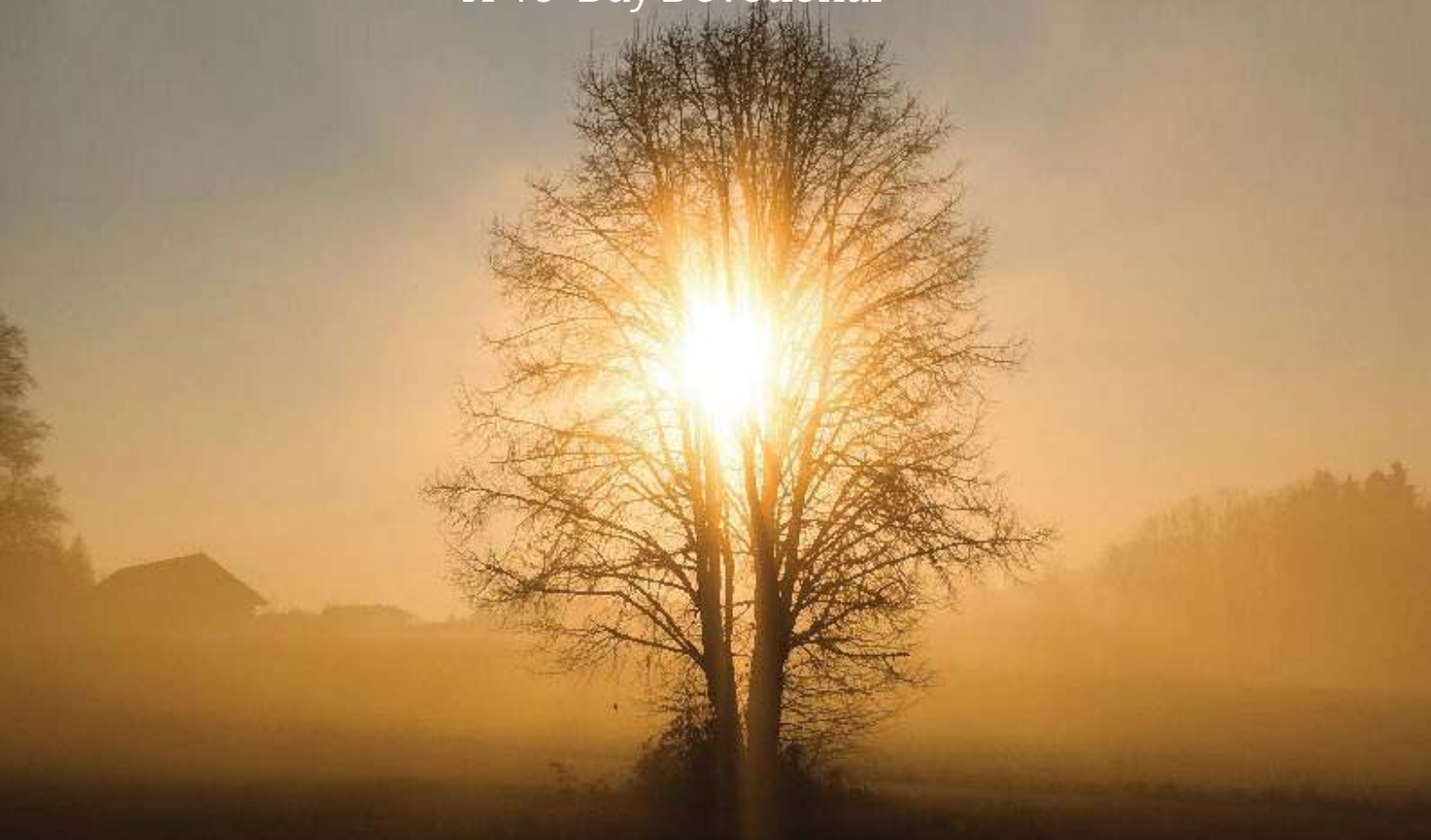


Sharon Surita

A PATH FORWARD

Finding Strength Through Difficult Times
A 40-Day Devotional



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1. Listening to Him

I often wondered if what I was hearing, was the voice of God. Perhaps, he was invading my thoughts, attempting to guide me peacefully to do His will. But, I was always full of doubt, second-guessing things and having a double mind. This is especially true during difficult times.

We, because of our human nature, reach out to others to ask for guidance from our friends, family members or even mental health professionals. We search for that solid piece of advice and keep searching if it doesn't align with what our gut tells us. Our gut is what we should listen to from the beginning. If we have doubts or reservations, we need to pause and meditate on why that is the case. If what we are planning does not align with God's word, then chances are, we should rethink that plan.

Ask God for his guidance, read bible scriptures that highlight the key characteristics you are currently dealing with. Go with what your heart tells you is the right thing to do and move forward. The decision-making process is forward, not backward progression. You will feel that burden lift from your shoulders and can move to the next task in reaching your goals.

(Psalm 3:5, 6 from the Amplified Bible)

⁵ Trust in and rely confidently on the Lord with all your heart

And do not rely on your own insight or understanding.

⁶ In all your ways know and acknowledge and recognize Him,

And He will make your paths straight and smooth [removing obstacles that block your way].

2. Turning down the Noise

Do your days begin with excessive amounts of noise; noise from thoughts, family, pets, chores, surroundings, etc.? It may seem difficult to find some time to dedicate to meditating on the word. In our case, my now 4-year old is the first to wake up generally, well before the sun rises. He immediately wakes me and the day begins in full speed. Although I am disabled, I do my best to help prepare meals and prepare for school/work. My 10-year old routinely interrupts my train of thought as he takes his breaks from virtual school. We are all home due to the current pandemic and I have been home much longer still due to my (prayerfully temporary) disability.

But we should remember that a calm heart and mind allow us more joyful moments in life. Instead of those moments being few and far between, we can build them into our daily lives. If the morning is too busy, pick an alternate time or even find shorter increments of time to sprinkle throughout the day, like a morning walk, or morning commute to work, lunch break, or make it a bedtime routine. In meditating on God's word, we can find answers to our prayers and peace in our hearts. We must learn to ponder on what God is communicating to us and then find a way to implement any actions that he leads us to do.

(Job 6:24 from the Amplified Bible)

²⁴ Teach me, and I will keep quiet. Show me what I have done wrong.

(Peter 3:4 from the New Living Translation)

⁴ You should clothe yourselves instead with the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God.

3. Replacing the Anger

We have a tendency to compare our lives to the lives of others. During good times, we may be inclined to say, Thank God I have this or thank God, I am not in their shoes. During the hard times, we tend to become spiteful, envious of others asking why do unjust things happen to us. Why does this illness linger? Why can't I advance in my career? Why am I in this relationship still? Why don't I have a partner?

It is not for us to understand why these things do and do not happen. That will only build on our frustrations, our feelings of inadequacy and our bitter attitudes towards life. We must lift our heads up, immerse ourselves in the promises of God and wait expectantly for the better days. We must work towards helping ourselves, but more importantly, open our eyes to the needs of our neighbors. In helping them, we give our lives more purpose and can turn away from the angry thoughts that invade our minds, the feelings of self-contempt that the enemy tries to inundate us with.

(Colossians 3: 2-4 from the Amplified Bible)

² *Set your mind and keep focused habitually on the things above [the heavenly things], not on things that are on the earth [which have only temporal value].*

³ *For you died [to this world], and your [new real] life is hidden with Christ in God.*

⁴ *When Christ, who is our life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.*

(Romans 12:2 from the New Living Translation)

² Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

4. Coping with Anxiety

Have you walked into your office at work or your home and immediately felt the tension in the air? Just like you, other people may struggle with their emotions from time to time. If you have a fast-paced job, have young children, or are in school, some days may feel overwhelming. Take a deep breath, close your eyes and picture a peaceful setting. Prioritize the things in your life, but first is God always.

Controlling the tone of your voice is difficult at times, but working toward this goal may help when addressing any conflicts with family or peers. Pray to God, asking him to give you wisdom to cope with the anxiety, but also give him thanks for all he's done. Let peace flow into you and through you. The peace that flows through us may rub off onto others. The most challenging moments can also be the most rewarding once we realize that God is in control.

When the anxiety comes upon us due to physical pain, the same applies. Although some of our ailments are "incurable" and we are unable to find the proper medical care, we can find peace in knowing God is with us and he will carry us through. This life is temporary next to the life awaits us in heaven.

(Philippians 4:6-7 from the New Living Translation)

⁶ Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.

⁷Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

5. In Need of Help

I believe we all have moments of despair. Some are short-lived and some span longer periods of time; weeks, months, even years. When we undergo these trials, our prayers to our Father, the Creator, notably gain intensity. We reach out to Him in earnest, seeking His guidance and embrace; asking for Him to hold us up when we fall down.

The physical illnesses in life bring on emotional pain and discomfort and the physical pain can most definitely do the same. I have struggled with a chronic illness and in several instances thought I had lost all hope. Eventually, I almost stopped asking for His help, but somehow, He kept giving me strength to endure day in and day out. I have renewed faith that true healing can enter us all; in both the physical and emotional sense if we keep pressing forward.

Keep asking the Lord for His favor, for His blessings, for His protection. Keep believing that He will provide for you and for all who seek Him out. Though we think we have fallen, He stands with us, never abandoning us.

(Isaiah 41:10 from the Amplified Bible)

¹⁰ Do not fear [anything], for I am with you; Do not be afraid for I am your God.

I will strengthen you, be assured I will help you; I will certainly take hold of you with My righteous right hand [a hand of justice, of power, of victory, of salvation.]'

6. Strength and Health

We all have a continuous and common goal to “feel better”. This can be self-directed or a wish for our family and friends, or even just acquaintances. Some of us are very structured in our daily routines to maintain a certain level of health and some of us are a bit more lax.

I’ve had my share of medical issues that seemed to escalate as I approached my 40th year of life. My situation was a precarious one and I had my doubts I would pull through. I went along with my preparations, delegation of authority and living will. I remember saying good night to my children, thinking they would probably not see me the next day. It was rock bottom for me as I struggled with chronic pain and nausea after a surgery that went wrong.

To this day, I am still not fully recovered, but as I look back to that dark time, I know in my heart that it was God that carried me through. His purpose for me has not been fulfilled. He had given me more time to turn from any evil ways, to better help those around me and to pass on the knowledge I had gained during these trying times.

You are here now for those same reasons. Call out to the Lord, pledge and take action to do His will and feel His strength sustain you.

(Proverbs 3, 7-8 from the Amplified Bible)

⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord [with reverent awe and obedience] and turn [entirely] away from evil.

⁸ It will be health to your body [your marrow, your nerves, your sinews, your muscles – all your inner parts] And refreshment (physical well-being) to your bones.

(James 5:16 from the New Living Translation)

¹⁶ Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.

7. Getting through the Pain

Many of us have struggled through some major hardships in life, those of which have caused physical pain or emotional strife. We might have asked the Lords, 'haven't I already endured enough pain,' or 'what sins have I committed, that I should continue to be punished'. Our hope is tested as we lose sight of the light at the end of the tunnel. But we need to grip it tightly, preventing that hope to be smothered completely.

The bible discusses **pain** in numerous scriptures and it reflects on the example of a mother in labor. Like a mother giving birth to a child, the labor pains begin suddenly. It is also mentioned that more pains will come (Mark 13:8). Our sense of time is different as we live our lives in earthly time. But God is forever. It is imperative that we align ourselves with God's word so that we do not become trapped in the moment.

I have been living with chronic pain which is strong enough to be disabling at times. When the pain seems too much, we have to focus on the highlights of our lives. The pain may seem unrelenting, but there were times where we had clarity before, and in keeping our faith, we can again find the joy of living. We can get through the pain instead of living in pain if we continue trusting in God.

(Job 6:10 from the New Living Translation)

¹⁰ At least I can take comfort in this. Despite the pain, I have not denied the words of the Holy One.

(Revelation 21:4 from the New Living Translation)

⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.

8. Fighting Fear

What is the definition of fear? According to Webster's Dictionary, fear is "a painful emotion or passion excited by an expectation of evil, or the apprehension of impending danger." Fear can escalate to dread or terror if we allow it. In biblical use, fear can also mean reverence/awe of God, but that is not the definition we immediately turn to.

In times of the former definition of fear, we may allow our thoughts to be clouded by the sense of impending doom. We spiral downwards in our train of thoughts: this illness is too much to handle, nothing good is coming of my life, things are only getting worse... But even if you do suffer, doing what is right in accordance with His word, you are still in His light. Don't allow the fear to cripple you, do not be intimidated by the trials and opposition you face.

Keep your prayer life simple and sincere and know that God does not want us to be full of fear or anxiety. Even when it feels like our world is crumbling apart, we can take peace in knowing that this downtime is only temporary and that God is with us. Look to Him and ask in earnest, how you may help others. In doing so, we are redirected from our thoughts, subconsciously turning away from the fears and find comfort in His omnipresence through our trials. Stand in astonishment, knowing He is willing and able to fight all of our battles with us, but we have to do our part.

(Luke 12:32-33 from the Amplified Bible)

³²*Do not be afraid and anxious, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*

³³*Sell your possessions (show compassion) and give [donations] to the poor. Provide money belts for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing and inexhaustible treasure in the heavens, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.*

(Joshua 1:9 from the Amplified Bible)

⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not be terrified or dismayed (intimidated), for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go"

(1 Peter 3:14 from the New Living Translation)

¹⁴ But even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it. So don't worry or be afraid of their threats.

9. Feelings of Isolation

We can be in the midst of a crowd, living in a populous area, or surrounded by friends. But even then, we can feel alone, experiencing things that we believe no one will understand. Though that may be true, as we all experience things differently, we are never truly alone. Even though we may feel isolated, God is with us.

If we listen to the Lord and His commandments, we will continue to stand firm and see the great things which He will do. We are getting stronger, wiser and can accomplish our God-given dreams so long as we continue serving Him. No matter the obstacles in our way, the loneliness we may feel can be parted when we open up to praising God for the things we have or have had in the past as well as praising Him for what is yet to come. He is our provider, our savior, our father, our friend. He wants us to continuously seek Him, to pray/speak to Him. He will never turn away from us and will never forsake us.

(1 Samuel 12:22 from the Amplified Bible)

²² The Lord will not abandon His people for His great name's sake, because the Lord has been pleased to make you a people for Himself.

(Isaiah 41:10 from the Amplified Bible)

¹⁰ Do not fear [anything], for I am with you;

Do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, be assured I will help you;

I will certainly take hold of you with My righteous right hand [a hand of justice, of power, of victory, of salvation]

10. Turning around the Disability

People once believed that a disability was inflicted on one as a form of punishment for sins committed by that person or by parents. This was a form of discrimination, passing down judgment on someone based on their disability alone. As Christians, we have come to understand that a disability is not punishment; rather it's a way for God's power to be seen. Instead of dwelling on our inability to do certain "normal tasks", we can rely on God and trust that He will give us the necessary tools to overcome any obstacle.

At one point in my life, I was devastatingly disabled. A surgery gone wrong left me unable to walk, unable to eat solid foods, and drove me near the point of ending my own life. I never imagined I would be in such a desperate state. But God brought me through. Some days are incredibly difficult, even today, but I now use the times when I have clarity, when the chronic pain is manageable to focus more on getting the word of God out in whatever means He directs me to. I am, just as you are a living testimony of His goodness. Let the light shine into and through you so you can pour the goodness of the Lord into the lives of others.

(2 Corinthians 12:9 from the New Living Translation)

⁹ Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.

(John 9:1-3 from the New Living Translation)

1. *As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth.*

² *"Rabbi", his disciples asked him, "why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents' sins?"*

³ *"It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins," Jesus answered. "This happened so the power of God could be seen I him.*

11. Hopelessly Confused

Our minds can play tricks on us, especially during trying times. Our thoughts turn inwards, driving us down. *What if we never get better? Why does this always happen to me? When will I catch a break?* We turn away from the promises of God, which eventually can lead us sin. So how can we prevent ourselves from becoming hopelessly confused and immersed in our own pits of despair?

I wish it was as easy as turning off the train of thoughts, but with practice, being mindful about where are thoughts are going, we will learn to redirect them. Since we've heard about Jesus and know the truth, we can cast aside our oppressed nature, and remember that God has given us victory before any fight has even begun. Don't allow sin to come into your life by thinking thoughts of defeat. Empty yourself of any anger and bitterness that can continue to negatively impact your life and instead, show kindness to yourself and to others. Remember that God is on your side. You are not lost.

(Ephesians 4:17 from the New Living Translation)

¹⁷ With the Lord's authority I say this: Live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused.

(Matthew 9:36 from the New Living Translation)

³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherds.

12. Hopeful and Uplifted

Have you ever gone through the day and realized that it was going so much better than you expected it would go. Those days can become more frequent when we learn to trust in the Lord, to not let our faith waiver. God has already planned for good things to happen, not disasters. The disasters are not from Him, rather they are from the enemy. But even when those disasters do strike, God is always there, a fountain of hope that can fill us completely.

The “good” days are good because they are filled with peace and joy and those two things can be contagious. God truly loves us and he will meet our needs even when we cannot fathom how. He is a God of miracles. In faith, you will not be met with disappointment but will be met with favor. When we express our needs and our hopes to God, He will provide. It may not necessarily be right when we ask, but it will be the right time in accordance with God. Ask boldly in faith, and watch how your peace, strength and courage grows.

(Jeremiah 20:11 from the New Living Translation)

¹¹ “For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”

(Romans 15:13 from the New Living Translation)

¹³ I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

13. Your Scars Tell a Story

Your scars can be used to share your story, your testimony; the proof that God does work miracles. Encourage others and show them what God can do for them as well. There may be something happening in your life that you were not expecting. Something that has flipped your life upside down and it is now affecting your faith. We don't experience God in a cookie-cutter manner. Everyone's experience is different. There is no template for our faith and prayer life.

What we have to remember is that there is a greater purpose. God will bless you more abundantly when you learn to accept what God is doing in your life, rather than dwelling on the fact that it is not what you expected it to be. Your battles have already been won, just keep moving in the direction He is guiding you towards and when you might have some confusion, just ask Him, meditate on His word and ultimately do what your heart tells you is the right and just thing to do. Then go and share your story with the sick, the hurting, the young, the old, and the broken because your battle is not yours alone and your experiences and triumphs can help others for generations to come.

(Galatians 6:17 from the New Living Translation)

¹⁷ From now on, don't let anyone trouble me with these things. For I bear on my body the scars that show I belong to Jesus.

(Isaiah 58:8 from the New Living Translation)

⁸ "Then your salvation will come like the dawn, and your wounds will quickly heal. Your godliness will lead you forward, and the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind.

14. Don't just pretend

God sent his Jesus, his son, into the world to save us, not to judge us. His has an eternal love for us, despite our faults. But we sometimes forget about this love and instead fight against whatever we should be fighting for. Replicate His love for you, show kindness to others. Don't just pretend, truly love others from the heart and fight the things that are wrong; the injustices, the negative thoughts.

We live in a world that revolves around social media and constant interruptions. Today's youth faces challenges that alters the way they grow emotionally. What is shown to the world may not necessarily be what the individual faces on a day-to-day basis. Some choose to give more insight on the challenges they face, whereas others choose to show only the joyful, peace-filled moments. It is not our job to judge either of these demonstrations, rather we should understand that each and every one of us faces challenges to varying degrees. This understanding will allow us to be more tenderhearted to other people and to receive consideration and kindness in return.

(Romans 12:9 from the New Living Translation)

⁹ "Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good."

(John 3:17 from the Amplified Bible)

¹⁷ "For God did not send the Son into the world in order to judge (to reject, to condemn, to pass sentence on) the world, but that the world might find salvation and be made safe and sound through Him."

15. Pushing Past the Pain

Have you ever had a day or span of days where the physical or emotional pain you are experiencing seems to be winning the battle, where you feel like you have been defeated and things don't look like they will ever improve? It is at precisely those times that we must look back at all the previous battles that God has helped us win and realize that at those times, we might have felt similar. Perhaps each one we encounter seems like an uphill battle.

We must remind ourselves that God is always with us. Nothing can separate us from His love. Yes, there may be days where we have all but given up, where we are so close to giving up. But God's will is for us to continue the fight. It may help to remind yourself that this earthly life is temporary as we wait for our eternal lives. Our fight is not ours alone. We are fighting for our children, our children's children, our extended families, our friends. When we focus on that, we realize we do not feel so isolated and that in-turn strengthens us.

(Romans 8:38 from the New Living Translation)

³⁸ "And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither, our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow – not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love.

(Hebrews 12:1 from the New Living Translation)

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.

16. Trying to Understand

The following thoughts may have run through your mind a time or two in the past. *I've been stuck here too many times, trying to understand why things happen the way they do, what I did to get where I was, how did I manage to cause this, how can I get out? I've invested so much energy into trying to answer these questions. Not just energy, but time and money also. I have done this not only for myself, but for others, worrying about their circumstances and how I can help them or if I caused the issue.* Sometimes, we need to take a minute and make sure to put God first again. We cannot do anything without him.

What matters most is that we try to live free of sin, being kind to one another, helping each other through good and bad. Whether our minds are cluttered with worry, or maybe we feel empty inside, detached from our bodies, we must rely on God. Look for that connection with Him by spending time with Him. Voice your supplications to Him and reach out for help because God blesses others too and can provide the support we need through them.

(Proverbs 20:24 from the New Living Translation)

²⁴ *The Lord directs our steps, so why try to understand everything along the way?*

(Philippians 1:10 from the New Living Translation)

¹⁰ *For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return.*

17. When Fatigue Weighs You Down.

A relapse is when someone who is suffering from a disease suffers deterioration after a time in which improvement was noted. It has a negative meaning, implying that one has fallen down, or has gone backwards, regressing instead of progressing. People who are relapsing from an ailment or addiction hold out hope for remission or period of time where symptoms can fade.

During the chronic illness that has shrouded my life, I have experienced the devastation that this can have on a person, not just physically, but emotionally as well. We can chose to continue the fight, but we also have to honor our bodies and stop comparing ourselves to others or to who we were before. Ultimately, the only way to get through these darkest times is to recall that God is our strength. He, as our Father, does not wish us to suffer and we cannot allow ourselves to stay mired in the self-pity that can envelop us during these relapses. Condition yourself to remember the times that the Lord has helped you overcome prior obstacles and lean on him as He brings you out again. Your fight will become your victory and a symbol of His grace that may help to strengthen others in similar situations.

(Job 4:3 from the New Living Translation)

³ *"In the past you have encouraged many people; you have strengthened those who were weak.*

(Psalms 72:13 from the New Living Translation)

¹³ *"He feels pity for the weak and the needy, and he will rescue them.*

18. Love One Another

Treat each other with respect. That's easier said than done in many households, places of employment and other gatherings. Sometimes we let our impatience show through verbally and non-verbally by the expressions we make. The people around us may put up defensive fronts or reciprocate the animosity but it generally doesn't turn out well. It can be incredibly difficult to love someone who uses harsh words or actions against you; therefore it may take practice to show kindness despite the situation.

Respect most often is reciprocated also, but in the cases that it is not, you will still have peace in your heart, knowing you have made an effort and will continue to do so. Hate should never be an alternative to love. Once you make the determination to show acts of love, it becomes easier as the positive impacts can be seen and felt.

Showing love to one another can take on many forms. Listening more and talking less is a great way to show people you care. Giving to the needy, donating to good causes, being patient with one another, providing companionship and sharing the message of God's love are all good ways to show love.

(1 Peter 2:17 from the New Living Translation)

¹⁷ Respect everyone, and love the family of believers. Fear God, and respect the king.

(1 John 4:7 from the New Living Translation)

⁷ Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God.

19. Believe and Receive

We talk about what we see and feel throughout our lives. But what about the things we cannot see? When we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior, we are born spiritually, not physically, and there is a gradual shift on how we experience and feel things. Learning that we can pray for anything and will receive it, if it's in line with God's will, is one of the most important lessons we can learn in our lives. Anything is possible when you have good intentions.

The thing is, we have to keep asking and keep doing. Generally, opportunities do not just fall into our laps. It is up to us to search out those opportunities, seeing how else we can become a testimony of God, sharing his goodness all the way. Remaining in faith may sometimes be challenging, especially when we hit a lag, feel like the opposition is winning. This is not the case. God is aligning us with His path. It may not be the most clear-cut path, but so long as we keep believing, we will receive the blessings He has promised. Have faith and start releasing it.

(Mark 11:24 from the New Living Translation)

²⁴ I tell you, you can pray for anything, and if you believe that you've received it, it will be yours.

(Mark 9:23 from the New Living Translation)

²⁶ What do you mean, "If I can'?" Jesus asked. "anything is possible if a person believes."

20. The Truth of the Matter

Can you discern truth from lies? Perhaps not in every situation. In some instances, there's a thin line between them: but in one case, it is always clear. The Word is truth and it is up to us to live in the Word. We may not be able to distinguish fact from fiction, but we can distinguish right from wrong.

In Isaiah 51:7, there is a statement that is directed to people who know right from wrong. It states that if we hold the Law in our hearts, we should not be afraid of harm from people or fear. In essence, this tells us that no matter what happens, our feelings should be kept in check and we must remember that God will take care of us. Maybe some situations have happened or will happen that lead us to questioning why God has allowed it. But the truth of the matter is that He has given us authority and the ability to not only know, but teach right from wrong. Keep doing what is right, while allowing others to learn from you.

(John 17:17 from the New Living Testament)

¹⁷ Make them holy you your truth; teach them your word, which is truth.

(2 Corinthians 13:8 from the New Living Testament)

⁸ For we cannot oppose the truth, but must always stand for the truth.

21. Redirecting your Mind's Eye

I have passed through many challenges and I know many challenges lie before me. When we are in the midst of challenges, we tend to focus on the difficulties rather than the triumphs. If we turn our attention to God, He will change our hearts and minds so that we can still live in love despite the challenges. Remove the negative thoughts; those thoughts that keep us discouraged and threaten to defeat us. Keep focused on the light of Christ living inside you and your troubles will lose their hold on your life.

Our feelings are fluid, changing just as the direction of the wind changes. Sustaining the truth of the Word is the way to our salvation. Even if the circumstance seems unrelenting, know that our God is the Way Maker and Miracle Worker. He will bring us through any challenge, whether we feel it is manageable or overpowering. He will bring us victory.

(Deuteronomy 30:6 from the New Living Testament)

⁶ The Lord your God will change your heart and the hearts of all your descendants, so that you will love him with all your heart and soul and so you may live.

(Zephaniah 3:15 from the New Living Testament)

¹⁵ For the Lord will remove his hand of judgement and will disperse the armies of your enemy. Ant the Lord himself, the King of Israel, will live among you! At last your troubles will be over, and you will never again fear disaster.

22. Coming to Agreement

Disputes arise in everyday life. Discussions involving politics, religion, household duties, etc. can often trigger an emotional response. It is good to discuss things with others but we must remain in control of our emotions to prevent any negative feelings from bubbling up inside of us or inside of others. Should we allow ourselves to lose control, we may destroy our relationships and become even more critical in our thoughts. It can make it difficult to build positive relationships because our emotions may follow us like a cloak.

On the converse, when we speak of things in agreement, such as the promises of God, those positive things become magnified in our lives. God has the power to provide our needs and even our wants, when we do things in faith. Sharing the journey with others may fortify the faith and God's goodness will become even more evident in your lives as he grants your petitions. The key in asking is that we ask with faith, in good conscience and in understanding that his time table is different from our own.

(Matthew 18:19 from the New Living Testament)

¹⁹ "I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you."

(John 15:7 from the New Living Testament)

⁷ But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted!

23. Seasonal Changes

Seasons are periods of time during each year that are differentiated by specific climate patterns. In many parts of the world there is a clearly evident transition from season to season, where there is renewal in the land. Are you prepared to be pruned? You do not have to feel overwhelmed or underwhelmed by any circumstance you may face. When the colors don't appear to be as vibrant in your life, imagine that you are being prepared for the renewal season. Likewise, if everything seems too bright and noisy to see or hear clearly, imagine that things will soon settle out into a beautiful visage in which you can enjoy.

During those seasons of preparation, we must remember to ask God to keep our gaze focused up. We know he provides us with our daily needs and we must keep a hopeful attitude that God will continue to bring us through. If we look beyond the things that threaten to bring our spirits down, we will be able to find the beauty in each season, thanking God for each transitional period with the knowledge that He will continuously guide us.

(Ecclesiastes 3:1 from the New Living Testament)

¹ For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven.

(Ezekiel 34:26 from the New Living Testament)

²⁶ I will bless my people and their homes around my holy hill. And in the proper season I will send the showers they need. There will be showers of blessing.

24. Guiding Light

Sometimes we may feel so lost that the darkness overshadows any light that might be spotted at the end of the tunnel. Problems seem to multiply and expand on the negative emotions that overtake us at times. Perhaps, another condition was just diagnosed, a career decision has left you uncertain, or disability continues to make you feel helpless. You are not helpless! You are not meant to stay in the darkness.

God says He will guide us along the best pathway of our lives. What we must remember, is that our lives are not the same as others' lives. God will continue to counsel us and guide our steps towards Him in whatever way is appropriate for each of us individually. He is in control. We need to stop fighting, tiring ourselves out trying to figure things out without Him and understand that He is the way to peace and joy. Whether there is darkness around us or not, He will provide the light and allow you to travel through any obstacles, even during the darkest of nights.

(Psalms 119:105 from the New Living Testament)

¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.

(Psalms 32:8 from the New Living Testament)

⁸ The Lord says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you."

25. Teach me Lord

In life, we learn things every day if we observe and are willing to learn. It is a lifelong journey, but it shouldn't stop with the desire to learn. We are to teach others along the way, spreading knowledge like a wildfire. The Bible tells us that the word will teach us how to live a righteous life, even when enemies are waiting. When we live in this way, our behaviors can be mirrored and influence those around us.

Circumstances beyond our control may force us to re-evaluate how we see God's work in our lives. We should always go to him first, relying on him and having faith that all things will work for our good. We should continuously ask him to give us a heart that wants entirely to worship and serve him. With this purpose firmly implanted in our hearts, there is no reason to stress about outcomes because the outcome is already known. We will be by our Father on earth and in heaven. While we are earth, we should continue to learn about Him, and applying what we learn, by studying the Bible

(Psalms 27:11 from the New Living Testament)

¹¹ Teach me how to live, O Lord. Lead me along the right path, for my enemies are waiting for me.

(2 Timothy 2:2 from the New Living Testament)

²² You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others..

(Psalms 86:11 from the New Living Testament)

¹¹ Lord, teach me how you want me to live. Then I will follow your truth. Give me a heart that doesn't want anything more than to worship you.

26. Giving Back

I never realized just how much God works in our lives until I could no longer work and provide financially to my family and was physically not able to function even with regular tasks such as cooking, cleaning or helping the children. It was at this time that friends reached out and donated privately to help us with living expenses. Later, my Long Term Disability kicked in and held us over. Somehow we made enough for our expenses and even were able to give back to others in different ways. It was by His miraculous blessings that we were saved. It wasn't the life I had envisioned, but I knew it was God carrying us through the tough patch.

Sometimes there are so many unknowns lying before us that it becomes overwhelming trying to decipher things. Should we continue down this path, we may begin to live frustrated lives, questioning our every moves? However, when we seek to do good things for others in good spirit, and do so without expecting anything in return, our blessings are multiplied. The happiness we find when we give back is immeasurable.

(Matthew 6:4 from the New Living Testament)

⁴ Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

(John 17:7 from the New Living Testament)

⁷ Now they know that everything I have is a gift from you.

27. Arming Yourself

We continuously need God's protection from the battles in this world. He can protect us from head to toe by clothing us with His armor; His belt of truth, chest plate of love, helmet of salvation, shield of faith and weapons of words. But our weapons aren't intended to wound others. Instead, God wants us to use our words wisely to enlighten our brethren to the goodness of God. But we also have to remember that before we can dawn the armor of God, we must remove the dirty clothes that have tainted our souls. God's armor is pure, a beacon of those living the righteous life.

It's time to leave behind the discouragement, guilt, the regrets about what we should have done, although we may feel as though we are struggling just to get by. The unfair situation can be turned around if we stay in faith. Speak healing and restoration, even when the body or heart seems broken. Things can turn around in an instant if you let God equip you. His mercy can make any mistakes in your past take you higher, sharpen your weapons and shine your armor and cause you to be brought out better than you were before.

(1 Thessalonians 5:8 from the New Living Testament)

⁸ But let us who live in the light be clearheaded, protected by the armor of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation.

(Romans 13:12 from the New Living Testament)

¹² The night is almost gone; the day of salvation will soon be here. So remove your dark deeds like dirty clothes, and put on the shining armor of right living.

28. Letting Go of Reasoning

One of the most difficult things to do is to abandon the need to reason. Another way of looking at this is to put ALL of your faith in God. We all strive to do this, but it takes years of practice to get close to our goal of trusting wholeheartedly. People have a tendency to look for cause/effect relationships with worldly eyes. That is science, and science does have a place; however, there are things that science cannot explain. This is coming from me, scientist who has studied engineering many years, going as far as to earn a PhD in the field. It has been an arduous path to stop the repetitive and vicious cycle of reasoning in everyday life and unfortunate circumstances that have fallen on me. Endless questions once wracked my brain. Why did this happen to me? Why didn't I realize this could happen? Why did I allow this to happen in the first place?

After a year of disability and finding out that there were additional medical problems that I would have to battle, I finally learned to stop looking for more, to stop searching for all the answers. My situation was not cut and dry. It was not a clear diagnosis, treatment and recovery. It was an battle and it became an uphill battle the more I researched and tried to solve my problems. I had to learn to trust God, to stop fearing the unknown and just have faith that He would guide me to wherever it is He wants me in His time. My battles were not just my own. They are His battles and He will use me, just as he will use you, to help others along the way. These false perceptions that we envision have no place in our lives.

(2 Corinthians 10:4 from the New Living Testament)

⁴ We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments.

29. Breaking Down the Barriers

There are days when we feel like we need to erect walls around our lives, to prevent the hurt from either seeping in or seeping out. We might have good intentions to prevent others from knowing about our hardships, our challenges. Other times, we feel like we are being attacked from the outside. A coworker seeks to take credit for your hard work, a significant other seems to be ignoring you, a child is finding every chance to question your authority, bills are piling up and you have to work harder just to catch your breath.

Sometimes, we even obstruct our minds from God's words with emotional walls. God wants to see us through everything in life, both the joyous occasions and the struggles. We must be careful not to harden our hearts. Lean on the word and understand that despite the obstacles that surround us, God is clearing the way. We don't have to try to figure everything out. We don't have to allow frustration to creep in as we run into walls in our life journey. Know that God will break down these walls and set us up for success. Choose to keep stepping forward, breaking down the barriers that would interfere with hearing God's word and acting in faith.

(Hebrews 11:30 from the New Living Testament)

³⁰ It was by faith that the people of Israel marched around Jericho for seven days, and the walls came crashing down.

30. Ready or Not

The motto, “always be prepared” is used so extensively in our world. “Prepare for the worst, but expect the best” is another one. This may not be a reasonable thing to take on and may actually harm us if we are continuously trying to predict the worst case scenarios. Yes, it sucks to go through rough patches, but it’s precisely that. We are going **through**, which is far better than being stuck in. If we meditate on what can go wrong, we are, in essence, living the problematic situations more than once, if they actually do come to pass. Rather than that, we can focus on the positive things and learn to express our gratitude (with a great attitude), and it will help us to go through the challenges whether we are ready or not.

God is our divine savior and he is always prepared, knowing every step we will take, even before our birth. Although, we may not know every action that will transpire, God does and he will always be our source of strength. This doesn’t mean that we are to sit idle and expectantly wait for all things to be done for us. It means that we should keep God in our hearts and share his message to others while living our lives to the fullest and in accordance with his Word. In that way, whether a challenge creeps up on us or not, we will feel closer to God and the threats of the enemy will not deter us.

(Psalms 46:1 from the New Living Testament)

¹ God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.

(Proverbs 22:18 from the New Living Testament)

¹⁸ For it is good to keep these sayings in your heart and always ready on your lips.

31. Having a Suggestive Nature

Are you a problem solver? Do you offer suggestions to others for various situations? Because we are all unique beings, with personalities that may be drastically different, we must be careful how we offer help. Although we have well-intentioned hearts and truly want to help our neighbors, they may not see it as helpful, rather it may come off as hurtful. Although, each of us needs to strive to not take offense to these things, it is often the first thing we do.

A chronically ill patient who has been fighting for his or her health for months, years or even decades may receive constant recommendations from friends meaning well. But the recommendations are not original to that patient and the frustration and discouragement may become greater. A husband and wife are struggling through their marriage and friends may offer insight, but they may be biased. An employer is not appreciative towards his or her staff. There are fruitful ways to problem solve and there are destructive ways.

(Exodus 23:3 from the New Living Testament)

³ *And do not slant your testimony in favor of a person just because that person is poor.*

32. In Due Time

If we expect to struggle, to fall down, to fail; then we are turning off the opportunities that were sent to us. We can't pick up the pieces and move forward from a broken relationship, from a feeling of betrayal or from an illness or disability by holding onto our pain, reliving the past traumas. God does truly listen to us. He understands our hopes and fears and when we place our trust in Him, miracles can happen. We may feel as though we have been waiting so long and begin losing hope. But then, you see it. You feel it. Things begin to line up and you must remember the blessings He has given you.

In times of trouble, we may feel stuck as if we are mired in quick sand. The troubles may seem to overpower us. But God is still lining things up. It may not be visible to us at first until all the pieces begin to fit together. Learning to have patience is difficult, especially when the tribulations weigh heavy. Patience is the fruit of the spirit and if we do not practice patience, we may miss blessings. The miracles that God bestows upon us will level us out so that we don't have to be burdened with the thought of being run down with work, family life, sickness or homelessness. After all, home is where the heart is. God resides in us and fills our hearts with His love.

(1 Peter 5:6 from the New International Version)

⁶ *Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.*

33. The Emotional Struggle

On many occasions, I have feel incredibly drained, emotionally taxed. Throughout my life, I have had trials and tribulations, but some felt so overbearing that I felt I could not go on and was tempted to give up. During those times, I was reminded that God has provided me with the strength to do what I need to do. This could mean something as simple as remembering to eat enough calories, to take deep breaths and bring down the autonomic stress response, etc. We all face temptations, but God does not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to endure. He also provides a way to turn away from any temptations.

Sometimes we may go through a painful situation, but we must learn to look beyond ourselves. God may have allowed us to go through the difficulty because he knew he could count on us to offer up our experience with others who may share the same trouble. We may still be in the questioning phase, questioning, why this happened to us, but our faith has allowed us to persevere. An acquaintance may not have the same faith, but we can offer assistance in showing God's mercy and bring them to the understanding of God. In that way we are fulfilling his will, letting our light shine through the darkness.

(Jeremiah 29:11 from the New Living Translation)

¹¹ "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."

(Psalm 91:11-12 from the Amplified Bible (AMP))

¹¹ "For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear up, lest you strike your foot against a stone."

34. His Blessings through Every Season

Historically, there are a few years that stand out as exceptionally difficult seasons, even years; years of disease, famine, economic crisis. The year 2020 was one of those years. We were faced with job loss, income loss, social deprivation, illness, fear. Some may have been affected more than others, but it was a global pandemic with unprecedented effects. It may have been the difficulties that stand out; however, the way we make it through those times is to search for and find the blessings in everyday life.

Blessings can be seen in every moment even if we are not able to use all of our senses. If we cannot see, we can feel. If we cannot feel, we can hear. Learning to redirect our focus from the negative and allowing the brightness of the blessings to lift us up is not something inherently simple, but with practice it can be learned. Sure we may fear a relapse, but that too is a thought we can choose to discard. A symptom that returns is not indicative of recurring illness, depression, inability. Keep faith and keep counting the blessings.

God has carried us through so many hardships and He will keep holding onto us all the days of our lives. Count your blessings by making time for other people, enjoying simple pleasures and doing everything with your full attention. Remain steadfast during the hardships and He will shower us with His blessings of health, restoration, love, joy, happiness, and strength. Recognize the gifts and learn to walk in them without comparing them to the gifts given to others.

(James 1:12 from the English Standard Version)

¹² Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

35. From Dark into Light

Looking outside some days, the clouds overtake the sun and the gloom of the day weighs heavy on the earth. But on a bright sunny day, strong light can also create powerful shadows. When we rely on worldly light, we may be deceived. However, The Lord's light is everlasting and can illuminate even the darkest of night.

Our thoughts are similar. We may begin with thoughts of doom and gloom. It is precisely at these times that we need to pull away from our thoughts and focus in on the Word. If we allow the negative thoughts to seep in, we will find ourselves deeper and deeper in the pit. Rather, when we look up and see the sun's light peeking through the clouds, we must acknowledge the foundational truth that God brings darkness into light.

As Christians, we are called not only to walk in the light of Christ, but to also be the light for others. By doing this, we inevitably begin the chain reaction of positive energy transfer. We call this "paying it forward." There is no gratitude greater than what we feel when we give back to others. The Lord will keep our lamps burning because we have been called out of the darkness. With His help, we can bridge mountains.

(Psalm 18:28 - 29 from the New International Version)

²⁸ You, LORD, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light. ²⁹ With your help I can advance against a troop with my God I can scale a wall.

36. The Test of Time

Are you patient enough to wait for a promised reward? Are you willing to stand firm through the trials in your life with a positive outlook? Many of us are learning to do just that. The challenges may have increased in complexity, but one thing is for certain; God is on our side always. We may ask ourselves, how long can we withstand the pressure, persevering against everything that threatens to bring us down? There is no defined amount of time. We know that there is a better and everlasting life ahead of us, therefore we hold onto the confidence, knowing we will be richly rewarded in heaven.

But how we wait for that promise, is the true test of time. God wants us to continue living by faith and to choose to keep moving forward even when an upsetting circumstance falls upon us. Also, how we rise to the challenge is what impacts those around us. We are able to show others just how great our God is when we overcome obstacles or persevere through any ongoing hardships. God does not take pleasure in our suffering, but he does take pleasure in our faith and praise as well as how often we step aside from our present circumstances and allow him to work wonders in our lives. Through Him, we are saved and by our salvation, we bring others to the realization that Christ our Savior can turn all things meant to hurt us into something that elevates us.

(Hebrews 10:36 from the New International Version)

³⁶ You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

(Genesis 50:20 from the New Living Translation)

²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.

37. Can You Feel It

Are you learning from it as you go through it? It is sometimes difficult to tell if we have learned from an experience, especially when progress is not immediately evident or it seems we have taken a step back. So long as we are not doing things from a heart of selfish ambition, we will gain wisdom and show it through our works. As we go through forward in life, we continuously evolve and learn to better speak and act genuinely, lovingly, sincerely... and learn to do so without wavering.

Sincerity is a trait that is held highly, along with compassion and patience. As we strive to be sincere, we are working towards kindness and truthfulness. These traits, which cannot be seen, but can be felt, please the Lord who blesses us with love and self-control. None of these traits are learned from a textbook. Rather, they are learned from experience. In times when the experiences appear to be negative, we must refuse to become bitter, and instead, view the experience as a stepping stone, which will accelerate us to the true purpose God has placed for our lives.

(James 3:17 from the ESV)

¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

(2 Timothy 1:7 from the ESV)

⁷ For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

38. Keep Stepping Forward

One foot in front of the next; this is what I remind myself every day. Sometimes I must break the day down into smaller increments and think to myself... one hour at a time. Looking ahead to tomorrow can bring us more worry, more anxiety at times. But God gives us more than enough grace for each day. I now believe that, more than ever, because I am still here on earth, we are still here on earth. His grace is bigger than anything we will face during our daily struggles.

I believe in you Lord. You can part the waters. You can carry me through the fires. You can lift the weight from my shoulders if I just keep stepping forward. Every time I feel like I am relapsing in my medical conditions, falling behind in household chores, struggling with finances, I remind myself these things. He has already carried me through so much, my darkest days, days when I thought I could go no further. His grace has been sufficient for me and it is sufficient for you. It's good to look forward to the future, but the most critical way to living in peace is to live in the present and keep in your heart the knowledge that God will lift you.

(2 Corinthians 12:19 from the New Living Translation)

⁹ but He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you [My lovingkindness and My mercy are more than enough—always available—regardless of the situation]; for [My] power is being perfected [and is completed and shows itself most effectively] in [your] weakness." Therefore, I will all the more gladly boast in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ [may completely enfold me and] may dwell in me.

39. Now or Forever

One of the greatest motivators we have is the drive to accomplish our personal goals. However, sometimes we fail to realize that reaching our goals is not the end of our journey. There will always be more goals and aspirations, more sources of motivation to do more, to be better. God does want us to strive for better, but also wants us to find joy in the current time. Take a moment and give thanks to our Lord for all the blessings he has given us and the opportunities that are yet to come. Experience the now! Take a deep breath and with the inhalation, reflect on all those moments of triumph.

On the opposite end of things, some of us are saddled with a feeling of defeat as we strive to move forward but are stopped in our tracks by physical pain, financial hardships, broken relationships or emotional struggles. Just like the times when we feel encouraged and motivated to keep moving forward, we need to keep stepping forward. The hardships will not last forever. They are here now, but our God is greater than all things that hinder us. He will keep providing the strength we need to make it through the now. We will be blessed with eternal life, free from any negativity. I cling to that promise.

As the day winds down, I often find myself fatigued and in some discomfort. But the peace of the evening allows me time to shift my focus. I am thankful for my family, for the shelter provided me and for the foods that I am able to eat. On the one hand, I can contemplate the why's, the how's and the unfair nature of my life as it stands, but on the other, I can consider the miracles that God has granted in the past and the hope for more miracles to come.

(John 3:15 from the Amplified Bible)

For God so [greatly] loved and dearly prized the world, that He [even] gave His [One and] only begotten Son, that whoever believes and trusts in Him [as Savior] shall not perish but have eternal life.

(John 4:14 from the Amplified Bible)

But whoever drinks the water that I give him will never be thirsty again. But the water that I give him will become in a spring of water [satisfying his thirst for God] welling up [continually flowing, bubbling within him] to eternal life.”

40. Persist in the Lord

Can you recall a moment in time where you thought you may not have enough strength, enough health, enough willpower to keep pushing forward? Perhaps you can remember down to the hour in time where you felt like giving up. Perhaps you may have flares in physical and/or emotional health issues that feels like a roller coaster ride. Perhaps you are still undergoing the storm continuously every day, for many days, months or years even.

This is the time we should turn to God and ask him to strengthen our spirit, not just our bodies. Things can get increasingly difficult, but that doesn't mean that God won't bring us through. We don't understand why some things happen to our friends, our loved ones, ourselves. It is a continual search for wisdom, guidance and strength that will carry us through. Stay persistent in this search. The favor of God is an amazing gift. We may not understand the whys, but keep reaching out to the Lord and He will give you enough grace to make it through any and all of our days.

(1 Corinthians 16:9)

9 There is a wide-open door for a great work here, although many oppose me.

(Romans 12:12)

12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

(Psalm 40:1)

40 I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry.

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