

VISION

DEVOTIONAL

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1 John 2:14 - I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.

Day 1 - Unhack and Unpack

The top downloaded apps for our generation are: Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok and BeReal. The average time Gen Z spends on their phones is 6 hours and 5 mins. Millennials aren't much better. Top apps downloaded are: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and TikTok. On average, millennials spend 4 hours and 36 mins on their phones daily.

Technology is an integrated part of our lives. It is a great tool for keeping up with our friends and loved ones. It can help us learn new things and it can help us stay more connected with people around the world. However, we are starting to recognize the dangers of excessive use:

1. It can release unhealthy amounts of dopamine in the brain. This can create cycles of addiction and false affirmation that need to be broken.
2. It can cause us to consistently compare our lives to others and can lead to anxiety and FOMO (fear of missing out).
3. Social media algorithms are not designed to give us truth but to advertise to us. They are designed to push us to content that we most "like." We can scroll our timeline and have a skewed perception of truth because we only see one thing.

Action: Here are some things that we can do to crack the code and unhack our lives:

- Don't start or end your day on your phone. Give yourself an hour to begin and an hour to end. If you use your phone, let it be for a worship playlist or to listen to your bible app.
- Set time-limits on your app. For Apple devices: **Go to Settings > Screen Time. Tap App Limits, then tap Add Limit.**
- Be stingy with your likes. You may think that a like is harmless, but "likes" equal attention and attention equals payment. Your likes are like currency in the attention economy. When you hit like or share you're saying that you think someone should be paid for this post. Before you hit like or share, ask yourself if this is something that you want promoted.
- Become an Ambassador. Taking breaks doesn't mean that you should leave social media altogether. Wherever people are, is a mission field. Create content that will draw others to Christ's love by being; creative, funny, or passionate about issues that matter. Your online activity is trackable. So, act like the Holy Spirit is tracking it as well.

Day 2 - Finding My Crew

God has called us to live in community. Community helps us benefit from the strengths of others while having someone who can watch our blindside. What does your crew look like? Teamwork is essential in the sport of rowing. The sport requires all rowers to coordinate their strokes perfectly to ensure the boat moves quickly through the water. The coxswain (leader) is responsible for commanding the rowers' speed and direction. The more coordinated the team, the quicker they travel.

Jesus is like our coxswain. He's at the head of the boat, ensuring that we finish our race well. What does your crew look like? Are your closest friends rowing in the same direction? Instead of focusing on the "rizz"... maybe we should take a look at their "row." Here are some ways to identify good crew members:

Scripture:

- They pray for me- (Find Galatians 6:1 in your bible and highlight it).
- I can be Transparent. (Find James 5:1 in your bible and highlight it).
- They are spiritual. (Find 2 Corinthians 6:14 in your bible and highlight it).

Prayer Point: Father, I recognize that I am not called to walk alone. Help me to find a group of people who I can be transparent with, pray with, and who are being led by your spirit. Disconnect me from anyone and anything that is distracting me from pursuing your way and will for my life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Action: List three (3) members of your crew and how you're planning to pray for them.

Day 3 - Losing Some Weight

Remember COVID-19? It seems like so long ago, right? We can still see the effects of COVID in our society today. The CDC identified being overweight as a risk factor that increased the likelihood of severe illness. Those who had excess weight could experience more complications with breathing and inflammation.

Are you carrying extra weight? Not just physically. Working out and eating better can help us knock off a few pounds. We're talking about the weight that everyone can't always see. Are you aware that carrying around added worry, fear, and carnality (worldly desires) can do more damage to your soul than excess weight does to your body? These kinds of weights make us more susceptible to attacks from the enemy, and keep us from resting in God's grace. Here are some ways that we can WORK OUT our salvation so that we are more FIT for God's service:

Scripture:

- Weight 1: Worry (Proverbs 12:25 "Worry weighs a person down; an encouraging word cheers a person up.")

Work out: Prayer and Thanks. Find Philippians 4:6-8 and highlight it.

Weight 2: Heaviness

- **Work Out: Praise.** Find Isaiah 61:3. Then Put on your favorite praise playlist. Sing Loudly. Dance if it gets good to you!

Weight 3: Temptation

- **Work Out:** Build strength through resistance. When you resist temptation, you build strength in the Lord. Find James 4:7 in your bible and highlight it.

Pray this prayer: Father, I desire to be fit for the kingdom. Help me to lay aside every weight that trips me up, according to Hebrews 12:2. I repent of trying to run my life for myself. I believe that your joy is my strength and I give your Spirit permission to coach me through what I need to lay down. In Jesus' name, amen.

Action: Is the Holy Spirit leading you to lay something down? Write it down here.

Day 4 - Strength through Focus

Do you wear glasses or contacts? If you don't, then maybe someone in your family does. How hard is it to see without them? In the same way, without God's word, none of us can see life clearly. God's word is like a prescription lens that helps us see things with a renewed perspective.

Some of us are *nearsighted* - we are so focused on what is right in front of us that we cannot see things in the distance. This causes us to only focus all of our energy on right now, without regard for things to come. Sometimes the decisions that we make are shortsighted and we do not think about how it will impact our future.

Some of us are *farsighted* - we can see things far away, but cannot see things close up. This can cause us to miss moments to be present and obey God right now. Or we can easily see other's faults and can't see our own shortcomings.

Some of us have *astigmatism* - this means that we're not able to perceive things accurately in the light. This is a worldly perspective that is distracting us from the truth.

Sometimes when we turn the light on in a dark room everything looks blurry and it takes time for our eyes to adjust. The glory of Jesus Christ is brighter than looking at the sun. But his Word is like a fresh pair of glasses that helps correct our vision so that we will have a successful path.

Scripture: Here are a few verses to look up and highlight about focusing on the things of God: (Psalm 119:105. John 8:12. Psalm 119:9-18, 1 Thessalonians 5:5-11, James 1:23, Matthew 7:3-5)

Action: Write down all the things that have been distracting you from focusing on Jesus. Pray that God will remove those distractions and that your focus will be set on Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, I recognize that I don't always see things the way that I should. Open my eyes to help me see how much I need you. Give me a greater hunger for your word and a better understanding of what I read. I believe that your word is a mirror and a light. Help me to remove the logs from my eye first so that I can help others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 5 - Strength to Surrender. I'm ALL IN

Scripture: Matthew 16:24 - Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

In 2016, Adam Walker was competing in an endurance swimming event when he found himself stranded in the ocean after a navigation error left him separated from his support boat. Walker was drifting in the water for over 20 hours. He was eventually spotted by a rescue boat. He survived because he was able to float for much longer than he was able to swim.

Did you know that when you were a baby you had an innate ability called “dive reflex.” This causes babies to have a more natural ability to float in the water. As we get older, it’s tougher for us to do this and we have to relearn how to float by relaxing and remaining still. It is difficult because it is against our natural instincts.

In the same way that it takes total trust for us to float, we have to totally surrender to Christ if we want to live strong in him. Just like floating requires us to turn over, so does surrender.

FYI: Did you know that it’s easier to float in Saltwater vs Freshwater? Some bodies of water are so salty that even the worst swimmers can dive in without fear. The salt concentration keeps them afloat. Jesus calls us, “the salt of the earth.” The more we surrender to him, the more salty our life becomes. So while your homies are busy trying to stay fresh...we’re trying to get more salty.

Action. Take a moment. What do you need to turn over to Christ for you to be all in? Use the lines after the prayer to write what you need to turn over.

Prayer: Lord, I admit that it is not easy to fully surrender. It is natural for me to run my life the way I see fit. I invite the Holy Spirit to reveal the areas in my life that I am not trusting your grace. I surrender my heart, will and emotions to your leading. Thank you for working with me through my trust issues. Help me to see that my strengths are weakness when compared to your strength. In Jesus name, Amen.

Day 6 - Young and Rare

On February 8, 2023 a routine chapel service sparked a revival that shut down the city. Students at Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky continued to worship, pray and testify for two straight weeks nonstop. This was entirely student led. They did not feature any well-known pastors, speakers, singers or political figures. The news of the “Asbury Revival” started spreading on social media and people from all over the nation came to Wilmore, Kentucky to pray and worship God. The influx of visitors quickly overwhelmed the town of Wilmore which had to shut down the city because their facilities were being overfilled. The students of Asbury inspired college and high school students across the nation to hold nights of worship, prayer, and repentance.

This is not the first time this has happened. God has used young people in every generation to speak prophetically to the culture since the days of the New Testament. Some have even given their lives for the name of Jesus. The “Jesus Movement” of the 1960s saw young hippies turn away from drugs and promiscuity toward radical love and obedience to Christ. God has also used youth and college revivals in the 80s, 90s and 2000s to build his kingdom. Is there anyone from your generation that hears the Lord’s call?

The Barna Group interviewed 26,000 teenagers in 26 countries and found that 9 out of 10 church affiliated young people are not practicing disciples of Christ. That means that 90% of church experienced young people are wasting their life on distractions.

Do you think that you’re too young? Do you feel like you have to wait until you’re older before God can use you? Are you assuming that you have time? Young people die too. God is calling you to make an impact TODAY.

Scripture: Here are a few scriptures to look up

- Don’t say you’re too young - Find and Highlight (Jeremiah 1:7-8)
- Remember the Lord - Find and highlight (Ecclesiastes 12:1)
- Set an example - Find and highlight (1 Timothy 4:12)
- Honor your parents/guardian - Find and Highlight (Ephesians 6:2-3)
- Obey God’s word - Find and Highlight (Psalm 119:9)

Prayer: Lord, you deserve my strength. Help me to see my youth as a gift instead of a curse. Help me to honor my parents and be an example to my generation. Use my personality and my creativity to help others experience Jesus’ love. Forgive me for wasting time and help me be a good steward. Holy Spirit, I want to know your voice. Speak Lord, your servant is listening. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Y&S 14 Day Devotional

Day 7 - Power in Sexual Purity

Sex. Let's talk about it. Our generation is bombarded with images and ideas that are designed to destroy our soul and pervert God's purpose for sex. Sex is not evil. Sex is not satanic. Sex is a gift from God that must be enjoyed when a man and a woman are in covenant (marriage). Pastor Otis Lockett Jr. once stated: "Sex is too powerful to be done outside of marriage."

We enjoy the benefits of using electricity in our home. We plug up appliances, video games, and iPads to electrical outlets that keep us safe from electrocution. Sex can be thought of like electricity. It serves a healthy purpose when it is used the right way. But without those barriers, electricity can kill you.

It is important for us to exercise God's wisdom with how we steward our sexual desires. We should ask ourselves "who is being impacted?" What if you knew that by viewing pornography, you were continuing the practice of sex trafficking. What if you knew that by having sex outside of marriage that you were destroying your soul? What if you were aware that by having multiple partners that you were abusing your own self emotionally and attracting demonic access to your life? There is always a victim. And it's always you.

Being single is not a curse. We can give ourselves more freely to the work of the Lord and use our energy to live in ways that promote radical change. We can seek out godly relationships that are pure and plutonic that encourage us to give ourselves to Christ. Here are some verses we can practice that will help us live victoriously in our bodies.

Scripture: Your body is a temple: Find 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 in your bible and highlight it. Find your exit: Find 1 Corinthians 10:13 and highlight it so that you can escape temptation. Set your mind on the right things: Highlight Philippians 4:8 to see what we should think about.

Actions: Our flesh is susceptible to temptation when we are restless in our faith. Here are some good questions that help us take inventory of our current mindset so that we can glorify God: What efforts do I believe that I should be giving my life to while I'm not married? How am I stewarding my physical and emotional health? What do I feel I'm called to do that I'm not currently doing? Am I active in my local church? Are my relationships encouraging me to be pure? Is social media distracting me? Do I need to get an accountability partner?

Prayer: Lord, I recognize that my body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. I desire to present my body as a holy vessel. Please forgive me for any and all sexual sin that I have committed. As I believe that I am forgiven, I release and forgive all sexual sin that has been done to me. Help me to submit my desires to you and deliver me from the shame of any past mistakes. I believe that in Christ, I am a new creation and that your Spirit has made me new. I commit myself to a life of sexual purity and give my body to the service of the Lord, Jesus Christ in whatever state I'm in. Thank you for your freedom!

Day 8 - Humility Hits Hard

In Dr. Craig Keener’s book, “Miracles Today,” he tracks down many stories of verified miracles that have happened around the world. These accounts have been verified either by doctors or reported in articles. This story was first told to him by a friend from while he was studying at Duke University. He received photographs from the family who it happened to:

“In 1949, Elouise Jordan (Memphis) suffered for many years from throat cancer before finally dying. Learning of her death, her daughter left work and arrived at Elouise’s home in time to see the hearse and a crowd gathering. Yet, she witnessed something utterly unexpected: her mother was now not only alive but celebrating. Their pastor, Bishop C.H Mason, had prayed over her body. Elouise was not only alive, but also completely healed of throat cancer, and lived a healthy life for another thirty-three more years.”

Bishop Mason was a man committed to prayer and fasting, living a life under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The world prioritizes being the strongest, the wealthiest, or the most popular. But the greatest power is available to the person who submits himself in service to God.

Scripture: Acts 10:38 says “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil because God was with Him.” When we humble ourselves, we make ourselves more available for the Holy Spirit to use us in miraculous ways. A stronger connection with the Holy Spirit helps us connect others with the kingdom of God.

Action: How do I humble myself?

- Deny yourself - Find Matthew 16:24 in your bible and highlight it.
- Fasting and Prayer - Find these passages in your bible and highlight them: (Isaiah 58:6-9, Matthew 6:16-18)
- Put others first - Find these verses in your bible and highlight them: (Philippians 2:3, James 4:6-7)

Prayer: Holy Spirit, please show me the areas in my life where I should humble myself. I repent for the ways that I have tried to run my own life. Reveal to me the thoughts and attitudes that are arrogant, prideful, and anxious. Help me to act and speak in ways that will draw others to Christ. I desire for you to get the most glory out of my life. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Day 9 - Weary Pursuits

Do you enjoy the Olympics? Do you know how much preparation it takes to qualify for the Olympics? Many athletes begin training at a very young age. Gymnasts and swimmers often start rigorous training as early as 5-7 years old. They continue training for over a decade before they reach Olympic level competition. These athletes may train 4-6 hours daily with strict diets. They work with coaches, nutritionists, and physiotherapists to maintain their skills at the highest level.

At 25 years of age, Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone broke her own world record for the 6th time to win the Olympic Gold in 400m Hurdles, running 50.37. This is a truly incredible accomplishment in the sports world. She worked for years on her craft and has catapulted herself into elite company.

The Bible says that her gold medals are corruptible (having the ability to be “corrupted,” “disintegrated,” “rotten,” “degraded”). Can you imagine working your entire life for something that will end up being worthless? Yet Sydney believes that her success is for the purpose of glorifying God.

After breaking her own record she stated: “My identity is found in Christ and so everything else flows from that,” McLaughlin-Levrone said. “Being able to have a firm foundation in my faith allows me to run freely in the race that God has set out for me.”

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:24 “Don’t you know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable crown, but we do it for an incorruptible crown. So I do not run aimlessly: I do not box as beating the air.”

Can you imagine spending all of your life pursuing something that amounted to nothing at the end? God is pleased when we achieve great things. We glorify him when we give our best, but if our achievements are not tools of worship, then they become idols. An idol is anything that takes the place of God in our life. An idol can be a person. An idol could be a job. An idol could be trusting in our own ability or the pursuit of our own happiness.

Action: Here are some verses to help us have the right mindset:

- *Recognize* that your worth is already established: Find these verses and highlight them - (Psalms 139:13-14) (Romans 5:8)
- *Understand* your works do not make you more valuable: Find and highlight these verses - (Isaiah 64:6) (Ephesians 2:8-9)
- *Offer* your best work as worship: Find this verse and highlight it - (Colossians 3:17)
- *Stop* comparing yourself: Find and highlight - (Galatians 6:4)

Prayer: Lord, I recognize my weary pursuits have left me burned out and unsatisfied. Help me to find my joy and satisfaction in your presence. I lay down all of my achievements at your feet. Heal my broken places and fill my emptiness. Help me to see my gifts as instruments of worship instead of a metric of personal worth. I believe that you love me and have made me to give you maximum glory. Help me to run my race with patience and see you as my reward. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Day 10 - Power of Patience

I want you to imagine that you and a friend are planning to take a trip to Detroit, Michigan to hear one of your favorite Gospel groups in concert. You are both leaving from Charlotte, NC but they have decided that they don't like waiting in crowded airports. Your flight leaves tomorrow, but you are expecting some delays. Because your friend doesn't want to wait, they decide that they want to start walking. Do you follow them or do you wait on your flight?

I know that this sounds extreme, but this is exactly what it's like when we try to get to God ordained places in our own strength. The distance between Charlotte and Detroit is about 700 miles. It would take the average person about 27 days to walk to Detroit if they walked 8 hours a day. A flight to Detroit would take about 2 hours. If you were stranded in the airport for 10 days and your friend started walking 10 days before your travel date, it would still be better if they had waited.

The likelihood of your friend making it to Detroit by foot is lower than yours because of exhaustion, discouragement, or distractions along the way. This illustrates to us that waiting on God is actually the shortest route to our destination. When we start moving in our strength, we risk exhaustion, discouragement and an early quit. The next time the enemy tries to get you to walk things out on your own, envision your foolish friend who grabbed their bags and left Jesus Airlines because they got tired of waiting on your flight. Check out these verses that show us the power of patience.

Scripture/Action:

Waiting *renews* strength (Highlight Isaiah 40:31)

Waiting *shows* expectation (Find and highlight James 5:7)

Waiting *develops* character (Find and highlight James 1:4-8)

Waiting *produces* fruit (Find and highlight Galatians 5:22-23)

Prayer: Lord, I struggle with patience. But I recognize that you have been patient with me. Help me to trust that your will is like advanced technology. While I wait on you, help me to find joy in knowing that you have an expected end for me. I do not want to desire to be any place, or have anything prematurely. Turn my anxiousness into anticipation. Please help me develop patience as a fruit of the Spirit in my life. While I wait, I will praise you! Thank you Jesus!

Day 11 - Strong in Trials

Life can catch us off guard sometimes. Have you ever done all the right things and it seemed like things just aren't working out? We regularly see on the news and on our timeline that bad things happen to people who we believe do not deserve. God's word says that we should not be surprised when we experience trials and catastrophe. Sin has not just broken our personal relationship with God, it has separated our world from God's perfect justice and righteousness.

God has answered our pain by sending Jesus who can identify with our pain. None of us have been perfect, but Jesus was. He knows what it's like to experience pain undeservedly.

Scripture: Hebrews 4:14-15 CEV

“Jesus understands every weakness of ours, because he was tempted in every way that we are. But he did not sin! So whenever we are in need, we should come bravely before the throne of our merciful God. There we will be treated with undeserved grace, and we will find help.”

Instead of taking pain out of the world, Jesus experienced it like we do and conquered it. He has not taken us out of the world, either. He has left us here to glorify him by how we respond to painful situations. Jesus Christ empowers us to endure trials and even treat our worst enemies with love. What makes a Christian different is not that we don't face tough times. The difference in our life is that God can use any and everything in our life to bring him glory. Even the ugly stuff. Here are some verses for you to check out.

- Don't be surprised (Highlight 1 Peter 4:12-13)
- Believe you are blessed (Highlight Matthew 5:11-13)
- Know that God is in control (Highlight Romans 8:28, Romans 8:18)
- Expect Harvest (Find and highlight Galatians 6:9)

Prayer: Lord, I can admit that sometimes I can be disappointed with how my life is going. I have trust issues, even with You. Help me believe that you still love me and that you can use all things for good. I recognize my limitations and that you are totally sovereign and in control. Brace me for any unexpected pain in situations that may try to deter my faith in you. I trust that your grace is sufficient when you don't answer my prayers in the way that I think you should.

Day 12 - Speak Strength

Do you talk to yourself? Lol. Don't be ashamed. It's actually really normal and really healthy. What have you been saying to yourself lately? Do your words reflect God's truth? Check out this story and you'll never question the power of what you say.

Dr. Masaru Emoto conducted an experiment to test the power of words. He placed rice in three glass beakers and covered it with water. Everyday for a month he said, "thank you" to one, and to another, "idiot" and the third, he ignored.

After one month, the rice that had been thanked began to ferment, giving off a strong pleasant aroma. The rice in the beaker that he said "idiot" to, turned black. The beaker that he ignored began to rot.

The average human body consists of 60% water and infants have an even higher percentage of water, around 75%. So, if these beakers of water and rice respond to the power of words, so could we?! The difference between us and a beaker of rice is that we have the power to talk back. We believe that God's Word reigns over mere "positivity." Speaking God's word over our lives and family has the power to bring a different kingdom to our fallen world. Changing the way we speak to ourselves will change how to speak to others.

Action: Find these verses in your bible and speak them over yourself with CONFIDENCE:

1. I am fearfully and wonderfully made! (Find and declare Psalms 139:14)
2. God has a plan for my life! (Find and declare Jeremiah 29:11)
3. The Lord is my strength and shield! (Find and declare Psalm 28:7)
4. I am a Child of God! (Find and declare John 1:12)
5. The peace of God guards my heart and mind! (Find and declare Phillipians 4:7)
6. I will not be afraid! (Find and declare 2 Timothy 1:7)
7. My sin is forgiven and my body is healed! (Psalm 103:3-5)
8. I am a New creation in Christ! (Find and declare 2 Corinthians 5:17)
9. I am more than a Conqueror! (Find and declare Romans 8:37)
10. God loves me and will provide for me! (Find and declare Phillipians 4:19)

Prayer: Lord, sometimes I talk reckless. Please forgive me for the words that I've spoken to others and myself that have not been in line with the truth. Help me to recognize the power of what I say. Encourage my heart with a renewed perspective so that I won't repeat satanic ideas. I repent of all gossip, slander, lying, discord, manipulation, bullying, and cursing in Jesus' name. I ask the Holy Spirit for a new tongue so that others may hear the good works of Christ. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 13 - Strong Evidence

There are many ideas from the culture that come to challenge our faith. Christianity is often the subject of academic ridicule and political scrutiny. There is a global agenda to reinvent the person of Jesus Christ, question the reliability of scripture, and remove the influence of the church from civic life. Despite those efforts, the Gospel is still the most transforming message on earth! Jesus remains the most significant figure in human history. Although many have done horrible things in the name of religion, no one has done more good for humanity than the Christian church. We do not worship God blindly. Our faith is not magical. It is founded on strong evidence. Here are some facts to add to your faith:

- Historical evidence: Scholars overwhelmingly agree that Jesus of Nazareth was a person who existed, including atheists scholars. As Christians, we trust the four (4) Gospels as testimony of the life of Christ. There are non-biblical historical accounts that mention the impact of Jesus. Some of those sources are Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, Suetonius and the Talmud. **(Find and Read the lineage of Jesus in Matthew 1 and Luke 3.)**
- Archaeology evidence: Most of the new evidence that supports the validity of scripture has been discovered in the last 100 years. That's really recent! (In your spare time look up these finds: Dead Sea Scrolls, The Tel Dan Stele, The House of David Inscription, The Caiphas Ossuary, Hezekiah's Tunnel, The Pool of Siloam.) **(Find and highlight Romans 1:20)**
- Jesus fulfilled prophecy in ways that are mathematically impossible: The Old Testament consists of 39 books with 30 authors. Old Testament prophets through God's spirit, spoke accurately and precisely about the coming Messiah. The probability of Jesus fulfilling only eight of those prophecies is 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000. That is a mathematical impossibility. Jesus actually fulfilled over 300 prophecies in his lifetime. 29 of those prophecies are about his crucifixion and he fulfilled them in one day. This shows us that the word of God is miraculously precise and we can trust that Jesus truly is the promised Messiah. **(Find and Highlight a few of these prophecies: Isaiah 53:3-7, Psalm 22:16-18, Zechariah 12:10)**
- *Testimony/ Life of early believers*: When a major event happens, reporters interview people who were there to understand what took place. We also allow personal testimony in the court of law to help determine the facts of a case. In the same way, we can look at the personal accounts in the Gospels and the Epistles to accurately account for the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Of the Apostles that were with Jesus, 11 of them were executed for their faith, refusing to deny Jesus' Resurrection. It is highly unlikely that they would give their lives this way if they did not believe without a shadow of a doubt that they saw Jesus bodily Resurrected from the grave. **(Find Acts 1:1-3 in your bible and highlight it.)**

Day 14 - Confidence in the Cross

Some of our favorite moments in cinema or television are when the bad guy turns into a dramatic hero. We can see this in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), like the way that Thanos' daughters switch sides to fight evil. "The Rock" was once the biggest stars in the WWE, but most people do not remember that he started off as a bad guy. "Redemption" is a biblical theme that we see recycled in movies, music and literature over and over again. The life of Apostle Paul is a story that truly illustrates "bad guys" becoming heroes.

Before his encounter with Jesus, Saul (aka Paul) was known for persecuting Christians and overseeing the death of some of the church's young ministers, like Stephen. (*You can read this story in Acts chapter 7-8*). Saul was on his way to destroy the lives of Christians when he met the resurrected Lord in an encounter that changed his entire life. He went from being an assassin to becoming an Apostle. He went from being the church's greatest enemy to becoming their greatest friend. He dedicated his life so much to the spreading of the Gospel and building the church that he wrote 3/4ths of the New Testament. He suffered greatly for his faith. The time that he was not building up the church, he was writing letters to the church from prison.

Paul did not just preach the cross. Paul lived his life sacrificially as if he had already died on the cross with Jesus.

Scripture:

Galatians 2:20 - "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. And that which I now live in the flesh, I live through faith to the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Because Jesus was raised from the dead, when we live a life on the cross, we allow the power of His Resurrection to be seen in us. His brother in the faith, John wrote this to his generation and to ours.

1 John 2:14-15 - "I write to you fathers because you have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong and the word of God abideth in you, and you have overcome the wicked one. Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

Our examples of faith encourage us that in Christ, we have overcome the world. We do not have to be afraid of the Cross any longer. Jesus has openly defeated death and given us power to live a life of love in a way that helps us connect to others and to God.

Prayer: Father, I believe that I was created for the purpose of bringing you glory. Help me to stay connected to the cross so that others may see Christ's power. I will no longer be ashamed of being a public witness of what you have done for me. Holy Spirit, give me boldness to speak and the courage to love even my enemies. May Jesus forever receive the glory. Amen.