yours to do in this season of life? How will you act on it today?
- Where have you recently witnessed small acts of great love? What does it mean to love your neighbor as yourself (see passage above)?

RENEW



A Blessing: "A Prayer for the Courage to Love Small" (p. 37)

A Prayer: *God of love, we know we were created by You, in love, for love. As Little Thérèse says, "love proves itself by its deeds." There are great things we long to do, loving things, yet there are limitations in this ordinary life that we live. Reveal to us the little way that is possible and sustainable, so we can show up faithfully, doing small things with great love and delight.*

Amen.



Rest for the Weary

READ



The Book: When You Are Exhausted (pp. 56-60)

The Word: Psalm 62.5-8

*For God alone my soul waits in silence,
for my hope is from him.*

*He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not be shaken.*

*On God rests my deliverance and my honor;
my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.*

*Trust in him at all times, O people;
pour out your heart before him;
God is a refuge for us.*



REFLECT



- There is a strange logic about exhaustion. It seems that the more tired we are, the harder it is to slow down. But, like it or not, sometimes our body or attitude give us clues we are nearing burnout. We are short-tempered or brittle or lack the creativity we usually have. We get sick easily or lack the joy that normally comes with hobbies or friends. What are the signals or symptoms that indicate that you need to take a break?
- Rest sounds lovely—except when the whole world rests on our shoulders, and we can't easily slow down, let alone stop. Take a second to remember: "Not everything has to be done. And not everything has to be done by you" (Good Enough, 58). What permission does that offer you today? How does the Psalm support that permission?
- Rest does not have to mean taking a nap in the middle of the day (because really... who can do that?!). It can be anything that fills up your tank for love, creativity, and generosity. Calling an old friend. Gardening. Organizing the junk drawer. Going to bed 15 minutes earlier. Reading a book and not expecting to learn anything. What does rest look like for you? How will you integrate that into this week?

RENEW



A Blessing: "A Blessing for When You're Weary" (p. 59)

A Prayer: *Holy God, Come and fill my heart with your peace. We are desperate for your life-giving, spirit-filling rest.*

Amen.

DEVOTION >

Being Content



READ



The Book: Happy Enough (pp. 61-67)

The Word: Philippians 4.10-13

I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

REFLECT



- Sometimes hunger looks like ambition or goal-setting or bucket lists. It can help us visioncast or create futures for ourselves we might not reach for otherwise. When was the last time you felt that endless hunger that strives for more, more, more? What gift does that kind of hope offer you? How does Philippians speak to that?
- On the flipside, when so few of us are living our BEST LIFE NOW, the narrative of endless progress can make us feel like we missed the mark—that we'll never be good enough or smart enough or successful enough. What downsides have you recognized in the "everything is possible" worldview?
- Being content in our present moment can be a tricky discipline. Look around. What feels like contentment right now? If nothing comes to mind, compress your attention even smaller

RENEW



A Blessing: "A Blessing for the Life You Have" (p. 65-66)

A Prayer: *God of love, you know us, and you know those things we do that dampen your life in us. Grant us freedom to come out from under what is not ours to carry. Let us sit awhile in your presence, and begin to sense how you are shaping for us a pattern of life that builds strength and peace. And may it be for us such an inner joy, that it might overflow to others.*

Amen.

Loving the Least of These

READ



The Book: For the Exiles (pp. 79-85)

The Word: Matthew 25.35-40

for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to’

REFLECT



- To love those who have been devalued and demeaned, is to do what Jesus did—to restore their human dignity. Who is someone you know who does this well? Or perhaps a time you received that kind of kindness?
- Are there any people in your sphere of influence who seem invisible, shunned, or forgotten? How might you extend kindness to them this week? How do you respond to the Matthew 25 passage?
- Is there a little part of you too painful to look at, that is hidden under a shadow of shame? Perhaps parts that feel left out, forgotten, last-picked? Allow yourself to see through the eyes of God for a minute. Speak kindly to yourself. If it’s too hard, imagine what you might say to a friend who feels the same way. Say it to yourself instead.

RENEW



A Blessing: “A Prayer for When You Don't Belong” (p. 83)

A Prayer: *God, thank you for moving the center of your kingdom to be with those who are rejected, just so they could belong. Encircle us in those very arms of your love, that our restoration might be so complete, so pure, and genuine that it radiates love to others in a way that gives them the same standing—the right to receive and give love and care, simply by virtue of their humanity. Amen.*

We're All Struggling

READ



The Book: The Tragedy Olympics (pp. 86-91)

The Word: Colossians 3.12-15

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.

REFLECT



- “The Tragedy Olympics”—where someone one-ups a set of horrific circumstances with their own—is often done out of a desire to relate or perhaps get a bit of attention for their situation. What’s the funniest incident of this that you have seen played out? Do you think struggle is everyone’s normal?
- Think of a time when someone knew how to support you in your pain. What did they do that felt like love?
- How do you balance your own struggles with the heartaches of the world? How do you navigate keeping yourself in perspective while also not minimizing your challenges?

RENEW



A Blessing: “A Blessing for When You Realize Everyone is Struggling (p. 89)

A Prayer: *God of love, show us how to be a support to others in their pain. May our reaction never be to judge or compare or compete. Teach us, when we don't know the right thing to do or say. But when we feel afraid or inept, empower us to follow through, to show up again and again with love and compassion and faithfulness.*

Amen.



DEVOTION TO

Too Busy for our Own Good

READ



The Book: Hopping off the Treadmill (pp. 98-102)

The Word: Isaiah 55.1-3

Ho, everyone who thirsts come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.

REFLECT



- Where do you fall on this busyness spectrum? How is this working for you? ←my days have lots of margin——my days are too full→
- Think back to something you did recently that shimmered with meaning. What does that say about what's important to you?
- As the great theologian and reformer Martin Luther said to Philip Melanchthon, "Philip, let's go fishing. Today we can leave the governance of the universe to God." How would it feel to get off of the treadmill (or at least slow down) today, and recognize that you are more than the sum of your tasks, hyper-activity, or accomplishments?

RENEW



A Blessing: "A Prayer for the Courage to Love Small" (p. 37)

A Prayer: *God, Sometimes we are tempted to believe that our worth is linked to all we can do. The person who never says no. Whose plate is filled to the brim. But too often our productivity can leave us feeling empty, exhausted, and unseen. Ground us in Your love. Remind us that we are not merely the sum of our tasks, and infuse our work, our relationships, our lives with a deeper meaning—one grounded in your purposes.*

Amen.



DEVOTION ¹⁷ Friendship



READ



The Book: Say Potato (pp. 150-155)

The Word: 1 Corinthians 12.12, 26-27

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

REFLECT



- Jeffrey A. Hall, a communication-studies professor at the University of Kansas estimates that it takes 200 hours over six weeks for a new-to-you person to become a friend. Think of a few of your closest friends. How long have you known them? Are you surprised by how long or how short a time it took for you to become one another's people?
- What qualities in a friend do you value the most? What special qualities do you offer your friendships? (Perhaps there are ways you can be a better friend to the people in your life. Reach out to a friend today, ask them: "How can I be a better friend to you?")
- Paul says that we should "carry each other's burdens" (Galatians 6:2). Is there something you are carrying that is too heavy to bear alone right now?

RENEW



A Blessing: "A Blessing for When You Feel Lonely" (p. 154)

A Prayer: *God of love, we need a friend, one that can weather the bad times and celebrate the good. You know us inside and out. Help us become the kind of person who can take responsibility for what is ours to change, so that we can be a good friend to others. So there's a mutual give and take in each relationship. God, strengthen me. Help us,*

Amen.



DEVOTION 12

Being Embodied



READ



The Book: To My Body (pp. 156-160)

The Word: 2 Corinthians 4.16-18

So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

REFLECT



- Today's devotional reading is a letter to a body. What aspects of this love-hate relationship with our flesh and bone do you identify with? How so?
- Jesus, by His very nature, was incarnate—experienced life with a body. What comfort or, perhaps, confusion does that bring you to know that the God of the universe was embodied, too?
- Paul says, "We have this treasure in jars of clay," (2 Cor. 4:7) and goes on to talk about an inner renewal that goes on unseen, day by day, even though our bodies break or come undone. What is the treasure you hold within?

RENEW



A Blessing: "A Blessing for the Body" (p. 159)

A Prayer: *God of love, Make us content to settle into our imperfect body. In the stillness we look to you. Call us once again into wholeness, that we might draw from you the grace and mercy we need to be content. And live a life of love, from a grateful heart,*
Amen.



DEVOTION 13 Forgiveness

READ



The Book: Too Few Sparrows (pp. 215-219)

The Word: Matthew 26.26-29

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'

REFLECT



- "Blessed are we, the newly wrong, chuckling over how much it hurts to be chastened a little" (Good Enough, 218). What 'newly wrong' experiences have you had lately?
- In Matthew 26.17-29, just before betraying Jesus, Judas asks, "Surely, you don't mean me, Lord?" Have you faced any grave situations where you were in the wrong?
- At the last supper with his friends, Jesus is showing them how love can reach even those seemingly unforgivable places. Where might you need to give or receive forgiveness, but feel like it's too late or too much to ask?
-

RENEW



A Blessing: "A Blessing for Being Open to Change" (p. 218)

A Prayer: *God of forgiveness, open our hearts to give and receive as you given yourself and received us. Grow us towards your forgiveness in Jesus Christ,*

Amen.

