

NEXT STEPS

A 30-Day Guide to Spiritual Growth



John D. Beckett



PREFACE

February 1, 2003, the Space Shuttle Columbia disintegrated as it was reentering Earth's orbit, just minutes from touchdown at Cape Canaveral, Florida. The mission's seven astronauts faced eternity in an instant. Their sudden fate prompted me to write *Coming Home*, a small booklet describing the biblical pathway toward becoming a follower of Jesus Christ.



Three years later, *Coming Home* was launched on a website: www.lifegreatestquestion.com. People from around the globe have found this site while searching for answers to such probing questions as, “What is the purpose of life?” Nearly one of every ten visitors has indicated a decision to become a believer—resulting in millions of new Christians.

That same year I wrote *30 Day Next Steps*. Its lessons have been distributed daily via email to these new believers ever since, with the goal of helping each build a strong, secure spiritual foundation. Now we are able to provide this content in print form—the booklet you hold in your hand.

May you find “30 Days” helpful, and may your journey into faith become the adventure of a lifetime!

John Beckett, Elyria, Ohio, USA

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GUIDE TO USING THIS BOOKLET

How should you use this booklet?

Topics for each day have been chosen to guide the spiritual growth of new believers, and to help established followers of Christ renew and apply foundational ideas of the Christian faith.

While some may read everything in one sitting (it isn't very long), try taking one lesson each day for the next 30 days. After all, you wouldn't want to get spiritual indigestion!

Begin each study by thinking about the initial question for that day's lesson. Then consider the message, asking, "How does this apply in my life?" Finally, reflect on the closing scripture, even memorize it. Underlining and making notes may help cement key thoughts. Links to further resources may be found toward the back.

Recently, I received the following note from a woman who was pregnant, not married and had previously chosen abortion. After reading Day 23, "Trusting God for the Future," she wrote:

"When I opened (that day's lesson) I heard God speaking to me. Am so encouraged! I will not kill my baby. He is God's Love, and He's going to provide for it. You have saved my life and that of my baby. I am blessed to know that He is there for me. Thank you!"

May this study help and bless you at your point of need. I am convinced that God's Word, and the lessons we derive from it, are our surest lifeline to a vital, purposeful life.



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DAY 1

PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

What actually happens when I commit to following Jesus?

In making that critical decision:

- You acknowledge your sin of living independently from God.
- You repent, turning toward God and away from your former way of living.
- You receive Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord.

Here is how the Bible describes this transformation: out of darkness, into light; out of bondage, into freedom; out of death, into life.

Wow! Once you commit to following Jesus you would think cloudy skies would part, sunshine would flood in and all your troubles would evaporate. But this was not my experience. I didn't feel a lot different on day one. Soon, however, as I allowed Christ to guide my thoughts and decisions, I discovered a whole new peace, confidence and inner joy.

Suppose you buy a new car but are surprised to find the battery missing. Well, you could simply admire your prized possession or even hop in and imagine driving it. Yet without a battery your fine new vehicle would stay put. Our lives without Christ are like that. But with Him as the "power source," we are able to be what He designed us to be.

Be encouraged, even if you don't see immediate change. With Christ in you, change will absolutely follow. You are a new person. You've begun a new journey.

KEY VERSE: *"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).*



DAY 2

BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

What can I expect on my journey?

“Daddy, are we there yet?” That’s the question our children would ask when they were small, just as we set out on a long car ride. I had to remind them of the many hours ahead but also to be patient and enjoy the trip.

Your journey of faith is more than a car ride. It’s a lifelong adventure. To help you along the way:

- Be confident that, whatever you encounter, Christ is with you. He promised: “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5).
- Look for small changes, not instant results. Some examples: meeting a new Christian friend; making progress toward overcoming an annoying habit; discovering a verse of scripture that “comes alive” for you.
- Embrace each moment, trusting God for the future.

Change is not easy. We need to be a little tough on ourselves, especially when we’re tempted to give up. But with each victory, even small ones, we are better able to meet the next challenge.

Many times I thought the Christian life was too difficult. Old habits and friends who were a poor influence would draw me like metal to a magnet. Sometimes I gave in. You will have these moments. But thank God we are not on our own. We can trust the Lord Jesus, the One who lives in us and is totally committed to seeing us through to the end of life’s journey.

KEY VERSE: *“He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).*



DAY 3

GOD WORKS INSIDE OUT

What should I do first?

Early in our journey, we need to understand the difference between *religion* and *relationship*. Perhaps you have seen the ways religion can be rules-based, harsh and stifling. In contrast, our relationship with Jesus should be much different: personal, open, warm and liberating.

Jesus wants us to come to Him the way a little child comes to a loving parent. For example, my wife, Wendy, and I were always delighted when one of our six youngsters would run up to us, arms outstretched for a hug, and then nestle in, completely at rest and filled with trust.

May I ask you to do something out of the ordinary? Regardless of your age, become a “little child” for a minute. Come to Jesus as one would to a loving parent. No requests. No expectations. You don’t have to brush your teeth or comb your hair. Simply come and linger in His presence, experiencing His love for you. Why not take a moment to do this right now?

Let this childlike action become a lifelong habit. From this place of trust you will experience the transforming power of the new life. Don’t fall into the busyness trap of “doing things for God.” More than our help, He wants us to confidently rest in His care. This enables Him to work through us. His work is inside out, not outside in.

KEY VERSE: *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).*



DAY 4

THE BIBLE: A WORD FOR ALL AGES

What is the best foundation for my spiritual growth?

I didn't always view the Bible as the kind of friend it has now become. Before I committed my life to Jesus I found it confusing, even mysterious, partly because I tried to read it from page 1, like any other book. Soon I got bogged down and put it aside.

After I became a believer, the Bible began to come alive. My entry point was reading about Jesus in the New Testament. Often, to my amazement, what I read in the morning would apply directly to events happening that very day.

Learning from the Bible is *the* best way to build a "rock-solid" spiritual foundation. From the Bible's inspired pages you will learn who God is, how He wants you to live and how He will guide you. Think of spending time with God's Word as laying the foundation of a building. Though hidden from view, it is indispensable and no place to cut corners. The soundness and stability of the entire structure depends on a solid foundation. Make the Bible the basis of your spiritual life.

If you don't have a Bible, you can easily access one at www.youversion.com, where hundreds of language versions are available. Start with Luke's gospel. Read a little each day. Let the words speak to you, bringing some fresh insight, some new truth.

KEY VERSE: *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Colossians 3:16).*



DAY 5

GOD IS LOVE

How can I be sure of God's love?

Billy Graham, the great evangelist, said, "The more I read the Bible, the more I realize that love is God's supreme attribute."

I've had times when I, like you, have felt far away from God's love. Perhaps you grew up in a broken home with little or no affection from your parents. You may have lost loved ones to illness, accident or war. You may have faced poverty and famine as daily realities. Pain is continuously nearby. Where is God's love in all this?

I believe God's heart aches more than we can ever know at the suffering, injustice and heavy burdens His children encounter. Sin, when it entered the world, brought consequences that affect our lives every day.

But God's love for each of us was supremely evident when He sent His son, Jesus, to buy us back, or "redeem" us, from sin's terrible impact. John's gospel tells us: "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

When you yielded your life to God, you came face to face with your heavenly Father's love. Now, as you continue your journey, lean into and draw deeply from Him. God loves you!

KEY VERSE: *"[May you] know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:19).*



DAY 6

Responding To God

How do I respond to God?

Suppose you are walking in a dense forest, and you stray off the path and lose your way. Night falls and it becomes dark and cold. You're without food or water. You frantically stumble ahead in the darkness, with no sense of direction. Fear gnaws at you: "I may never make it back to safety."

Then your anxious eyes see a light in the distance. You realize: *Someone is searching for me!* The light is coming your way. You call out, "Here I am!" The reply comes back: "Keep calling!" Moments later your rescuer appears—a forest ranger who knows the deep woods and the way home. Steadily he leads you back. As the ranger delivers you to your doorstep, he says, "You're safe now." You study his kind and fatherly face. In sheer relief you respond in the only way you can—with profound gratitude. "How can I ever repay you?" you ask, knowing no payment could ever suffice.

In that same way, our heavenly Father rescued us. Our condition was even more desperate than we could have imagined. There was no way to make it on our own. Then He came and personally guided us home, redeeming us from deadly peril.

Our only reasonable response is to love Him in return—with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. In fact, a central message of the Bible is that we were made for one great purpose: to receive and return God's love. It's a two-way street!

KEY VERSE: "*We love Him because He first loved us*" (1 John 4:19).



DAY 7

THE MEANING OF LIFE

What is most important in life?

People search for life's meaning in many ways. Wealth. Power. Status. Possessions. As alluring as these may be, people who achieve them are seldom satisfied. Often it's not until our later years that we fully grasp the extraordinary value of our relationships.

I am grateful to have been able to achieve much in life. Many would view me as "successful." Yet my greatest treasures by far are my relationships—with my wonderful wife, Wendy, and our children, grandchildren and close friends—*and* with the Lord Jesus—a bond that is absolutely unique!

Even when we are denied the intimate relationships of marriage, family and friends, there is One who always will be, without fail, our friend. Recall His pledge: "I will never leave you or forsake you."

By the time Billy Graham was in his 90s, he had lost his wife, Ruth, and many close acquaintances through death. But he always had a friend in Jesus. He stated, "It is the greatest discovery you will ever make: You were created to know God and be His friend forever. This is a staggering truth. Think of it. The infinite, all-powerful holy God of the universe wants to be your friend. He wants you to know Him personally."

Take a moment now to embrace this profound reality, for in it you touch the very meaning of life: You were created to be God's friend.

KEY VERSE: *"I no longer call you servants... but friends" (John 15:15).*



DAY 8

WHY 30 DAYS?

When will the good changes begin?

When we make any kind of significant adjustment in our lives, the first 30 days are critical. Studies show it takes this long to shed an old habit, or establish a new one. So let the “habit” of studying God’s word, His character and His ways become well rooted. You’ve begun the adventure of a lifetime, but there are risks. Here are two ways you can be pulled off course and how to deal with each.

- *Family and friends who don’t understand.* Regardless of how much or how little you’ve said to others, they will notice differences in you. Some will want to know more, but others may be antagonistic and mock you. The best course is not to be defensive or argumentative, but to let Christ, Who now lives in you, love them through you. Hopefully, in time, they will want to change too. But whatever you do, don’t let others pull you back into your old ways.
- *Bad habits that are not easily broken.* Maybe you’re in an unhealthy relationship or weighed down by lifelong struggles. You may feel it’s too difficult. You may think, “I can’t make it in this new life.” Don’t give in to these thoughts. Based on my experience, it won’t be long before you see some real victories. Remember, Jesus took you to Himself just as you were. He loves you unconditionally and will guide and strengthen you every step of the way.

KEY VERSE: *“He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).*



DAY 9

THE HELPER

How am I supposed to live the Christian life?

Some have the misunderstanding that once we become believers we can continue to live life on our own. I sometimes fall into that trap, thinking my abilities are sufficient. Consider your personal talents. You may possess great verbal, analytical or athletic skills. But be careful, for those very strengths can be barriers to God's best.

God's intention is not that we be self-sufficient, but that we live humbly submitted to Him in a close, dependent relationship. By now, it should not surprise you that He didn't give you an impossible assignment. Rather, He made the surrendered life possible by sending us His ongoing presence in the Person of the Holy Spirit. The term "Holy Spirit" comes from the Greek word *pneuma*, which means "breath" or "wind." As we receive the Holy Spirit the Father sends to us, we apprehend truth, sense evil and are guided to do what is right.

You will find Jesus' description of the Holy Spirit in John chapter 14: verses 16, 17 and 26. There you will meet Him as lifelong counselor, helper, companion, teacher and friend.

Don't expect the Holy Spirit to come with great fanfare or dazzling brilliance. He works quietly, never intruding. He always points to Jesus, never to Himself. When we are sensitive to His presence He whispers in our ear and tugs at our heart. He is committed to abide with us forever.

KEY VERSE: *"If I depart [to heaven] I will send Him to you" (Jesus' promise in John 16:7).*



DAY 10

THE RENEWED MIND

What does it mean to renew my mind?

If it hasn't happened already, you will find yourself struggling with wrong thoughts and ideas. I know. Though I've walked with Christ for many years, there are still times that I find myself wrestling with such attitudes as selfishness, pride and lack of trust.

How fortunate for us that Jesus Christ will help us change our thought life. That doesn't mean it's easy, but it is possible. The Apostle Paul describes the change process this way: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).

The Lord doesn't want you to set your mind aside when you come to Him. Just the opposite. He created your mind and wants it fully productive, but in the right way. He wants it renewed. Don't stop thinking, but start thinking and viewing things from His perspective.

A great way to begin is to meditate on the Scriptures. Take the verses mentioned so far in these studies, reflect on them, even memorize them. Scripture memorization is perhaps the most powerful way to discipline and renew your mind. Why not begin right now? Today's Key Verse (below) is a wonderful "mind-renewing" scripture. Repeat it often, making it your companion throughout this day.

KEY VERSE: *"Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things" (Philippians 4:8).*



DAY 11

LOVING OTHERS

Is it really possible to love others?

God's second great commandment is, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). (The first commandment is to love God – heart, mind, soul and strength.)

I find that loving others can be a difficult assignment, especially when the "others" have treated me badly—for example, those to whom I have loaned money and who have neither repaid the loan, nor have made any attempt to do so. You could be facing a far more difficult situation, such as an unfaithful marriage partner or an abusive parent. Loving such people may seem impossible.

There are two keys to our successfully loving others.

First, loving others is a requirement, not an option. We may not *feel* like loving someone who has deeply offended us. But God requires us to *decide* to forgive and love that person in spite of the offense. In my experience, feelings will eventually follow. But the starting point is always a decision—to forgive and to love.

Second, we are only truly able to love others based on God's love toward and through us. Imagine His love as an inexhaustible river of water flowing into us and out through us to others. He is the source. We are conduits. People we encounter are recipients—very possibly experiencing a quality of love they've never known.

Loving others is a privilege and responsibility that comes directly from God's heart.

KEY VERSE: *"Abound in love to one another"*
(1 Thessalonians 3:12).



DAY 12

LOVING OURSELVES

How do I love myself?

Here is the “surprise” from yesterday’s lesson: The reference point for loving others is to love—get ready—yourself! “You shall love your neighbor *as yourself*.” But it’s not easy.

Some confuse loving themselves with a chocolate binge or a designer watch they can’t afford, just to feel good! But rewards from self-indulgence can be fleeting.

Some have difficulty loving themselves because of intense feelings of inferiority: “I’ll never be like her!” “I can never measure up!” They compare themselves with others, a practice called “unwise” by the Apostle Paul (see 2 Corinthians 10:12).

Still others disparage themselves because of serious mistakes they have made, or sins that have held them captive. They’ve yet to discover God’s remedy, that He graciously releases us from the burdens of the past when we ask for and receive His forgiveness.

The key to loving yourself is to see yourself as Jesus sees you. You are of infinite worth to Him, precious in His sight, the object of His great love, filled with His Spirit, part of His body of believers, commissioned to fulfill the unique design He has for you. Take a moment to ponder the amazing creation you are in Christ!

As one who is intensely loved by God—unshackled from a poor self-image and baggage from the past—you can love yourself and then “love your neighbor as yourself.”

KEY VERSE: *“You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:13-14).*



DAY 13

OVERCOMING THE OLD NATURE

How do I handle tough times and temptations?

Does becoming a follower of Christ exempt you from difficulty? No. You are not miraculously whisked into a trouble-free glass bubble when you are born again. Rather, you become a battlefield, where you contend with ongoing temptations and daunting challenges.

Though we received a new nature at conversion, we inherited a nasty carryover from our former life called “the old nature.” That legacy from the past hangs around, throwing up roadblocks to the Christ-centered life. It’s not easy to disconnect from ideas and habits that have defined us for so long.

But there’s good news! Jesus took our old nature to the grave when He was crucified. The new nature He gave us in its place is intended to fully displace the old. Our job now is to be aggressive in making that happen. The Apostle Paul says, “Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:11 NIV). In other words, *render effective* what Christ did on your behalf.

In Galatians 5:16–17, we are challenged to live by the new nature. “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” That means you allow the Holy Spirit, now living in you, to shape your thoughts, guide your steps, govern your reactions and correct you when you stray. The old nature is real. But God enables and empowers you to walk in victory.

KEY VERSE: *“Take off the old self with its practices...and put on the new self” (Colossians 3:9-10 NIV).*



DAY 14

RESISTING THE DEVIL

How do I deal with the devil?

One day a heated argument broke out between two otherwise collegial senior managers at our company. What caused the outburst? I didn't have a clue!

That evening, as I read a book called *Dealing with the Devil*, it dawned on me that Satan, God's archenemy, could be stirring up trouble with our managers. The author used an analogy to describe the authority we have in Christ to make a difference: Suppose a person in street clothes is standing in a busy traffic intersection. He waves his arms wildly to stop oncoming traffic, but cars keep whizzing by. Then he makes one change. He puts on a policeman's uniform. Instantly drivers comply!

Here was my clue. If I were "clothed with Christ," I could influence spiritual traffic. So I "put on my uniform" and prayed in Jesus' name, taking authority over the troublesome unseen forces. To my amazement, the problem had evaporated by the next day.

The devil is a real adversary. Once a high-ranking angel, he rebelled and was evicted from heaven (see Isaiah 14:12). Though defeated by Jesus in His death on the Cross, Satan continues, by bluster and intimidation, to harass and deceive God's people. Jesus called him a thief who steals, kills and destroys.

What are we to do? The Bible says, "Resist him and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). In other words, put on the policeman's uniform!

KEY VERSE: *"I (the Lord) will contend with him who contends with you" (Isaiah 49:25).*



DAY 15

ABIDING: THE HEART OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

How do I stay close to Jesus?

If I could pinpoint my number one desire for you to take from this study, it would be this: Stay closely connected to Jesus. (The biblical term is “abide.”) Abide in Him. Though I struggle in this area, with a bad habit of “doing my own thing,” my lifetime goal is to grow as close to Jesus as I possibly can.

Abiding is more than gaining knowledge. We can know the foundations for our faith and yet not know Jesus. Abiding is more than doing good deeds. A close relationship with Jesus is our highest priority. Good works will follow.

Jesus used a powerful metaphor to describe the relationship He desires with us: “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Here is the reality: We “branches” are completely dependent on Jesus, the “vine,” for support, vitality and productivity. Abiding applies to all aspects of life—including our thought lives, finances and relationships. We abide as we *trust* Jesus completely, *speak* with Him as a friend, and *enjoy His presence*, dwelling securely in His love, care and protection.

Be cautious of the trap that you have to *do* something first, before you can “abide.” Abiding is *now*, not future. Make staying close to Jesus your number one goal. Abide in Him!

KEY VERSE: “*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you*” (James 4:8).



DAY 16

ENJOYING THE LORD

Is there a central goal to life?

Many people are hindered from having a joyful relationship with the Lord because they see that relationship as one of *duty* rather than *delight*. But how does the Lord view the bond between us?

“The LORD your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing” (Zephaniah 3:17). Can you picture your heavenly Father rejoicing and singing as He looks upon you?

The Westminster Catechism asks: “What is the chief end of man?” The inspired answer: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.”

A.W. Tozer, in *The Pursuit of God*, says, “God formed us for His pleasure...that we as well as He can in divine communion enjoy the sweet and mysterious mingling of kindred personalities. He meant us to see Him and live with Him and draw our life from His smile.”

Here are a few pathways to enjoying the Lord:

- See Him in everyday things, including the beauty of His creation and significance of every individual.
- Regard boundaries He sets, such as His commandments, for your good, not to your detriment.
- Express to Him with your whole heart your worship, thanks and praise.

Try recalibrating with this perspective. You will begin enjoying the Lord as never before.

KEY VERSE: *“You will show me the path of life; in Your Presence is fullness of joy. At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11).*



DAY 17

TRUTH: THE KEY TO FREEDOM

Why does truth matter?

Imagine chatting with the Apostle Paul over a good cup of coffee. You ask, “Paul, what drives you to try to reach everyone with the gospel?”

He might say, “To make known the truth that there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (see 1 Timothy 2:5).

His answer is profound, and basic to our beliefs. There aren’t multiple gods, but one. And there’s only one way to God—through Jesus Christ, who said, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). The essence of truth is the Lord Himself.

Why must we contend for the truth?

- Truth *frees* us. Jesus said, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).
- Truth *guides* us. “When He, the [Holy] Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13).
- Truth *guards* us. When we “receive the love of the truth,” we arm ourselves against the insidious power of deception (see 2 Thessalonians 2:10 and Matthew 24:4).

Are you a high school student? You know lying and cheating are art forms. Are you in college? Objective truth is ridiculed on today’s campuses. Are you in business? Too often, truth is abandoned for expediency and financial gain.

Truth matters. God calls on us as believers to know and hold fast to the truth, no matter the cost.

KEY VERSE: “*Buy the truth and do not sell it*” (Proverbs 23:23).



DAY 18

WORKERS WITH HIM

What work does God want me to do?

Do you think of God as alive, active and engaged? Remarkably, the “gods” in almost every non-Christian religion are passive, abstract or mere historical figures.

Jesus said, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working” (John 5:17). God did not simply create the universe with an explosive burst of divine energy, then back off to let it run on its own. Rather, He is intimately involved, in us, around us, in every situation and circumstance.

If we don’t recognize God is at work, we risk doing, in our own strength, that which He wants to do through us. The two approaches are very different.

Joining God in *His* work is an extraordinary privilege. He leads, and as His co-worker, you follow. Your every sense becomes alert to His activity. Nothing is random. Everything is part of a larger design. For example:

- You notice the downcast face of a neighbor who has recently lost a loved one, and you extend God’s comfort and compassion.
- You miss an airline flight, and later discover God had a purpose in your being delayed.

Think about your current situation—as a student or as you begin your work career or start a family. Are you changing jobs or planning to retire? You’re not where you are by accident. Adjust your focus away from your agenda to *God’s* by asking, “Where are *You* working, and how can I join *You* in *Your* work?”

KEY VERSE: *We are “...workers together with Him” (2 Corinthians 6:1).*



DAY 19

ASSEMBLING TOGETHER

Who has God linked me with?

Next to nurturing a close personal relationship with the Lord, make it a priority to join with other believers.

Groups of believers, or “churches,” come in many packages. They range from small clusters who gather secretly in regions where such practices are forbidden, to “mega-churches” of tens of thousands of Christians. Vital churches that are healthy, vibrant and strategic are central to God’s purposes for these days.

Look for a church that reflects patterns and practices followed by New Testament gatherings as described in Acts 2:42. Four components fueled their rapid growth and stunning impact:

- *Teaching* kept them rooted in “sound doctrine.”
- *Fellowship* kindled friendship, worship, mutual encouragement and boldness.
- *Breaking bread* meant having meals together in homes.
- *Prayers* reflected their dependence on God for wisdom, guidance and strength.

What is your next step for Christian fellowship? You can ask God to bring you together with His choice of individuals and groups. Size isn’t important, but sound doctrine and teaching are.

Be open to unconventional approaches. For many years our family met in homes with several other families. Our children loved these gatherings, structured around the approach of the early church noted above. Today, throughout the world, many new churches are forming to meet the wide-ranging needs of new believers. One might be just right for you.

KEY VERSE: “...not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together” (*Hebrews 10:25*).



DAY 20

WORSHIP

Note: Days 20 & 21 are written by Wendy Beckett, my precious wife since 1961.

Why is it so important for me to praise and worship Jesus?

When believers praise Jesus and sing to Him, is it because God, the King of the universe, needs the worship of human beings? Not really, although we can be sure God delights in our worship. Actually, I find that praise and worship enable me to lift my thoughts from myself to my Savior, Friend and Lord.

When we meditate on His goodness, His amazing love, His sacrificial death for us and His great power in our lives, our natural response is praise and worship. Thankfulness spontaneously wells up within us.

David, Israel's greatest king, was a worshiper. The Psalms are full of his overflowing heart of thanksgiving and love to the Lord.

- Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever (Psalm 107:1).
- Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised (Psalm 48:1).
- The Lord lives! Blessed be my Rock! Let the God of my salvation be exalted (Psalm 18:46).

As you go about your daily activities, praise Him for who He is. Tell Him you love Him. Some days you won't feel so thankful, but the more you praise Him throughout the day, the more you will sense His joy and see things from His perspective. Your daily life will take on a whole new meaning.

KEY VERSE: *“Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name!” (Psalm 103:1).*



DAY 21

PRAYER

How do I communicate with my Father in heaven?

What a privilege to actually speak personally with the Lord of all heaven and earth at any moment!

Jesus' disciples observed how much time He spent with His heavenly Father. One day they asked, "Can You teach us to pray?"

His response, often called "The Lord's Prayer," in Matthew 6:9–13 is a model. It focuses our attention on Him. It brings to Him our needs for provision, forgiveness and protection, and ends with praise.

Speak with Jesus as your best friend. Begin thanking and praising Him for His great love for you. Then tell Him your concerns. You can share anything with Him. He already knows, so don't worry about shocking Him.

Many of David's psalms are cries for help in times of trouble. In Psalms 17, 28, 61, 64, 70 and 86, David calls out to the Lord to hear and protect him.

When you know you have disappointed the Lord, come to Him immediately and ask for forgiveness. He will forgive, encourage, strengthen and bring clarity to your problems.

Remember, prayer is continual conversation with the One you are learning to love and trust. Just looking up into the sky and smiling at Him or giving your own hand a squeeze—as if holding the Lord's hand—can immediately bring you into the closeness you need with Him.

KEY VERSE: *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer...with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6).*



DAY 22

TEMPTATION

Why do I keep having these thoughts?

A tenacious and destructive force is at work in the life of every believer. Temptation is the continuing effect and downward pull of our former life, with all its bad habits. Its goal is to hinder our close walk with the Lord. Temptation in itself is not fatal. But yielding to it can have deep and lasting consequences. Our best counter-strategy is early detection and bold corrective action.

Christians are not immune to evil thoughts and behaviors. In fact, because believers are of such value to the Lord, we can become even greater targets than non-believers. Our adversary is cunning and finds all kinds of ways to tempt us. The Apostle John urged that we carefully guard ourselves in three areas: "...the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" (see 1 John 2:16).

- Lust of the flesh might involve self-indulgence, obsessive focus on one's body or impure sexual thoughts.
- Lust of the eyes refers to what we illicitly crave. Be careful what you let your eyes see!
- Pride of life manifests in self-promotion, selfish ambition and advancement at the expense of others.

Don't try to battle temptation on your own. The next time you are tempted, call out to the Lord for help, for "He is able to aid those who are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18). With each victory you gain greater strength. God is faithful and *will* make a way of escape (see 1 Corinthians 10:13).

KEY VERSE: *"The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations" (2 Peter 2:9).*



DAY 23

TRUSTING GOD FOR THE FUTURE

Is my future safe in His hands?

When Wendy and I were beginning our family, we spent long hours talking about what kind of world our children would encounter. While we still wonder, we're confident in this: The future is safely in God's hands. We can trust Him, no matter what happens.

Historical perspective is an important backdrop to trusting God. The Bible describes history as having a beginning and an end. It is linear, not circular, as some religions contend, and is defined by three major markers:

- *Creation.* The Bible's opening phrase is, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Jesus was present: "He was in the beginning with God" (John 1:2).
- *Redemption and Restoration.* The birth, death and resurrection of Jesus fulfilled God's plan for our restored relationship with Him. This became the pivot point of all history.
- *Consummation.* The Bible describes an ultimate "summing up," when God will "gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him" (Ephesians 1:10).

We are now in the period leading up to the consummation. Each person (including *you!*) and each event has a purpose, whether a birth, a death, a scientific discovery or even a terrible storm. It is no time to be passive but rather to be watchful, engaged and fully trusting God in all things as He writes the glorious final chapter (see Matthew 24:42).

KEY VERSE: *"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End" (Revelation 21:6).*



DAY 24

AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE

How do I keep my focus on that which is lasting and most important?

It is hard for us, whether we are studying for an exam, changing the baby's diaper or closing a business deal, to give much thought to eternity. Most of the time, our focus is on doing the next thing. But Scripture reminds us: "(God) has also set eternity in the hearts of men" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Something deep within us calls out to understand that which is lasting and most important.

The Bible is our reliable guide to understanding the eternal, assuring the believer in Jesus Christ that the promise of everlasting life is as certain as the reality of this life. The Apostle Paul understood that we are designed for eternity: "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body" (Philippians 3:20–21).

Does such a perspective affect our lives here on earth? Indeed it does! Confidence in God's ultimate purposes produces true hope, giving us the stamina to persevere, whatever the trial. In comparison to eternity, our day-to-day lives are but a moment, a vapor.

We can say, with the Apostle Paul, "I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day" (2 Timothy 1:12 NIV).

KEY VERSE: *"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory"*
(2 Corinthians 4:17).



DAY 25

CALLING

How can I serve God in my work?

Our primary calling is always to Christ. Os Guinness in *The Call* says, “First and foremost we are called to Someone (God), not to something...or to somewhere.” But he adds that God also calls us vocationally. His plan for us includes our work.

As a young believer I thought that to fully serve God I had to go into some type of “full-time” Christian work. Yet my interests and background pointed toward engineering and business. When I asked the Lord for guidance, I sensed Him saying, “John, I’ve called you to business. Do it with all your heart.”

Many Christians struggle to know their calling. Our culture incorrectly differentiates between “sacred” and “secular,” asserting that sacred activities are nobler. Neither Jesus nor His followers held this view. A. W. Tozer, in *The Pursuit of God*, says, “The sacred-secular antithesis has no foundation in the New Testament.”

God calls people to many honorable endeavors—from education to engineering, from farming to factory work, from raising children to running a company. The challenge is to keep our activities in *harmony* with God’s design, rather than in *opposition* to that design.

To gain vocational clarity, consider: What are my talents? What do I enjoy? How have my education and experiences equipped me? Where do I sense God’s pleasure? Work goes beyond the paycheck. Find where God has called you, and do it to the best of your ability.

KEY VERSE: “*And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men*” (Colossians 3:23).



DAY 26

IN, BUT NOT OF

*How do I maintain my equilibrium
in daily living?*

One of the great challenges of the Christian life is to relate to the world around us, especially in situations where co-workers and friends behave in ways that are alien to Christian norms. As we interact with others, we can err in two ways:

One is to *isolate*, to just stay to ourselves. But what if our isolation robs others of the godly influence we can have in their lives? Could we be the only “bible” they are reading?

The other error is to *assimilate*, to be just like those around us. The Bible instructs us to stand apart on matters that are non-negotiable, yet remain flexible and accessible in ways that engage us with others (see Malachi 3:18, 1 Corinthians 9:19–22).

Jesus modeled a balanced approach. He neither isolated nor assimilated. He related to people where they were, yet without compromise.

Billy Graham said we should be like the Gulf Stream as it flows through the chilly waters of the Atlantic: “The Gulf Stream is in the ocean, and yet it is not a part of it. Believers are in the world, and yet they must not be absorbed by it.” Thus, we are to retain our identity and purpose, but also affect the surrounding climate. We are to be *in* the world but not *of* it.

KEY VERSE: *“They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. As you sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world” (John 17:16, 18).*



DAY 27

WHEN WE STUMBLE

How do I get back up after I fall?

A critical point in your spiritual life is when you stumble. It seems to happen when you least suspect. You're making progress in your growth, such as overcoming bad habits, then, boom! Without warning, you do something "really stupid," such as suddenly bursting into anger or insulting your best friend.

What we do immediately after we fall is critical. If we're not careful, we can, out of guilt or shame, draw away from the Lord. "I've blown it. I'm a failure." Or we may try to justify ourselves: "He deserved my tongue-lashing!" The farther we go down this path, the more difficult it is to recover.

The other path, one of forgiveness, works just the opposite, enabling you to grow even closer to God. The key is to come to Him quickly, in complete honesty about what you've done, and ask His forgiveness. You can't surprise Him or shock Him. He knows everything already—even what you've been thinking. What is God's response? "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). What a wonderful promise!

Take the initiative. Come each time you stumble, whether your failure was large or small. As you do, you will find that your confidence in His love and full provision for you grows each day.

KEY VERSE: *"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him" (2 Peter 1:3 NIV).*



DAY 28

NEAR THE CROSS

Why is the Cross so vital to me?

As our studies draw to a close, I want to encourage you to live near the Cross. This may seem strange, for a horrific death took place at the Cross and nearly everyone abandoned Jesus. But, the nearer we are to the Cross, the closer we are to a place of victory (1 Corinthians 15:54).

At the Cross:

- Jesus was *punished* that we might be *forgiven* (Isaiah 53:4–5).
- Jesus was *wounded* that we might be *healed* (Isaiah 53:4–5).
- Jesus suffered *death* that we might be given *new life* (Hebrews 2:9, Romans 6:4).
- Jesus took our *poverty* that we might have *abundance* (2 Corinthians 8:9).
- Jesus took our *rejection* that we might receive the Father's *acceptance* (Ephesians 1:5–6).
- Jesus was made a *curse* that we might enter into *blessing* (Galatians 3:13–14).

Pause and reflect on these mighty transformational exchanges and how they may apply in your life. For example, you may feel you are cursed. At the Cross, Jesus actually became a curse for you so you could enter into blessing. Do you struggle with rejection? At the Cross, you receive Jesus' acceptance, even with all you've ever done wrong, or will do wrong in the future.

The Apostle Paul underscored the power of the Cross when he said, "May I never boast except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14). At the Cross you are released from great, unrelenting burdens. Live near the Cross. It is your gateway to freedom.

KEY VERSE: *"If we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him" (Romans 6:8).*



DAY 29

NEXT STEPS

What do I do next?

Recently I heard an elderly Christian woman wistfully say, “I’m not even close to where I want to be in my prayer life.” This was not false humility. This was the heart-cry of one who yearns to know more and more of Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul was also in his closing years when he said, with similar passion, “I want to *know* Christ.” He reminds us of an athlete straining toward the finish line as he continues: “Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:10, 13–14).

T. Austin-Sparks, reflecting on the vastness of Christ, said, “The effect of the Holy Spirit’s work in us is to bring us to the shore of a mighty ocean which reaches far, far beyond our range, and concerning which we feel—Oh, the depths, the fullness, of Christ! If we live as long as ever man lived, we shall still be only on the fringe of this vast fullness that Christ is” (Austin-Sparks, *The School of Christ*).

This study will end tomorrow. Congratulations! You’ve stayed the course for 30 days! I urge you to press on and keep growing, for you’ve only scratched the surface. *There is so much more!* And you have the capacity to receive so much more.

Knowing Christ is a lifelong pursuit!

KEY VERSE: “*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out*” (Romans 11:33).



DAY 30

BEARERS OF LIGHT

How can I most effectively help others?

As I prepare to say “goodbye,” I am deeply grateful you are building a solid spiritual foundation for your life. When you came to Christ, you were rescued from darkness and immersed into the light of Christ. The Apostle Peter says, “(He) called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

Now I encourage you to radiate the light you have received into the lives of others. Here is a promise Jesus gave to a woman caught in the darkness of moral sin: “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12).

Throughout the Bible, light is a central theme and a powerful metaphor. It is always set in contrast to darkness. In fact, light extinguishes darkness. You may have noticed how a single candle illuminates everything in an otherwise dark room. Even these studies, as they go out into a dark, sin-saturated world, are a form of light challenging the darkness.

Never underestimate the ways you can bear light in your circles of influence, with family members, friends, fellow students or co-workers. And remember, it’s not *your* light but the light of Christ shining through you.

I close with the charge Jesus gave His followers: “*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in heaven*” (Matthew 5:16).

I am thankful for you and honored the Lord has enabled us to become acquainted.

May God bless and keep you always.

John Beckett

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



John D. Beckett was born and grew up in Elyria, Ohio. He graduated from M.I.T. in 1960, after which he worked as an engineer in the aerospace industry.

In 1963 he joined his father's small manufacturing business, and became president in 1965 upon the death of his father. The company has grown to become a worldwide leader in producing engineered components for residential and commercial heating. The company, with its affiliates, employs some 650 people.

Mr. Beckett is a founding board member of The King's College in New York City, and serves on the board of Cru (Campus Crusade for Christ, International).

His first book, *Loving Monday: Succeeding in Business Without Selling Your Soul*, was published in 1998, and is now available in nineteen languages. His second book, *Mastering Monday: A Practical Guide to Integrating Faith and Work*, was released in 2006.

Mr. Beckett received honorary Doctor of Laws degrees from Spring Arbor University in 2002 and The King's College in 2008. He has also been named "Christian Businessman of the Year" by the Christian Broadcasting network (1999) and manufacturing "Entrepreneur of the Year" by Ernst & Young (2003.)

He resides in Elyria, Ohio with his wife, Wendy, to whom he has been married since 1961. They have six children and seventeen grandchildren.

