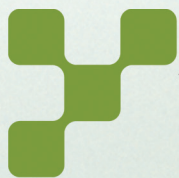


31 DAYS WITH JESUS

student devotional

Tested in the trenches, with proven results: download a free Bible study devotion for youth, written by DOUG FIELDS. 31 DAYS WITH JESUS is a student devotional that will deepen the spiritual health of your youth group. This Bible devotion will help your students will explore the gospel of Matthew and be encouraged to respond in prayer and reflection.

These youth devotion ideas are ready to be applied to your ministry setting.



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Getting Started

This resource is for your ministry! Feel free to adapt this as you think is best for your students. Take the headers off, fix the typos, correct the theology (DOH!); do what ever it takes to make it great for your students. We ask that you don't sell this devotional or distribute it to other ministries, send them to www.youthministry.com.

We would love to hear from you! If you have a way to make this better, email Matt McGill at matt@simplyyouthministry.com.

Blessings,



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Who Is Jesus?

He is God (Matthew 26:63-64)

He became a person (John 1:14)

He taught with authority (Mark 1:22)

He healed the sick (Matthew 4:23)

He hung out with the outcasts (Matthew 9:10-11)

He got angry at the religious fakes (Matthew 23:27)

He was persecuted unfairly (Matthew 26:59-60)

He was tempted in every way (Hebrews 4:15)

He never made a mistake (Hebrews 4:15, 1 John 3:5)

He died, rose from the dead, and continues to live to this day (1 Corinthians 15:20)

He made it possible to have a relationship with God (John 3:16-17)

He can sympathize with our struggles (Hebrews 4:15)

He Loves Us (Ephesians 3:19)

In this devotional, you'll get to explore for yourself the life of Jesus as told by one of his followers. Matthew was one of the twelve disciples and walked with Jesus for three years. When Jesus found him, his character was questionable: as a tax collector he was cheating his own people. Jesus transformed his life, and Matthew would later write the story of Jesus' life so others might also be transformed.

Each day includes a scripture reading, a short inspirational thought, and space for you to reflect on what God is teaching you. Having a quiet time 31 days in a row is tough! Pick a time when you are at your best: if you're a morning person, consider the morning. If you're a night person...you get the picture. Pick a place that is free of distractions. Disconnect from the internet, your phone, anything that'll grab your attention away from God.

Having a quiet time for 31 days is REALLY tough. If you miss a day, don't beat yourself up! Jump back into the swing of things, don't stress yourself out by trying to "catch up." The point is to grow closer to God, so read at your own pace. The goal is not to "finish," but to grow.

Day 3 – Matthew 3:1-17

About thirty years has passed from the time you read yesterday (in chapter 2) to what you read today (in chapter 3). Now, you read about John the Baptist, a prophet, a man chosen by God for a mission to set the stage and prepare people for Jesus. John the Baptist's mission included a message--"repent." Repent is basically a fancy word which means, "to change one's mind and act on that change. To turn around. To turn from living the world's way to living God's way."

Did you notice who came to hear John the Baptist's message? Those who sincerely wanted to confess their sins and change, as well as those who wanted to be part of the "in" crowd. The first group experienced baptism and life-change while the others received a lecture and a slap to their character.

Which group do you most identify with? Do you go to church because you need to hear a message that will lead to life-change, or do you go because you want to be seen? When was the last time you asked yourself this question, "Why do I really go to church?"

John the Baptist had a message of change. Jesus Christ is the way to bring about change. John the Baptist said of Jesus, "he will change you from the inside out..."

What needs to be changed in your life? It's never too late! Do you need to change your motive for going to church? Is it your heart? Do your actions need change? You can't make any significant life-change without God's help and power...that's a big message in the Bible! That's the goal of the Christian journey . . . change. That's the reason for this church! By the way, the beginning of the year is a great time to make changes!

Day 13 – Matthew 12:1-50

God in the flesh is standing before religious leaders and they don't recognize him. Jesus is a mystery to them. The Pharisees had spent so much of their growing and learning years studying about how to act religious that they actually missed God in action. It's almost comical, but it's too sad to be very funny. Jesus claims equality with God by stating he's the Lord of the Sabbath and the "religious actors" miss the moment.

In chapter 12 we read about the Pharisees trying to trap Jesus so they could "prove" Jesus wasn't the Son of God and that he was nothing more than a devil-following freak show. It seems every attack thrown at Jesus was met by an answer that baffled the Pharisee's thinking and challenged their religious game.

In verse 30, Jesus makes a bold statement that there is no middle ground in following him. He says that you can't be neutral about following him...it's either all or nothing. This is challenging! And Jesus reminds us that following Jesus is begins with the heart. He slams the Pharisees and then tells them he can "see" their heart by how they talk. Their religious show meant nothing, but their heart mean everything.

It's good to stop and think about the commitment you've made to follow Christ. You might try writing your answers to these questions below:

- > Where do you need God to perform surgery on your heart?
- > Can others tell the condition of your heart by the words you speak?
- > If you find yourself being neutral about your walk with Christ, what do you need to do?

Also, take a minute and tell God that you don't want to act like a Christian (Pharisee) but that you want to be identified by the fruit you display in your life (v.33).

Have a great day as you walk with Christ in your life!

Day 17 – Matthew 16:1-12

Pharisee and Sadducee yeast sounds a little weird. At first the disciples didn't know what it meant, so if you were a little confused with today's reading you're not alone. Again, in these few verses of chapter 16, Jesus uses another illustration to communicate the essential truth that the inside of a person is more important than their actions.

Typically, the Pharisee and Sadducees were religious enemies because they disagreed on many issues. But when it came to their hatred for Jesus and his teaching they became a team with the goal to discredit and destroy him. In Jesus' eye Pharisee and Sadducees were both religious frauds because they didn't focus on the issues of the heart (their insides) but on actions (their outside) from the law. As you've been reading, Jesus hated this.

Now, you might have thought, "what the deal with "yeast?" Yeast is an ingredient used in cooking to make bread rise. Too much yeast can ruin everything. That's why Jesus called the Pharisee and Sadducees "yeast." Even a small amount of evil in their lives was ruining an entire group of people.

Sins in your life that seem "little" may very well be "yeast" and have big effects on your relationship with God, your witness, and your other relationships. Your sin can impact others just in the same way the sins of the Pharisee and Sadducees were leading others away from the truth that Jesus brought. Evaluate your life today and see if there's any "yeast" that needs to be dealt with.

Day 21 – Matthew 18:1-14

It appears that the disciples might have lost a little of their focus on what's important when they began to argue about positioning (the argument is more clear in Mark 9; Luke 9). Their pride had become an issue. It may have been that they were jealous of Peter, James, and John for going to the mountain with Jesus (chapter 17). They might have even arguing over high positions in the new church that Jesus spoke of. It became such an issue that they even had the guts to ask, "which one of us is the greatest?" I envision it like this, "Hey Jesus, we know you're pretty special being God... uh...but, we're over here kind of wondering which one of us is the greatest...aside from you of course." It's at this point Jesus steps in and teaches about the importance of humility.

Jesus didn't even dignify their answer. Instead, he called a little child into his presence and said the child was a picture of greatness. He told them to stop being childish with their meaningless arguments and become childlike. That was a creative way to deal with tension and teach about humility wasn't it?

True humility is taking your eyes off yourself and putting them on someone else. Humility is a positive consequence for becoming others'-centered. What keeps you from becoming others' centered? Pride. Pride has always been a struggle-point with people. The fall of humanity can be traced back to pride. Look for it in your life. Notice it. Catch it action so you can recognize it. Name it. The hurdle to growing spiritually is learning to navigate around the bumps of pride and clear away the mounds of pride that have been building in your life.

Jesus tells his disciples to take drastic measures when evaluating themselves. He doesn't intend for them to literally cut off a hand or a foot since destroying the outside of your body will not affect the condition of a heart. Do you need to take drastic measures to take care of your pride problem? If you want to be great...the road to take is humility and it's easier to get there being a servant than a celebrity.

Day 23 – Matthew 19:1-12

The Pharisees couldn't trap Jesus on other issues so they went after a biggie—divorce (isn't it interesting that divorce continues to be a controversial issue today?). The Pharisees didn't seem to care about the truth regarding marriage, they were eager to see Jesus fumble his words and contradict himself regarding his interpretation of the Mosaic Law of Divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

Once again, Jesus masterfully backs his accusers up by taking them to a time prior to the Mosaic Law, in Genesis, where God's intention for marriage was that it would be permanent. Jesus changed their focus from divorce to the importance of a lasting marriage—God's design from the beginning.

In verses 4-6 we can learn some solid truths about marriage:

1. Marriage is God's idea. This doesn't take much explanation. Basically, it wasn't some guy name Randy who discovered marriage during the cave-man era.
2. Marriage is a physical oneness. The reference to "two becoming one" points to sexual intercourse. God created sex so that husband and wife would become one flesh, which is a physical image of marriage. That's why God intended sex to be for marriage only.
3. Marriage is intended to last. God's idea of oneness is that it will last as long as one of them is alive. The words, "let no one separate them" don't give room for options.
4. Marriage is male and female. Other variations to man and wife are unacceptable in God's design for marriage. They may become more acceptable in our courts and liberal society but not in God's eyes.

Divorce is going to happen, but that doesn't make it right. It's been happening since the beginning of our time. That's why Moses made a law that required some steps to be taken before divorce could happen. Moses saw woman being thrown out of homes when the husband was frustrated or "done" with them. Divorce was too easy and the sinful people were destroying each other. Divorce brings pain and God hates it.

About half the students I know come from broken families. There's a lot of suffering in their lives and they would be the first to tell you that divorce hurts. As you think and pray about your future, keep in mind that God's plan for your future marriage doesn't include divorce. His plan is that it will last. Don't lose sight of that standard as you continue to live your life hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Here's something worth remembering, "marriage is one of God's most wonderful designs!"

Day 25 – Matthew 20:1-34

My mom is a great lady and one of my biggest fans. I'll never forget when she gave my baseball coach a hard time because she thought I deserved to bat higher in the lineup than he did. They discussed my batting average, she reasoned, he countered, and my mom came out victorious. While I may have batted higher in the following games (from 8th spot to 9th), I lost respect from my teammates because my mom whined.

Because of that experience, I can relate to how James and John must have felt when the mother petitioned Jesus for a higher place of greatness. She was just doing her job—being a good Jewish mom. Just like my teammates, the other disciples were ticked—they also wanted positions of greatness with Jesus. Imagine their thoughts, Jesus just said he was going to be put to death, and their minds started to roll... “hmm, if he’s going to be in heaven first, maybe he can talk to God about a better spot in the heavenly line up.” That was all they knew about greatness—a higher position. Once again we see human meeting divine and conflict emerging.

In this discourse with James and John’s mother, Jesus lays out a formula that, to this day, challenges our view of leadership. He said if you want to be a leader you must be a servant. His design for greatness begins at the bottom. If you want to be first, you must be last. If you want to be great, you must serve. Pretty different than, “claw your way to the top at any cost.”

Following Christ isn’t like following other leaders of the world who love to show off their power and authority. Christians show power when they are weak, humble, and others’ centered. Through weakness, God comes alive and becomes strong in the life of the believer. Through humility, Christ can be seen. When you become others’ centered, you become God-centered. It’s a life long journey that begins when you say “yes” to God’s way.

How’s your journey with serving others going? This is one biblical paradox that you may never truly understand (I don’t!).

Day 31 – Matthew 25:1-46

In this chapter, we not only find more teaching on the end times but also on the responsibility of the believer to do something with his or her life. We've read enough by now to know that the arrival of Jesus (the second coming) is going to be sudden and many won't be ready (vs. 1-13). But the rest of this chapter is a solid wake up call that our life is meant to account for something.

I must write very carefully because I don't want you to think that you are saved by works (what you do for God), because you are saved by your faith in Jesus Christ (what He did for you). But what you do is a result of your faith and salvation. These two stories show us that we aren't to waste our lives but to invest them in God's service.

What is God's service? It may be as simple as giving a cup of water, food to the hungry, clothes to the naked, visitation to the prisons... When you help someone in need you are helping Jesus. Christians are "Christ's one" and are to try to follow Christ's actions while on earth.

Sometimes I think of being one of Jesus' twelve disciples and how I would have responded to the pain and lack of justice he experienced on the cross. I think of what I would have said and how I would have acted. When I put myself in that situation I become quite the superhero, in my imagination. But, in the reality of the everyday situations that Jesus refers to (vs.31-46), I'm not super at all. You see, when I see Jesus in need everyday (when I see others in need) I often miss the opportunity to serve him. I see him in need when I drive by the hungry, pass by the homeless, read about the prisoners, and don't think about offering a drink to the thirsty.

I know I'm saved by faith, but there is an incredible opportunity to do—in the name of Jesus—that demonstrates that my faith is real. Take a look at your life today and think about how you can show someone needy Christ's love in a very real and practical manner. How could you do that today?
