

Day 1

Scripture Reading: Philippians 2:1–11

Key Verse: “And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:8)

Title: A Greater Intimacy

Think for a moment about something that you created from scratch—a painting, a sculpture, a poem, a cake. You made choices to uniquely affect the outcome. There is no one who understands your masterpiece quite like you. Perhaps you have experienced uncertainty or confusion when you heard a certain song or saw a certain piece of art. What did the artist mean? What was this person trying to say? The artist or author is the one who has an intimate knowledge of the created thing, born out of the process of creation.

Our Creator God has an intimate knowledge of who we are. He formed us, breathed life into us, and knows about every hair on our heads (Matt 10:30). Because He made us, we can be certain of His care for us. Although a creator can have this unique understanding of his or her work, this person is still not able to “become” the masterpiece and experience life from that dimension. This person has a limited perspective. But God as creator went a step further—He sent His Son to experience life in our shoes. Jesus is all compassionate and understanding because, as Henry Nouwen stated as quoted in *Everyday Saint*, “Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human” (80). Jesus Christ taught us how to truly love by personally experiencing the suffering of humanity.

Day 2

Scripture Reading: 1 John 2:1–17

Key Verse: “Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.” (1 John 2:6)

Title: Not as It Seems

God, if there ever was a day when you knew how committed I am...it would be today. I hope that you can appreciate my patience and my self-control. I did not punch anyone at the stockholders meeting, although I could not help swearing at them. They deserved much more, so they should be thankful. I've also stayed married to Gretchen, although it has taken a few indiscretions on the side to keep me from getting divorced. I'm relatively faithful to her and I know she appreciates how I care and provide for our family. I attend church every Sunday and I do give money to the church and people in need. I am not very interested in reading and studying the Bible, but I think I do enough. I think God, if you would take a look, you would see that my score card is pretty positive. I live the Christian life pretty well, I might say. There are people in the world who are so much worse. At least I am not like them.

It is not enough to just know who God is. It is not enough to claim to follow Christ but not live it. It is often much easier to speak something than to practice it. However, Christ asks that our lives truly demonstrate knowledge of Him. In fact, in Matthew 7 Christ explained that not everyone who claims to know Him will enter the kingdom of heaven. Even people who do good things in His name will be turned away. We have to completely surrender our lives and will to Him. If we do what God asks of us, God's love

is made complete in us and we are changed by that love. We walk as Christ did, sharing God's love with others.

Day 3

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 1:11–20

Key Verses: “‘Come now, let us reason together,’ says the LORD. ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land.’” (Isaiah 1:18–19)

Title: To Be Clean

Before entering a mosque to pray, a Muslim man has to cleanse himself. He goes to a special area outside of the mosque and removes his shoes. Then the washing ritual begins. As the water pours to the ground his hands, ears, lips, nose, arms, and feet are all ritually washed. They are washed in a certain order with special prayers said during the process. This cleansing is required before stepping into the mosque. The person is cleansed, ready to present his prayers to Allah. Without the perfect ritual cleansing, the prayers would not be accepted.

The Israelites followed rituals too. They brought sacrifices to the Temple of God to atone for their wrongdoing. They were to bring an unblemished animal to the priest and it would be sacrificed for their sins. This sacrifice served as a method of cleansing so that sinful human beings could approach God. But are rituals enough? Will acting out these solemn rituals provide salvation?

Even though God required these sacrifices, He grew tired with actions that were not followed by intent. The people were following the religious law, but their hearts were not any different. They were enacting a ritual to make them clean, but were not surrendering their hearts to Him and being in right relationship to God (Hosea 6:6). Because God is holy, we must be cleansed before we come to Him. But He is looking for more than just outward actions—He is looking for a cleansed and contrite heart.

Day 4

Scripture Reading: Galatians 4:1–9

Key Verse: “So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.” (Galatians 4:7)

Title: Slave No More

The hot sun burned his skin. Sweat drenched his hair and ran rivers down his cheek and neck. His muscles strained with his heavy load and he felt that he could not give it any more. At the moment of greatest strain the whip came crashing down, burning his skin and leaving a flaming reddish mark. Inwardly he shrieked, but outwardly he clenched his jaw in determination. The shackle scraped his ankles as the chains drug across the dusty field. *What kind of life is this?* his mind screamed. *If only I could be free!*

We too have lived enslaved—to sin. When Christ paid for our sins with His blood, our chains fell to the ground and we were released. Imagine the release of the spirit when a slave is freed! How the joy must pour from the deepest center of his or her being—*I am free!* Amazingly enough, many who experience this only take the tiniest sip of freedom. They often still live in the same patterns and are enveloped by the same fears from which Christ has already redeemed them. Will you be truly freed? Will you experience the release of this bondage in every area of your life? Make the decision today to live in the fullness of His redemption.

Day 5

Scripture Reading: Psalm 139

Key Verse: “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?”

(Psalm 139:7)

Title: The God Radio

There is a radio playing in the house. Gentle strains of music float up in the background...but there are other noises too. The washer spins, two children argue, the toilet flushes. Toys crash to the floor and then the television is turned on. Dishes are rinsed and stacked in the dishwasher, making a clanking sound. There is so much going on in this house that you can barely hear the whisper of the gentle chords, playing over the radio. It is there, aching to be heard, but no one listens.

God is also aching to be heard. He is dying to have us stop and pay attention, or to find our volume switch. He wants us to turn down the distractions of life so that we can hear Him more clearly. He is always there, in every part of our lives, but we often compartmentalize our interaction with Him. We interact with Him only during certain times...mostly when it is convenient to us or when we need His listening ear and His help. He wants us to listen to Him too. He wants us to be like Mary when Jesus visited her—He wants us to stop the maddening rush of life and sit at His feet and be filled with the knowledge of Him.

Day 6

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 11:1–10

Key Verse: “In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.” (Isaiah 11:10).

Title: Living in Community

What do you think of when you hear the word “community”? Most likely it brings to mind a group of people, for that is what community is. But what brings these people together? How are they connected?

The Bible says that believers are a part of a community. We all need one another. The body of Christ is formed of members who all have different functions, working together to bring glory to God. We are on this journey of living in Christ at the same time, and we should be supporting and encouraging one another. There is no one person who is greater than another. According to Jim Hampton in *Everyday Saint*, the community that we are seeking to develop is described in the eleventh chapter of Isaiah. The author contends that this text describes a group where all people are included, all people are safe and loved, and healing and conversion take place (95–96).

Does your community of believers look like this? One of the best ways to bring about this environment is to follow the commandments of Christ, to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” and to “love your neighbor

as yourself” (Matthew 22:37, 39). When we follow these commandments, God will work through us to bring about a true community with Christ at the head.

Day 7

Scripture Reading: Philippians 2:12–18

Key Verses: “Do everything without complaining and arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe....” (Philippians 2:14–15)

Title: As Bright as Stars

On a clear night the black curtain of the sky is speckled with them. They shimmer and sparkle like tiny diamonds littering the expanse of space. In a secluded place, where the lights of the earth are few, the sky is more bright and vivid with their glow. In those places they are visible by the thousands. Some twinkle while others hold a steady bright light. Yet others look yellowish or red to our eyes while some seem the purest white. Amidst the darkness of the night sky they shine forth, capturing our attention with their brilliance.

Stars are astronomical wonders. These exploding balls of gas emit light energy that travels through space to where we are. Much of what we know about stars is hypothesized, based on the best information scientists can gather. Science believes, based on the speed that light travels, that the light we are seeing in the dark night sky is from explosions that happened millions of years ago. Perhaps, when we look at stars, we are looking at light from the past, based on the distance that it traveled to our eyes.

Regardless of how science tries to analyze stars, they still instill wonder in us and capture our attention in the blackest night. They are beautiful and we remain awed by them. Paul

called for Christians, who are children of God, to shine like stars in the darkness of the world. When we live according to the will of God, we stand out. When we live with the Spirit of God in us the world cannot help but take notice.