

# Growing Inwardly When You Can't Go Out

## A One Week Online Bible Study by Dayna Schoonmaker

This one week Bible study intends to help you develop a more Christlike life, even in the midst of these uncertain times. As you move through the devotionals below you will be invited to participate in practices designed to help you embody Christlikeness as you read and pray through brief passages of scripture. Following each passage of scripture there are questions to help you reflect on how you can embrace each day's theme as you continue to develop your life in Christ.

### Devotionals

**Day 1:: Relinquishing Control** - We are finite, fragile beings who are merely *in process* of becoming who God intends us to be. In order to work on becoming more Christlike we must be willing to relinquish control to God and surrender the pursuit of self-realization. Times like these remind us just how dependent we are on God and on one another.

Spend some time in prayer with your hands open before you, palms facing upward. This posture invites us to let go. It is also a vulnerable posture creating openness within us.

### Scripture Reading:

*But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. - 2 Corinthians 4:7-11*

### Questions

1. We are fragile and finite beings. In what ways are you feeling the limitations of your earthly body today?
2. Despite being finite, this passage reminds us that though we are tried in this life we are not destroyed. What are some of the trials you've faced recently or are currently facing? How is God providing you strength to persevere?
3. Sometimes it is hard to see trials and persecutions as an opportunity for our faith to shine, yet like seeds that must submit to the earth to become the plants they are intended to be, we are reminded that our trials are what make Jesus evident in us. How are you allowing God to shine through you?

**Day 2:: Removing the Refuse** - A key element to drawing closer to God is allowing for the clearing away of excess fears, destructive behavioral patterns, and the lies we tell ourselves. By allowing ourselves to be pruned of the dead weight we are carrying around, we are better able to seek and follow God freely.

Actively move your body today. Part of pruning is stretching and moving different parts of yourself, both inwardly and outwardly, to see what serves you and what stunts your growth. Physically embodying your worship time will help bring a new type of awareness to your spiritual walk, helping you to identify areas that need work.

**Scripture Reading:**

*He must increase, but I must decrease. - John 3:30*

Questions

1. Holy pruning is not simply about removing, but reprioritizing. A gardener prunes branches that are not producing so that healthier parts can get the nutrients they need. What aspects of your life do you need to reprioritize? Is it your career aspirations? Your family? Your health? Even negative things like insecurity can claim undue amounts of space in your life. Naming those things is the first step to placing God above them.
2. What would it look like to truly humble yourself and clear the clutter from your life so God can become your top priority? Is this something you can do on your own or will you need to seek God's help or the help of others to accomplish this pruning?
3. How can you incorporate the truth of this passage into your life right now as you move forward?

**Day 3:: Restoring the Soul** - As we continue to pursue Christlikeness in our lives we are restored to new life in Christ. Just as we are in process of becoming who God intends us to be, God is in process of restoring us. Restoration takes time and careful attention to meticulous detail along the way.

Take time today to be still and silent. This is a difficult practice for many people. As you sit in silence allow yourself to be aware of any discomfort. Acknowledge your restlessness and commit to stillness and silence for at least 5 more minutes. Repeat as necessary to create a deeper calm within yourself.

### **Scripture Reading:**

*Then Gideon said to God, "In order to see whether you will deliver Israel by my hand, as you have said, I am going to lay a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will deliver Israel by my hand, as you have said." And it was so. When he rose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung enough dew from the fleece to fill a bowl with water. Then Gideon said to God, "Do not let your anger burn against me, let me speak one more time; let me, please, make trial with the fleece just once more; let it be dry only on the fleece, and on all the ground let there be dew." And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground there was dew. Judges 6:36-40*

### **Questions**

1. You may not be certain in your heart what God wants you to do, or if you are hearing God right. It is okay to ask God for a sign like Gideon did. Part of restoration is being willing to ask God *all* the questions. What do you need to ask of God?
2. This story goes on (Judges ch. 7) to show that God did come through, but with far less "manpower" than Gideon had hoped for. The confirmation of the fleece gave Gideon the ability to trust God's plan no matter how foolish or unlikely it seemed. What will it take for you to trust God's work in your life?
3. Restoration is about seeing the real problem and dealing with it at its source. Where is God working to restore you? Can you even see or name the root issues? What would it look like to dig deep with God to uncover them?

Once we've asked our questions, wrestled with our doubts, dug deep to the source of our woundedness and begun to trust God regardless of our circumstances, then we will be able to experience the true power of wholistic restoration in our lives.

**Day 4:: Replanting in New Soil** - In order for real change to flourish, we often need an explicit move from one position, posture, or perspective to another. Envisioning ourselves as being replanted allows space to re-conceptualize our lives in view of God's plan and purpose.

Make a change to something in your physical environment today. Have you been thinking about cleaning something out or rearranging some furniture? Perhaps you've been thinking about creating a quiet space for prayer and meditation in your home. Go ahead and make the change. As you make physical changes, allow the outward sign to be a mirror to the inward changes God is making in you.

### **Scripture Reading:**

*Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law — indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you. So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. Romans 8:5-13*

### Questions

1. You've begun to clear away some of the fears, doubts, false idols and distractions from your life by naming them and relinquishing control to God, but what temptations and lies of the flesh have already begun to creep back in? It is okay to acknowledge that a desire for change does not immediately create change.
2. How can you refocus your mind on the Spirit of life and peace today? Perhaps it would be helpful to mentally imagine yourself being carefully uprooted from the soil of your former thoughts and replanted in fresh soil enriched with the presence and peace of God.
3. It takes time for roots to re-establish themselves in new soil, just as it takes time for the mind to root itself in new patterns of thought and behavior. How can you intentionally tend to this transition over the coming days?

**Day 5:: Residing in Christ** - Once we've decided on a new course of living we must continually focus on growing and blooming into Christlikeness. Each day we have the opportunity to choose to look to Jesus rather than casting an anxious glance to the left or the right.

Accepting grace and growth includes the willingness to lean into and accept the work of God in your life rather than straining against it. Identify one aspect of your discipleship that is nurturing and enjoy that form of worship today. Perhaps you could sing along to your favorite worship music. Perhaps you could make a piece of art. Perhaps you could read your favorite passage of scripture. Do something that helps you feel close to God today.

### **Scripture Reading:**

*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. 2 Peter 3:18*

### **Questions**

1. This week, you've been asked to relinquish your need to be in control, you've worked to identify and remove the refuse, you've done the hard work of trying to identify where restoration is needed and you've nurtured new life in new soil. Now you are invited to reside in God so that you might draw strength and peace from the only true source of life. The verse for today is simple on purpose. Growing is not about striving but about opening yourself to the possibility for growth. How can you lean into the invitation to continue growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus?
2. Our sole purpose in this life is to bring glory to God. In what ways can you continue to transform your life toward this purpose? Name one or two things you've identified this week that can help you live a life that is more glorifying to God.
3. As you prepare to end this devotional, take time to identify your main point of revelation. You may have learned a lot and been challenged on several fronts, but it is important to have a clear takeaway to hold on to as you seek to grow in Christ. Write it down and keep it with you or post it in a place you will see it daily.