

COUNTERFEIT

fame, money, stuff, comfort
perfectionism, approval

COUNTERFEIT

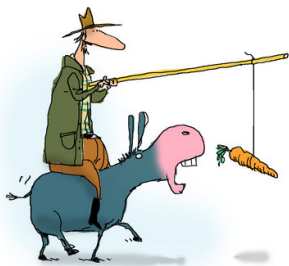
CHASING REAL



Wollongong

DAY 1: CHASING WHAT IS REAL

“I put God first and do not allow other things to cloud my vision.” – Nicki Minaj



Do you ever feel like this donkey?

Long before the 1800s, King Solomon lamented the futile pursuits in life as nothing more than “chasing after the wind.”

Many things in life hold out the promise of happiness, joy, fulfillment, contentment and peace. Things like fame, comfort, money, possessions, approval and perfection are all big motivators for us in life, but over time

it becomes apparent that these are all false pursuits, they are counterfeit goals that produce counterfeit happiness...

There's a better way to live. You can step off the performance treadmill. There is so much more to life than bigger and better.

Jesus addressed this frenzied quest for more in Matthew 6. As you read Jesus' words today, try this. Take a deep breath and empty your mind of your concerns. Imagine you're there as he's teaching. What are you sitting on? How does the air smell? How does his voice sound? What else do you hear? What do you see? What is unraveling inside of you at the sound of his voice.

Read the following verses. Think and pray about the verse that applies the most to your life.

Ecclesiastes 1:12-14 *Call me “the Quester.” I've been king over Israel in Jerusalem. I looked most carefully into everything, searched out all that is done on this earth. And let me tell you, there's not much to write home about. God hasn't made it easy for us. I've seen it all and it's nothing but smoke—smoke, and spitting into the wind.*

Matthew 6:19-34 *“Don't hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or—worse!—stolen by burglars.*

Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it's safe from moth and rust and burglars. It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.

22-23"Your eyes are windows into your body. If you open your eyes wide in wonder and belief, your body fills up with light. If you live squinty-eyed in greed and distrust, your body is a dank cellar. If you pull the blinds on your windows, what a dark life you will have!

24"You can't worship two gods at once. Loving one god, you'll end up hating the other. Adoration of one feeds contempt for the other. You can't worship God and Money both.

25-26"If you decide for God, living a life of God-worship, it follows that you don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes or whether the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God. And you count far more to him than birds.

27-29"Has anyone by fussing in front of the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? All this time and money wasted on fashion—do you think it makes that much difference? Instead of looking at the fashions, walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them.

30-33"If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers—most of which are never even seen—don't you think he'll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you? What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God's giving. People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.

34"Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes..

Consider. *Was it nice to slow down and be around Jesus? How can I make more room for Jesus in my life?*

Pray: *After reading today's Scriptures, pray and ask God to slow you down enough to hear from him throughout your day.*

DAY 2: CHASING FAME

“Fame doesn't fulfil you. It warms you a bit, but that warmth is temporary.” – Marilyn Monroe

The Greek word for fame—phēmē, pronounced fā¹-mā—is used only twice in the New Testament. It's often defined as speech, report, or news. Here's how phēmē is used in Luke 4:14 KJV:

And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about.

Where was Jesus returning from that caused a fame of him to spread through the region? Let's get context. In Luke 1, we hear about Jesus' coming birth. In Luke 2, he's born and grows into a boy. In Luke 3, he's baptised. Finally, in the first several verses of Luke 4, Jesus is fasting and being tested in the desert by Satan. This brings us back to Luke 4:14.

Then Jesus returned to Galilee, filled with the Holy Spirit's power. Reports about him spread quickly through the whole region. Luke 4:14 NLT

In today's reading, you'll take in the whole story of Jesus' test in the desert. Jesus was fasting in the desert for 40 days and in the middle of it, Jesus is tempted with the wrong kind of food (Luke 4:3-4), fame (Luke 4:5-8), and faith (Luke 4:9-12). Each time, Jesus rejected the temptation and responded with God's Word.

The fame Jesus experienced in Luke 4:14 is clearly different to the fame Jesus was offered in Luke 4:5-8. Jesus was tempted with counterfeit fame but rejected it and instead experienced real fame.

We tend to go after the immediate things that Jesus was offered in the desert - the counterfeit blessings. Supply without satisfaction (Luke 4:3-4), splendour without sacrifice (Luke 4:5-8), and salvation without surrender (Luke 4:9-12).

Think about recognition at work, social media likes, and praise from others. It feels good for a moment, and then you instantly crave more.

If we're honest, we've all likely experienced times when we wanted to be noticed or well-known for something. Similarly, Satan offers Jesus money, influence, and power. Jesus was tempted just like us, but He didn't take the bait.

Read the following verses. Think and pray about the verse that applies the most to your life.

Luke 4:1-15 *Now Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wild. For forty wilderness days and nights he was tested by the Devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when the time was up he was hungry.*

3The Devil, playing on his hunger, gave the first test: "Since you're God's Son, command this stone to turn into a loaf of bread."

4Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy: "It takes more than bread to really live."

5-7For the second test he led him up and spread out all the kingdoms of the earth on display at once. Then the Devil said, "They're yours in all their splendour to serve your pleasure. I'm in charge of them all and can turn them over to whomever I wish. Worship me and they're yours, the whole works."

8Jesus refused, again backing his refusal with Deuteronomy: "Worship the Lord your God and only the Lord your God. Serve him with absolute single-heartedness."

9-11For the third test the Devil took him to Jerusalem and put him on top of the Temple. He said, "If you are God's Son, jump. It's written, isn't it, that 'he has placed you in the care of angels to protect you; they will catch you; you won't so much as stub your toe on a stone'?"

12"Yes," said Jesus, "and it's also written, 'Don't you dare tempt the Lord your God.'"

13That completed the testing. The Devil retreated temporarily, lying in wait for another opportunity.

14-15 Jesus returned to Galilee powerful in the Spirit. News that he was back spread through the countryside. He taught in their meeting places to everyone's acclaim and pleasure.

Matthew 9:27-31 As Jesus left the house, he was followed by two blind men crying out, "Mercy, Son of David! Mercy on us!" When Jesus got home, the blind men went in with him. Jesus said to them, "Do you really believe I can do this?" They said, "Why, yes, Master!"

He touched their eyes and said, "Become what you believe." It happened. They saw. Then Jesus became very stern. "Don't let a soul know how this happened." But they were hardly out the door before they started blabbing it to everyone they met.

John 8:12 Jesus once again addressed them: "I am the world's Light. No one who follows me stumbles around in the darkness. I provide plenty of light to live in."

John 1:15-18 John pointed him out and called, "This is the One! The One I told you was coming after me but in fact was ahead of me. He has always been ahead of me, has always had the first word."

We all live off his generous bounty, gift after gift after gift.

We got the basics from Moses, and then this exuberant giving and receiving, This endless knowing and understanding— all this came through Jesus, the Messiah. No one has ever seen God, not so much as a glimpse. This one-of-a-kind God-Expression, who exists at the very heart of the Father, has made him plain as day.

Mark 16:14-16 Still later, as the Eleven were eating supper, he appeared and took them to task most severely for their stubborn unbelief, refusing to believe those who had seen him raised up. Then he said, "Go into the world. Go everywhere and announce the Message of God's good news to one and all. Whoever believes and is baptised is saved; whoever refuses to believe is damned.

Pray: God, how is trying to be liked keeping me from shining your light? I want to go after You with everything in me. Amen.

DAY 3: CHASING ACHIEVEMENT

"Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful." - Albert Schweitzer

When it comes to biblical kings, no one achieved quite as much as Solomon. Israel flourished under his reign. He oversaw the construction of God's temple - one of the great wonders of the Ancient World. He built himself a royal palace. Rulers would travel long distances to see his wealth, bringing with them gifts of gold and jewels. He could answer any question posed to him. He had his choice of women (and he chose a lot). He had been blessed with every good thing one might wish for in a lifetime.

If anyone should have been happy with what they had achieved in life, it should have been Solomon. But in the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon painted a different picture. He literally says, "I hated all the things I toiled for under the sun." He explains, "because I must leave them to the one who comes after me."

Solomon figured something out. We can't take it all with us in the next life. Our promotions, houses, awards, cars, and vacations stay behind.

That kind of achievement is counterfeit. The real kind of achievement, the real and lasting kind of achievement is something that Solomon eventually figured out. At the end of Ecclesiastes, he sums it up, "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind."

At first glance, this might not seem like the most inspirational thing ever, but take another look. Solomon says that these are the things we should seek to achieve in life: fearing God—which means loving Him, respecting Him, and doing what He asks.

We're used to the world saying, "Run! Don't stop. See these expensive things? See these accolades? Thousands of other people want them, but don't let that stop you. Fight for them! Go! What else are you doing with your life? Life is a competition, and only the best will succeed."

But God's Word says, "Love God. Do good."

Think about how accessible this is to everyone. No matter whether you're single or married. Rich or poor. Young or old. Healthy or sick. Love God and do good. That's real achievement.

Read the following verses. Think and pray about the verse that applies the most to your life.

1 Kings 10:1-9 *The queen of Sheba heard about Solomon and his connection with the Name of God. She came to put his reputation to the test by asking tough questions. She made a grand and showy entrance into Jerusalem—camels loaded with spices, a huge amount of gold, and precious gems. She came to Solomon and talked about all the things that she cared about, emptying her heart to him. Solomon answered everything she put to him—nothing stumped him. When the queen of Sheba experienced for herself Solomon's wisdom and saw with her own eyes the palace he had built, the meals that were served, the impressive array of court officials and sharply dressed waiters, the lavish crystal, and the elaborate worship extravagant with Whole-Burnt-Offerings at the steps leading up to The Temple of God, it took her breath away.*

6-9 She said to the king, "It's all true! Your reputation for accomplishment and wisdom that reached all the way to my country is confirmed. I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it for myself; they didn't exaggerate! Such wisdom and elegance—far more than I could ever have imagined. Lucky the men and women who work for you, getting to be around you every day and hear your wise words firsthand! And blessed be God, your God, who took such a liking to you and made you king. Clearly, God's love for Israel is behind this, making you king to keep a just order and nurture a God-pleasing people."

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 *I said to myself, "Let's go for it—experiment with pleasure, have a good time!" But there was nothing to it, nothing but smoke.*

*What do I think of the fun-filled life? Insane! Inane!
My verdict on the pursuit of happiness? Who needs it?
With the help of a bottle of wine*

*and all the wisdom I could muster,
I tried my level best
to penetrate the absurdity of life.
I wanted to get a handle on anything useful we mortals might do
during the years we spend on this earth.
I Never Said No to Myself
4-8Oh, I did great things:
built houses,
planted vineyards,
designed gardens and parks
and planted a variety of fruit trees in them,
made pools of water
to irrigate the groves of trees.
I bought slaves, male and female,
who had children, giving me even more slaves;
then I acquired large herds and flocks,
larger than any before me in Jerusalem.
I piled up silver and gold,
loot from kings and kingdoms.
I gathered a chorus of singers to entertain me with song,
and—most exquisite of all pleasures—
voluptuous maidens for my bed.*

*9-10 Oh, how I prospered! I left all my predecessors in Jerusalem far
behind, left them behind in the dust. What's more, I kept a clear head
through it all. Everything I wanted I took—I never said no to myself. I
gave in to every impulse, held back nothing. I sucked the marrow of
pleasure out of every task—my reward to myself for a hard day's work!*

*11Then I took a good look at everything I'd done, looked at all the sweat
and hard work. But when I looked, I saw nothing but smoke. Smoke and
spitting into the wind. There was nothing to any of it. Nothing.*

Ecclesiastes 12:13 *But regarding anything beyond this, dear friend, go
easy. There's no end to the publishing of books, and constant study
wears you out so you're no good for anything else. The last and final
word is this: Fear God. Do what he tells you.*

Consider: *What would change about today if your only goal in every situation was to love God and do good? How will you achieve this goal?*

DAY 4: CHASING PERFECTION

"I am careful not to confuse excellence with perfection. Excellence I can reach for; perfection is God's business." –

Michael J. Fox

*"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." **Matthew 5:48***

No big deal, right? Just be perfect—like the holy, righteous God of the entire universe is perfect.

If you were to make yourself perfect, where would you even start?

For most people the idea of being perfect like God means no lying, no cursing, no snapping at the kids, or "borrowing" your friend's Netflix password.

But let's pretend you say, "Sure. I can do that." And you do. You clean up your act. You obey the speed limit. You give to the poor. You pay for Netflix yourself. And you do this for days, then weeks, then months, then years.

You still wouldn't be perfect. This is a counterfeit perfection.

In Matthew 19, a wealthy young man found himself trying to be better. He asked Jesus what he should do to get eternal life. Jesus told him to obey the major commandments. The young man said that he had kept each of those commandments. Then, Jesus replied, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." But when the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Jesus wasn't telling the young man that becoming perfect was a two-step plan. First, obey the commandments, and second, give away all your stuff. Jesus was saying the path to perfection starts with getting rid of whatever might keep a person from following him.

But perfect? How could anyone be perfect? This is not the world's kind of perfect. It's so much better. When you choose to follow Jesus, he covers your sins and imperfections with the death he died on the cross. And in God's eyes, you become every bit as perfect as Jesus himself.

Read the following verses. Think and pray about the verse that applies the most to your life.

Matthew 5:48 *"In a word, what I'm saying is, Grow up. You're kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you."*

James 2:8-11 *You do well when you complete the Royal Rule of the Scriptures: "Love others as you love yourself." But if you play up to these so-called important people, you go against the Rule and stand convicted by it. You can't pick and choose in these things, specialising in keeping one or two things in God's law and ignoring others. The same God who said, "Don't commit adultery," also said, "Don't murder." If you don't commit adultery but go ahead and murder, do you think your non-adultery will cancel out your murder? No, you're a murderer, period.*

Matthew 19:16-21 *Another day, a man stopped Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"*

17 Jesus said, "Why do you question me about what's good? God is the One who is good. If you want to enter the life of God, just do what he tells you."

18-19 The man asked, "What in particular?"

Jesus said, "Don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't lie, honour your father and mother, and love your neighbour as you do yourself."

20 The young man said, "I've done all that. What's left?"

21*"If you want to give it all you've got," Jesus replied, "go sell your possessions; give everything to the poor. All your wealth will then be in heaven. Then come follow me."*

Psalm 119:89–96 *What you say goes, God, and stays, as permanent as the heavens. Your truth never goes out of fashion; it's as up-to-date as the earth when the sun comes up. Your Word and truth are dependable as ever; that's what you ordered—you set the earth going. If your revelation hadn't delighted me so, I would have given up when the hard times came. But I'll never forget the advice you gave me; you saved my life with those wise words. Save me! I'm all yours. I look high and low for your words of wisdom. The wicked lie in ambush to destroy me, but I'm only concerned with your plans for me. I see the limits to everything human, but the horizons can't contain your commands!*

Hebrews 11:39–40 *Not one of these people, even though their lives of faith were exemplary, got their hands on what was promised. God had a better plan for us: that their faith and our faith would come together to make one completed whole, their lives of faith not complete apart from ours.*

Pray: *God, thank You for the perfect sacrifice of Your Son. Help me to give up anything that's preventing me from following Christ. In Jesus' name, amen.*

DAY 5: CHASING COMFORT

"We act as though comfort and luxury were the chief requirements of life. All that we need to make us happy is something to be enthusiastic about." - Albert Einstein

Whether we're stressed, hurt, tired, lonely, or just bored, we all find ourselves at times chasing comfort. Who hasn't overspent, overeaten, overslept, overdrunk, and overestimated the ability of stuff to actually deliver lasting comfort?

The word "comfort" has its own complicated history. It comes from two Latin word parts, *com*, which means "together with," and *fortis*, which means "strong or strength." Later, the Latin word *confortare* came to mean "to strengthen much." Eventually, an Old French word, *conforter*, added words like "solace" and "help" to the definition. In the 14th century, another French word *conforten* was defined as "to cheer up, console." Finally, by the 17th century, the English version of the word began to imply the sense of physical ease that we understand today.

What we chase now is counterfeit comfort because the definition of the word has changed. Strength that comes from being together with God in the tough times is the real comfort. Everything else we use to comfort ourselves is counterfeit.

Do you see God as your strength, together with you in the midst of pain, or as your barrier from pain?

The prophet Isaiah foretold of a Messiah who would enter our world to be wounded for our transgressions and suffer for our healing. If the very nature of our faith is to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, then let us consider his response to pain. In 1 Peter 2:21-25, we see a Saviour who accepted pain quietly despite having done nothing to earn it. Jesus does not avoid pain or look for a scapegoat; he comes into our world and makes our pain His pain.

Jesus is together-strength. Then, before He goes back to be with the Father, He promises us that the Holy Spirit—a "Comforter"—would not only be together with us, but in us! That's something worth chasing.

So, let's not chase the worldly version of comfort—bingeing Netflix series with blocks of chocolate and tubs of ice-cream. Instead, let's pursue comfort from the Holy Spirit, knowing that it doesn't mean a pain-free life but comfort in the middle of pain.

Read the following verses. Think and pray about the verse that applies the most to your life.

Isaiah 53:1-12 *Who believes what we've heard and seen? Who would have thought God's saving power would look like this?*

2-6 The servant grew up before God—a scrawny seedling, a scrubby plant in a parched field.

There was nothing attractive about him, nothing to cause us to take a second look.

He was looked down on and passed over, a man who suffered, who knew pain firsthand.

One look at him and people turned away.

We looked down on him, thought he was scum.

But the fact is, it was our pains he carried—our disfigurements, all the things wrong with us.

We thought he brought it on himself, that God was punishing him for his own failures.

But it was our sins that did that to him, that ripped and tore and crushed him—our sins!

He took the punishment, and that made us whole.

Through his bruises we get healed.

We're all like sheep who've wandered off and gotten lost.

We've all done our own thing, gone our own way.

And God has piled all our sins, everything we've done wrong, on him, on him.

7-9 He was beaten, he was tortured, but he didn't say a word.

Like a lamb taken to be slaughtered and like a sheep being sheared,

he took it all in silence.

Justice miscarried, and he was led off—

and did anyone really know what was happening?

*He died without a thought for his own welfare,
beaten bloody for the sins of my people.
They buried him with the wicked,
threw him in a grave with a rich man,
Even though he'd never hurt a soul
or said one word that wasn't true.*

*10 Still, it's what God had in mind all along,
to crush him with pain.
The plan was that he give himself as an offering for sin
so that he'd see life come from it—life, life, and more life.
And God's plan will deeply prosper through him.*

*11-12 Out of that terrible travail of soul,
he'll see that it's worth it and be glad he did it.
Through what he experienced, my righteous one, my servant,
will make many "righteous ones,"
as he himself carries the burden of their sins.
Therefore I'll reward him extravagantly—
the best of everything, the highest honours—
Because he looked death in the face and didn't flinch,
because he embraced the company of the lowest.
He took on his own shoulders the sin of the many,
he took up the cause of all the black sheep.*

1 Peter 2:21-25 *This is the kind of life you've been invited into, the kind of life Christ lived. He suffered everything that came his way so you would know that it could be done, and also know how to do it, step-by-step.*

*He never did one thing wrong,
Not once said anything amiss.*

They called him every name in the book and he said nothing back. He suffered in silence, content to let God set things right. He used his servant body to carry our sins to the Cross so we could be rid of sin, free to live the right way. His wounds became your healing. You were

lost sheep with no idea who you were or where you were going. Now you're named and kept for good by the Shepherd of your souls.

Pray: *God, I don't like discomfort, but I love You. Please change my understanding of Your comfort, and help me to really feel it.*

Holy Spirit, show me how Your "together-strength" is with me and in me. Jesus, thank You for bearing my shame on the cross.

Amen.

DAY 6: CHASING APPROVAL

"I worked with someone who told me they'd never like me. But for some reason, I just felt like I needed her approval. So I started changing myself to please her. It made me stop being social and friendly. I was so unhappy." - Ariana Grande

Don't get me wrong, approval is something you should desire. In fact, it is hard wired into the human social psyche. Like everything though, there is a real approval and there is counterfeit approval. The difference is in where the approval comes from. Seek the real approval and it will make you - seek the counterfeit approval and it will break you.

Almost from the moment we are born we are conditioned to seek the approval of people. As children, adults praise us when we do good things. We enjoy their praise, so we continue doing good things. In school, we study hard in search of praise from teachers, or we muck around to find acceptance from peers. Once we enter the workforce, we put in long hours in hopes of impressing our bosses, or we buy bigger houses and better cars to gain the respect of our friends and family.

And when we succeed in gaining the approval of people, we feel great. The world looks brighter. We walk with a spring in our step. Our very sense of self-worth is strengthened.

But... You knew there was going to be a "but." It's not the real thing. It's counterfeit approval.

Eventually, one of those people will fail to give you approval. And when that happens, it can be a mess. You may already know this.

It's not that you were looking to the wrong people. You won't ever find the approval you need from people. Only God can speak your deepest need for approval. And guess what? You don't have to stand on your head or act a certain way to gain his approval.

The moment you accept Jesus as your Saviour and make Him the Lord of your life, you're approved by God. That's it. You're set, because from that point on, you're God's child.

Chances are you've heard all of this before. Today, let yourself feel it. You have all the approval you could ever need—approval that will never falter or fail. Your worth is secure, and you can rest in the approval of God your Father.

Read the following verses. Think and pray about the verse that applies the most to your life.

Galatians 1:10 *Do you think I speak this strongly in order to manipulate crowds? Or court favour with God? Or get popular applause? If my goal was popularity, I wouldn't bother being Christ's slave.*

Ecclesiastes 9:7 *Seize life! Eat bread with gusto, drink wine with a robust heart. Oh yes—God takes pleasure in your pleasure!*

Romans 14:15–18 *If you confuse others by making a big issue over what they eat or don't eat, you're no longer a companion with them in love, are you? These, remember, are persons for whom Christ died. Would you risk sending them to hell over an item in their diet? Don't you dare let a piece of God-blessed food become an occasion of soul-poisoning!*

17–18 *God's kingdom isn't a matter of what you put in your stomach, for goodness' sake. It's what God does with your life as he sets it right, puts it together, and completes it with joy. Your task is to single-mindedly serve Christ. Do that and you'll kill two birds with one stone: pleasing the God above you and proving your worth to the people around you.*

1 Thessalonians 2:3–8 *God tested us thoroughly to make sure we were qualified to be trusted with this Message. Be assured that when we speak to you we're not after crowd approval—only God approval. Since we've been put through that battery of tests, you're guaranteed that both we and the Message are free of error, mixed motives, or hidden agendas. We never used words to butter you up. No one knows that better than you. And God knows we never used words as a smoke screen to take advantage of you.*

Even though we had some standing as Christ's apostles, we never threw our weight around or tried to come across as important, with you or anyone else. We weren't aloof with you. We took you just as you were. We were never patronising, never condescending, but we cared for you the way a mother cares for her children. We loved you dearly. Not content to just pass on the Message, we wanted to give you our hearts. And we did.

Titus 3:4-8 *It wasn't so long ago that we ourselves were stupid and stubborn, dupes of sin, ordered every which way by our glands, going around with a chip on our shoulder, hated and hating back. But when God, our kind and loving Saviour God, stepped in, he saved us from all that. It was all his doing; we had nothing to do with it. He gave us a good bath, and we came out of it new people, washed inside and out by the Holy Spirit. Our Saviour Jesus poured out new life so generously. God's gift has restored our relationship with him and given us back our lives. And there's more life to come—an eternity of life! You can count on this.*

Consider: *Who or what are you currently looking to for approval? How would your relationships change if you let God's approval meet that need?*

DAY 7: CHASING GOD

"Put God first in everything you do ... Everything that I have is by the grace of God, understand that. It's a gift ... I didn't always stick with Him, but He stuck with me." -Denzel Washington

Where are you going?

No matter where we're going at any given moment, it helps to have a destination in mind.

The problem with the world around us however, is that we're bombarded with things we ought to do. We ought to chase fame, money, possessions, approval and everything else. With so many destinations coming at us, it's no surprise how many of us are left stunned, looking for direction in life.

In reality we're only capable of going toward one destination at a time. What should that destination be?

Hebrews 12:1-3 portrays it like a run toward Jesus. It says we should fix our eyes on Jesus. Then run toward him. When we do that everything else falls into place.

But how do you "head toward" Jesus? You do what Jesus did.

Prayer. When Jesus needed to recharge after days spent speaking to crowds, he sought out His Father. When he was in distress in the Garden of Gethsemane, he cried out to his Father. Prayer keeps us connected to Christ.

People. We were created to live in relationship with other people. Jesus surrounded Himself with people throughout his time here, challenging them and encouraging them in their faith. You'll probably chase whatever the people you spend the most time with are chasing. So, spend some time with people who are chasing God.

Serving. Jesus came to earth to serve—he said so Himself. He did so in ways big and small, and he ended His ministry with the ultimate

service—sacrificing his life for ours. When we serve those around us, we chase God by doing what Jesus did.

Fasting. Whether Jesus was fasting from food in the desert, or from time around people when he went away to find silence and solitude, Jesus, the Son of God, knew even he needed to temporarily remove things from His life to chase after God. What can you occasionally remove to chase God?

The Word. Jesus had a head start on this—as John 1 says, Christ literally was the Word of God in human form. One of the best ways we can know Jesus is spending regular time reading, meditating on, and contemplating God’s direction for us in the Bible.

Act: *Which of the above will you take action on in your life? How will you start? Who will you tell about it?*

Read the following verses (take your time). Think and pray about the verse that applies the most to your life.

Hebrews 12:1-3 *Do you see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we’d better get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we’re in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he’s there, in the place of honour, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!*

John 1:14 *The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, generous inside and out, true from start to finish.*

Mark 10:41-45 *When the other ten heard of this conversation, they lost their tempers with James and John. Jesus got them together to settle things down. "You've observed how godless rulers throw their weight around," he said, "and when people get a little power how quickly it goes to their heads. It's not going to be that way with you. Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not to be served—and then to give away his life in exchange for many who are held hostage."*

Bonus: *Read more of what Jesus thought and taught.*

Matthew 5:1-48

Matthew 6:1-34

Matthew 7:1-29