

Daily Devotions (For When You are Struggling)

By Jessica Pritchard

Day 1 (Feeling overwhelmed?)

Reading: Matthew 11:28-29 “Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

Message: I wonder if this situation sounds like a common occurrence for you, you find yourself looking at your to do list which seems to get bigger and bigger every day. As you remember you have to call that family member who left you a message yesterday, the pile of stuff building up in the corner of the room and your friend has asked to meet up to talk through and pray for a difficult situation.

At times like this there is usually two responses; manically run around trying to complete five tasks at once and usually not completing any effectively or push all the issues to the back of your mind and pick up a book or watch some TV. Either way you get to the end of the day feeling overwhelmed by the sheer number of things that needs to be done and as you lay your head down on the pillow your mind begins racing.

It is a vicious cycle that is only too easy to get sucked into. We feel that we are carrying all these burdens on our own and that we will never find rest, but we could not be more wrong. These burdens that we carry are not ones that we have to deal with on our own, there is someone who understands what we are going through and worse.

God reminds us throughout scripture that if we lean on him that we will find that rest that we so desperately crave. One of my favourite reminders from this verse is that God is not only able and willing to assist us with our physical needs and problems but the ultimate rest that God offers is rest for our very souls. Only God can provide rest and comfort that transcends the physical problems we face.

If there are times that you're feeling overwhelmed by life's demands and just don't know where to turn, remember the promises of God and let that peace fill your soul. You can then lay your head down at night knowing God is there with you as your rock, your strength and your ever-present help in times of trouble.

Prayer: Lord you are the giver of rest. Help me to trust that you have everything under control and that I do not have to deal with everything on my own, but I can hand everything over to you, the all-powerful God of all the world. Thank you for taking my burdens over and over again, never ceasing to lighten my load.

Day 2 (Feeling angry?)

Reading: James 1:19-20 “Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

Message: When you are feeling angry it can be very difficult to function in your day-to-day life. You can spend your time stewing and constantly replaying past events in your head. Anything can make us angry, something small that happened recently or a bigger event that happened years ago. Things can be so hard to forget and even harder forgive and move on from and so much of our time can be taken up with anger and our hearts held captive with the angry thoughts.

We need to let this anger go as it is not having any effect on the source of frustration but only on you and your life. This is when the enemy can flourish and feed off our anger, causing us to stumble and fall further.

But there is good news, God can, and will, rescue us from this anger and from the grasp of the devil. We need to cry to God for help asking for his strength to forgive and to let go of that anger. His loving arms are around us, letting us know that he understands and wants the best for us.

These changes do not happen overnight, and are not a quick fix, but each day we take a small step in forgiving those who have caused us to be angry and pray that God will change our hearts in these times.

Prayer: Father help me to forgive and to let go of my unrighteous anger. Remind me of your everlasting patience and help me to forgive others as you have forgiven me. I thank you God for your never-ending mercy towards me and for not being angry at me but opening your arms to embrace me as your child.

Day 3 (Feeling sad?)

Reading: Lamentations 3:22-23 “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness”

Message: There are so many situations in our lives that can cause us to feel sadness such as missing a family member, your career not going the way you feel it should, the sickness of a friend or a relationship breakdown. These situations can make us feel that we are alone and have nowhere else to turn. We might even feel guilty about our sadness as Christians are meant to be happy people without a care in the world. It is okay to feel sad.

Even as Christians despite the numerous blessings we have received there are moments when sadness is the obvious human response. In the person of Jesus, we as he wept over the death of his dear friend Lazarus. Sadness is a natural part of living in a sinful world. However, as

Christians we should have a deep sense of personal comfort even in those truly sad occasions, because every morning that we open our eyes God's mercies are new for that morning.

Your sadness will pass, even when it feels like it will never go away, the rain always comes to an end (yes even in Swansea). We know this because we serve a God who brings comfort to his children. We can be comforted knowing that he is in control of each situation we face, and he loves us so much that everything we go through is for our own good. What an amazing truth to hold onto "The Steadfast love of the Lord never ceases".

Prayer: Lord there is a great sadness in me at this moment, please show me your goodness. Surround me with your presence and your comfort. Help me to long to praise you, even when I am downcast. You are a great and mighty father who loves his children and I thank you for loving me in my most difficult times and my most joyous. You are the rock on which I stand.

Day 4 (Have so many what-ifs?)

Reading: Matthew 6:25 "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat of what you will drink, not about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing."

Message: The mindset of 'what if' is often dangerous, there are so many things we can question; what if I don't get that job? What if I get too ill? What if they don't speak to me again? What if I can't afford my bills next month? There are countless scenarios which can be both big and small that we can say 'what if' to, but this thought process will not help you at all.

You can get trapped in this mindset and spend hours burrowing further and further into what if scenarios, and we start creating and reliving scenes and outcomes that will probably never come to pass. You might also be someone who is constantly living in the past wondering how your life might have been better if only I had done this, what if I had said this?

If we are doing this, we are putting ourselves into the role of God and in many ways not trusting that he has a plan and is in control of each aspect of our lives. It is not God's intention for us to be filled with anxiety and stress over the future or the past. Instead, He wants us to trust him and put everything into His hands. Do we truly trust that God has a plan for our lives if we are constantly living in a state of fear or worry?

He will not let anything happen to you that is out of his control, and he will never abandon you alone in a difficult situation. It is natural for us to worry about the future and to have concerns or remember the past.

Instead of asking 'what if' we should be trusting in "what will" happen according to God's perfect plan.

Prayer: Lord I confess that when I worry about the future, I am not always fully relying on you. Please give me the courage to release my fears and stop saying what if and to trust fully in the plans that you have for me. Lord I thank you for your great love and that I can give my anxieties to you so and for the peace of knowing you are there for me always.

Day 5 (Feeling anxious?)

Reading: 1 Peter 5:6-7 “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”

Message: There are many ways that anxiety can present itself, ranging from a mild feeling of being tense to having panic attacks. However, anxiety presents itself, It will bring on the all too familiar feeling of dread which can take over our lives and can make us feel like we cannot continue. When we are feeling anxious, we can so often feel completely alone with our thoughts that seem to never go away.

The important thing to remember in this time is that God is near, even when we are at our lowest. He understands that anxiety is hard which is why it is addressed so many times in his word. When Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane knowing the horrors that were before him, he knew a level of physical and spiritual anxiety that we will never know.

We can take encouragement in the knowledge that the God we rely on and pray to understands anxiety and fear in a greater way than us. Jesus being truly man and truly God means that God understands the emotions that we feel because he has lived a life as one of us (yet without sin) with all the emotions and stresses that life brings.

When your anxious thoughts are taking over your mind just remember you have an all-powerful God on your side. He knows our every need and will fulfil those needs, if we simply turn to him and allow him to. He will never leave you and will never turn his back on you, and we have this confidence because “He cares for you.” The God who created and sustains everything cares about you in your pain and misery.

Prayer: Lord I am so full of anxiety right now and I have nowhere else to turn except to you. Please come to me right now Lord and grant me your peace and deliver me from my anxious thoughts. Thank you for caring for me while I am at my weakest and for loving me at times where it is most difficult to love me.

Day 6 (too busy?)

Reading: Exodus 20:11 “For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Message: Busyness is a necessity in life, and it can be a blessing in times when we need to get things done. However sometimes this busyness can distract us from what’s really important. Also, if we know we have a busy day coming then this can cause feelings of dread to face the next day. At this point something needs to be done.

At times like this we can look to God and follow his example, particularly looking at how he created the world. He spent six days working each day doing something new each day, but what happened on the 7th day? Did he create one more species of animal? Or did he think this ocean needs a few more fish? No! On the 7th day he took the time (after he had created it) to rest. We should also follow this pattern, as it is a command from God in the bible to keep the sabbath day holy.

If we have too much going on that means you are not using this day for rest, then maybe time is needed to look at your to do list and reorganise these tasks and maybe start saying no to certain things where possible. If our all-powerful God chose to take time to rest after a busy week then how much more do we need this time.

I don’t think we should limit resting to the sabbath either, though God has set a clear pattern for Sundays (which we can observe even when we are self-isolating). We should be making sure that our lives never become so busy with things of this world that we push God out of our lives. Every day is a time to ask, am I too busy for God and if we are then we should make time for him.

Prayer: Lord I feel so busy at the moment and there is so much going on. Lord, I pray that you will help me to prioritize what needs to be done, but also I pray you will help me to take time to rest and be in your presence. Thank you for giving us a day where we can rest and find peace in you and I pray on these days you will help me forget everything and focus on you.

Day 7 (Full of doubt?)

Reading: Matthew 14:31 “Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt’”

Message: If we are being honest with ourselves there are times that we have all experienced doubt, either because of a situation that has arisen or simply because our mind is racing. There can also be a variety or different aspects of doubting and questioning. This can cause so much confusion for us; we wonder why we are having these doubts and it can make us feel that our faith is not strong enough.

However, we can take comfort in the fact that God acts out in kindness to those who doubt even when it is not always deserved. He will give us many more reasons to believe, as he knows our weaknesses. We do not need to be ashamed of the feelings of doubt, and we definitely shouldn't avoid God in these times. In fact, these are the times when we should be running to God and seeking Him more. He will help to expel our doubts and our fears, all we need to do is ask.

How encouraging is it that when Peter was sinking because of his doubting and lack of faith "Jesus reached out and took hold of him" Christ didn't leave Peter but reached out towards him even in his state of fear and lack of faith.

Just because we may have times where we are doubting it does not mean God's hold on us is any less. God loves us unconditionally, and will hear and answer our prayers, as he knows what is best for us.

Prayer: Lord I thank you that I can come to you with any issues, and I do not need to be ashamed. I thank you that you will never turn away from me because of my doubts and that you will continue to hold me close to you. I pray that you will take my doubts away from me now and just fill me with assurance of you and that I will always know your presence. Thank you for never giving up on me.

Day 8 (Feeling discontent?)

Reading: Philippians 4:11-13 "Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

Message: We can be discontent about any aspect of our lives; money, possessions, career, appearance and everything else. We start to think that what we have isn't enough and that we deserve more, however what this is really showing is that we are discontent with God's provision and not being thankful for everything he has given us, when we actually do not deserve any of it.

When we feel like this, we can be tempted to take situations into our hands to try and achieve what we think we should have. This can have damaging effects on our spirituality as we move away from trusting God to provide into trusting ourselves, and each step we take from God is more and more damaging.

However, this feeling is not uncommon and hard to get away from in today's society, as we are being told we need this or we need that to be happy and this list is endless, and it seems impossible to reach this happiness. But we have a God who gave us everything in the person of his son Jesus, he did not even spare His own son for us. Yet we can become discontent with our lives, as if the son of God dying for us was not enough for us to be content.

When you are struggling with discontentment, turn to God, tell Him why you feel this way that He is the only one who can fill the void that we all have. He knows your heart and he knows the circumstances you are in, and all we need to do is let him into our lives and we will know the true joy of having Him as our loving father.

Prayer: Lord I am feeling so discontent right now, I feel that I am stuck and I do not know how to overcome these feelings. But Lord I thank you that you are always there to hear my pleas and I pray that you will show me Lord that if I have you, that is all I need in life. Thank you for your love and the strength that you give me to face these feelings.

Day 9 (Finding it hard to forgive?)

Reading: Colossians 3:12-13 "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive.

Message: Have you ever had someone outstay their welcome? They came to stay for a day, but now they have been in your house for weeks; eating all your food, taking up your time and it feels like they are taking over your life? Perhaps the more familiar experience is someone visiting for a quick call and three hours later they are still there.

These aren't exactly pleasant scenarios, but this is what happens when you don't forgive. Someone told me before that not forgiving someone is letting them live rent free in your head, it doesn't affect them in any way but it has a number of negative effects on you.

This is a situation I am pretty sure we have all been in and it is something we will all face in a world full of imperfect people. What makes it even harder is that forgiveness is not a natural thing to do and it is not easy either. It is a lot easier to resent someone who has wronged us than to love that person, just like it would have been a lot easier for God to not watch His Son, whom he loved, die for those who have turned their back on him and those who have done nothing but hate him.

Forgiveness always comes with a cost, the person who we need to forgive may not even know that they have wronged us. We need to be praying to God and ask for his help, even if we have to do this daily. There is no limit to how many times we can turn to God and ask for help. This may not mean that our relationship with that person is completely healed, it may never be, but if we have truly forgiven them then we will eventually find peace.

The most important thing for us to remember is that we are asking God for help, and he has been through all of it and more, he understands, and he wants to help. God loves us which means he chose to forgive us. There is nothing anyone could do to us that is worse than what we have done to God which makes the fact he has forgiven us even more incredible.

Prayer: Lord I am finding it hard to forgive right now, I feel frustrated and hurt. Help me to remember how you have forgiven me, by paying the ultimate price, and let that encourage me to forgive others. Thank you, Lord, for this forgiveness you have shown to me, I know I did

not deserve it but your grace is immeasurable. Thank you for the strength you give me to forgive those who have hurt me.

Day 10 (Feeling exhausted?)

Reading: Isaiah 40:28-29. "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength."

Message: Exhaustion can be a strange thing, sometimes we can be so worn out we find it hard to sleep or rest. There are many ways exhaustion can present itself, whether it's physically, mentally or emotionally and in this state, things can mount up and make us feel worse and worse. We can feel so weak in these times and as if we have nowhere to turn, but one thing we must remember is that our God is never too exhausted to help us.

There is encouragement from the bible in that when exhaustion is mentioned, the first thing we are reminded of is that God never tires and will never give up on us. Usually, it is God's strength that is the main focus which is what we need to hear most when we are going through these times. His strength will never run out and we can claim this strength as our own, even though we do not deserve it God loves to help us. What is even more encouraging is that the word does not say that strength is given to those who are strong and are ready to go, he says he gives power to the faint.

God knows you and he knows what you need, and he loves to take care of his children. As the hymn 'He giveth more grace' says "When we reach the end of our hoarded resources, the Father's full giving has only begun" which illustrates how much we depend on his strength to get us through this time of exhaustion.

Prayer: Lord help me in my time of exhaustion tonight, help me to turn my thoughts away from those things that are making me weary, and to fix my eyes upon you, the one who gives all the strength I could ever need. Thank you for your promises in your word and thank you for giving me a hope that is unchanging and unshakeable.

Day 11 (when you are waiting)

Reading: Jeremiah 28:17 "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."

Message: It always seems that we are waiting for something in life, whether we are waiting for our lunch break, the end of the day, the weekend or that holiday we have in a few months. We can spend this time looking forward to our own plans and wishing our lives away and can become impatient waiting for them to be fulfilled. I'm sure it is the experience of many people

reading this. Trusting in your own plans and only focussing on these does not get you far. What we need to remember is that right now we are exactly where God wants us, and his plan is being fulfilled right now. The time may seem wasted to us, but to God he has planned every minute of our lives and it is exactly where we should be.

This does not mean that we should be sitting around doing nothing while we are waiting to see how his plan will be fulfilled, we can still use this time wisely. We could be looking forward to a holiday, which isn't wrong, I personally am always really excited when I have a holiday booked. However leading up to this time rather than saying to yourself "I wish these next two months would go quickly" we should be using this time and every second we have to glorify, thank and proclaim Jesus.

We can also be waiting for something that isn't as fun to wait for, such as test results which could go either way. At this time it is so easy to think "I wish I could just fast forward to find out the results" but we could be spending this time praying to God for the result and praying for strength to cope.

No moment of our prayer life is ever a wasted moment of our life.

Some of us might be waiting for something we don't know will ever happen, for example praying for a family member to be saved. We can say to God "why hasn't this happened yet it would be so much easier if they knew you", but what we should be doing is trusting His perfect plan and knowing that in all situations he is God.

We may have times where we feel we are waiting a very long time, wishing time would pass quicker or just wanting something to happen now. But we should never lose sight of the fact that we have an all powerful God who has a perfect plan for our lives, not plans to hurt us but to give us a future and a hope.

Prayer: Lord I am feeling so tired of waiting at the moment, it feels like I have been waiting for so long. Lord help me to use this time to turn to you in these times and to take up every opportunity for prayer. I also want to thank you Lord that you do have a plan for my life and you have planned every minute. I may not understand your plan, but I pray that you will guide me in the way I should go and give me comfort in reminding me that you are in full control.

Day 12 (filled with regret)

Reading: Hebrews 8:12 "For I will be merciful towards their iniquities, and I will remember their sins not more"

Message: Why did I say that to that person? Why did I do that? Why didn't I help that person? Why did I commit that sin? These are all questions that can run through our mind when we know we have done something wrong and wish that we haven't. We can feel regret about so many things, things that just happened or something that happened months or even years ago, and we can just over analyse every mistake that we have made and how it's affected our lives.

However, this is not something that God wants us to do. If we turn to him and ask him to forgive us, he will do so, but what does he then do? Does he constantly remind us of the things we have done wrong to make sure we are feeling bad about them? Does he bring up these things when we have forgotten about them to make sure we remember them? No, in fact he does the complete opposite. He removes our sins from us and then he chooses to remember them no more. One important point to make here is that God doesn't forget about our sins, because this would mean that he does not know about them anymore. He chooses not to remember which means that he still knows they have happened, but he does not hold them against us. Which to me is even more encouraging, that he still knows everything we have done wrong and is fully aware, but he still forgives us and chooses to love us still.

If there are times where you can't forget about something you have done wrong and you are dwelling on your sins, don't do this. As the hymn 'before the throne of God above' says "When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within. Upward I look and see him there, who made an end to all my sin." we should not be dwelling on our sins but instead looking towards the one who took them all away.

Prayer: Lord I am struggling to forget about my sins today, and I have so many regrets about what I have done wrong. Please help me to look to you and know that you do not remember my sins so I don't have to either. Thank you for sending your son to die to take away these sins and for loving me despite all the wrong things that I have done wrong.

Day 13 (Missing a loved one?)

Reading: Psalm 62:8 "Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us."

Message: When you are missing someone it can be quite a hard feeling to shake, as usually the only thing that will fix this issue is if you see that person, which may not always be possible. Maybe you are missing a family member who lives abroad, a loved one who has passed away, a friend who lives a few hours away or maybe it's simply because you are in isolation and you can't see those you would usually see regularly.

We can feel a mixture of feelings when we are missing a loved one, we can feel sad that they are not with us, angry at the situation that is preventing you from seeing them or maybe you are anxious about how long it will be before you next see them. However we are feeling this is not a pleasant situation to be in, and I can imagine, given the current situation right now that we all have this feeling of missing someone. However if we are trusting in God then we can take comfort in the fact that we have him to pour out our hearts to and he will help us. It is important to emphasize here that this doesn't mean that God will suddenly get that person to turn up at your door in the next 24 hours, but he can fill that void that we think can only be filled by the person we are missing, and his presence will be so much more comforting as he is the God of all comfort.

This is going to be a difficult time at the moment, we are all more separated from those we love than we probably ever have been before. However now more than ever is when we should be turning to God in prayer and asking for his presence. He can show you that he is

there and he will if we ask, he loves you and he never wants you to feel that you are alone, as with God you will never be alone.

Prayer: Lord I am missing _____ so much right now and I am finding it difficult to be away from them and from the rest of my friends and family. I pray during this time of isolation that you will help me to stay connected with those that I love and more importantly Lord that I stay connected to you. Lord I thank you for the comfort you give me in these times and thank you for your love which means that I am never alone.

Day 14 (suffering?)

Reading: Romans 8:18 “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

Message: Suffering is one of the main themes running through the christian story, and we see suffering played out in Jesus dying on the cross to save us from our sins. I am not saying that suffering is a good thing and we should seek out difficulties that would cause us to suffer, but what we have to think about is the result of suffering. If we look to the cross the result of Jesus’ suffering is that sinners are saved and can enter into a loving relationship with God, and if you ask me that is a pretty good result.

We are all prone to times of suffering at some point in our lives, and it can take different forms such as physically, mentally, emotionally or even spiritually. What all these different forms have in common is that when going through these difficult times we can feel that there will be no end to the suffering and it is easy at this point to lose hope. However throughout the bible there are many messages of hope, the verse above being one example, of how suffering will ultimately lead to good. This can be difficult to get our heads around, it doesn’t feel right that we should go through something horrible just for something good to happen afterwards. However when we are in the midst of suffering one positive is that we are given more opportunity to turn to God and to cling onto him tighter than we ever have before.

There is one more thing I find strangely encouraging, in the bible God said as a christian we should expect suffering, and this was fulfilled. This can’t have been an easy promise for God to keep, as our loving father he does not want to see us go through these difficult times. But if he can keep this promise, how much easier will it be for him to keep the other promises throughout the bible, and if we look at the verse above again, how great is the promise that when we are with God in glory it will be so much greater than our suffering is bad.

When you are suffering it is not an easy time to go through and you will face difficulties. But remember that your suffering will lead to something much better and God is in control of it all, and he knows what you can handle. When we then think about how amazing heaven is going to be, we will look back and think how it was all worth it.

Prayer: Lord be near me now in my time where I am suffering, I am finding it very difficult to see how any good can come from this. But Lord I know you have a plan and you work all things for your good, but be with me now to help me get through this time. Lord thank you for taking

the suffering of Christ and turning it into something so amazing, and because of this I know I am your child.

Day 15 (feeling betrayed?)

Reading: Romans 12:19 “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord”

Message: Betrayal can also be defined as being gravely disloyal to someone, which means it usually comes from someone we care about and who we thought cared about us. This is the reason it can hurt so much, as we expect our enemies to do bad things to us but we do not expect this from those that we love.

When we have been betrayed it is hard to see that person in a different light and suddenly hearing their name makes you feel very uncomfortable. Our reaction to a betrayal will also allow us to see the weakness of our hearts and it reveals how broken we are. One way we may then think is that we want the person who has betrayed us to hurt as much as we are hurting and our minds will naturally wander to how we can carry out our revenge. This is a natural feeling, no one wants to be hurting while the person who has done something wrong is feeling no pain at all, and it doesn't seem fair. However, at this point is when we look to Jesus, who has been through this exact same situation, and who understands exactly how we are feeling right now. When Jesus was betrayed by one of his closest friends, he did not seek revenge afterwards and he did not try and cause him pain, and this is the example we should follow.

This won't be an easy thing to do and we cannot do it by ourselves, we need to turn to God, he will help you. We do not need to get our revenge on these people who hurt us, as the verse above states, God is in control. We need to trust that he will do what is just, as this is in his divine nature, and we hand all control over to him.

Prayer: Lord I am struggling right now thinking about how that persona has betrayed me and how I want them to feel how I am feeling now. I pray that you will help me to hand it over to you now and to trust that you will do what is right and what is just. Help me to forget about these thoughts of revenge and to help me keep my eyes on you as the perfect example we have to follow.

Day 16 (Feeling discouraged?)

Reading: Joshua 1:9 “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

Message: Discouragement can arise from many different situations in our lives, it can be from a bad week in work or from something that has been going on for years and years. It is very easy at this time to wallow in this discouraged state and to just think negatively about the situation, thinking there is no hope.

There is one major problem with thinking this way; this is not the way God wants us to live, this is how the devil wants us to behave. He wants us to focus on our problems and then take our eyes away from God, he wants us to give up in the spiritual battle, because then he has won. However we are not going to lose this battle as we have someone on our side who has already defeated our enemy, we have Jesus on our side. He has promised throughout his word that he will be with us no matter what the battle is that we are facing, and more importantly he will be the one who is strong and we can lean on him. As mentioned in a previous devotion, it is important to remember that when we are going through times of discouragement that God is using it for good, and that good will eventually be revealed to us.

At these times I think the verse above is particularly helpful when we are going through a discouraging situation as it reminds us that God is with us wherever we go. So right now while you are stuck in your house, God is with you. If you are working in a difficult environment where things are different, God is with you. He will never leave you, and he will give you the strength that you need.

Prayer: Lord I pray that you will help take away these feelings of discouragement, and you will help me to realise that you have a plan and that you are using these difficult times. I thank you Lord that you are with me no matter where I am in life and no matter what situation I am in, and for being the strength I need to face each day.

Day 17 (Anxious about money?)

Reading: Philippians 4:19 “And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus”

Message: Whether we want to admit it or not, money is a big aspect of our lives. We all have some sort of bills we need to pay, and the only way we can pay these bills is with money. As it is such a big aspect of our lives it can also cause a large amount of anxiety as we could be worrying about having enough money saved for an emergency, whether we have enough to help that struggling family member or maybe you are struggling to get by each week.

Now more than ever there are probably a lot more people around us who may be struggling financially as they are not able to work, and for some they may not know when they will be paid next. In this current situation this is going to become a lot more common, however one thing we can always count on is God. We can fully depend on him whenever we need him and we will never have to worry about him not being available. However when we are struggling

with money and turn to God he will not suddenly put a big bunch of £50 notes in our pocket, but he will supply our needs. If we look at the example of Elisha and the widow (2 Kings 4:1-7) they were in debt and struggling to live, and yes Jesus provided for them but he did not make them abundantly rich. He gave them enough for them to pay off their debts and then they had enough left for them to live off themselves without having to worry.

This is just another way God provides for us in ways that we don't necessarily expect, but we need to learn to trust that he will provide every need exactly how we need him to. The Lord loves us like a father and he wants to help us, and he will but it's not just about him fixing the problem straight away, but standing by us while we are going through these problems.

Prayer: Lord I feel so anxious right now, worrying about having enough money in my account or worrying about possible expenses. I know you are faithful to your children and that you will provide my every need, but I pray you will put my mind at rest today and help me to trust in your provision. Thank you for all the gifts that you give me that I do not deserve and for caring for me as your child and providing for every need.

Day 18 (Feeling lonely?)

Reading: Matthew 28:20 "...And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Message: When talking about loneliness it is natural to assume that if someone is feeling lonely it means that there is no one around them. This can be true but loneliness can also be felt when surrounded by people or when talking to people every day. We may not have the company or the friendship that we crave and end up feeling that we have nowhere to turn.

In a church community loneliness does not seem possible, as we are seeing each other every week (under normal circumstances) or right now we might think that someone has our number they could just give us a ring if they are feeling lonely. However, what if that person does not think that they can ring you, that they'll be a burden if they do call? This is when we should be taking responsibility to check up on those we think could be struggling. If you know a person is living by themselves, check up on them. If they are the only christian in their household, offer to pray with them. Even if it's someone who is in a house full of christians they may still appreciate someone different to talk to, give them a call.

This also works the other way round, if you are feeling lonely right now you can't just sit back and do nothing and wait for someone else to fix it. Sometimes you need to take the first step. If there is someone you used to speak to a lot on a sunday, give them a call and confide in them. You may find that someone else is in the same position as you and this contact will be beneficial for you both, but you'll never know until you try.

However, there is one issue with this solution and that is that human beings are not all perfect (amen). We may think that person has called at a bad time, or we may think the person we have called gave the impression they don't want to talk to us, so we give up trying. The point is you cannot fully depend on the humans around you. But luckily for us there is someone we can fully depend on, Jesus. This is emphasized in the verse mentioned above as it was one of

the last things Matthew recorded Jesus saying to his disciples. To me if it is the last thing he told the disciples, it must be true.

He is there 24/7 for us and we can turn to him at any point and he will never turn us away. We can pray to him and tell him everything we are worrying about and he will listen. We can find true comfort in our perfect Jesus, who loves us so much that he died so we could have true fellowship with him forever.

Prayer: Lord I feel so alone and lonely today, I am struggling with this isolation and have nowhere to turn. Help me to feel your presence now Lord and to realise that if I trust in you then I am never truly on my own. Thank you for sending your son to die for me, so I can have a true fellowship with you.

Day 19 (Feeling dissatisfied?)

Reading: John 4:13-14 “Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Message: Our society is one that always seems to want more, and pushes this thought process on us so we think that we need more as well. This can lead to us feeling dissatisfied in many areas of our lives; we may want to be in a better position in work, want a better car than our neighbour who bought his last week or want a bigger house as we have seen our friend has just bought a new one in a much nicer area than what we live in now.

The problem is we think we will feel so much better if we have these things and that the void we are feeling will be filled if we get what we think we need. The problem is even if we get these things there is no way they are going to fill the hole, and this is one reason there is so much dissatisfaction in the world. But there is one solution for this problem, and it is the best solution we could ask for and it will definitely fill the void, and this solution is Jesus. He is the only one who can fill this gap in our hearts, as we have been created with a desire to worship him, which is why each person will have this feeling at some point in their lives. Dissatisfaction can be a difficult feeling to wrestle with, however the Lord knows and understands and he wants to help. All we have to do is pray to him and remember what Jesus has done for us, and this should fill us with gratitude as we remember how amazing it is that Jesus gave so much for us when he died on that cross.

What is even more encouraging is the thought that when we reach heaven and when we are with our saviour, that not only will we be satisfied with what we have, but we will not want anything else. This is something that is hard to grasp while here on earth but it is something we can look forward to, which we are also reminded about in the hymn “There is a hope” where the final line states “When sufferings cease and sorrows die, and every longing satisfied. Then joy unspeakable will flood my soul, for I am truly home”

Prayer: Lord I am struggling right now with feeling dissatisfied, and it is hard to forget these feelings with society around me encouraging these feelings. I pray that you will remind me

what it is you have done for me by sending your son to die, and I thank you that because of this when I come to heaven I will have every longing satisfied as I will be home with you.

Day 20 (Facing big decisions?)

Reading: Psalm 32:8 “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you”

Message: Life can be full of decisions that we need to make, that can range from everyday things such as what are you going to wear this morning or what are you going to have for food tonight. These decisions won't usually cause us many issues, however there are bigger decisions that need to be made in life which could be something like, where should I go to university, should I take that job abroad, how should I discipline my children.

The issue with making decisions like the ones above is that usually the result will have a huge impact on our lives, and this can cause us to worry about making the right decision. There are so many things that we consider as our choices will not only affect us but can affect our loved ones as well, and when we consider this option it makes it even harder to reach a decision. We can spend hours thinking about each option and not knowing where to turn, but there is one thing that we can take comfort in and that is that the God that we love is present and active in our lives. We need to take all these thoughts and worries to him and he will help us and guide us, and wherever he guides us we can trust that his plan is the one that will be most beneficial for us and will bring him glory. What is even greater than just pointing us in the right way, but he will also walk next to us while we are going through these plans so we can trust that he will be there next to us.

One poem that has been written to illustrate this further, is one entitled 'Footprints', where the message is that a man looks back on scenes of his life but during difficult times he only sees one set of footprints so assumes God abandoned him. When he questioned God, he was reassured that the one set of footprints belonged to God, and he was carrying the man through those times.

We can trust God to guide us down the right path and also to be right there with us while we are going through life. He will instruct and teach you and will counsel you with his eye upon you.

Prayer: Lord I do not know what direction I should go in or what decision to make. Please show me your plan for my life and help guide me to where you want me to be. I also thank you Lord for being there for me throughout my life and for carrying me through difficult times.

Day 21 (Can't stop worrying?)

Reading: Proverbs 3:5-6 "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."

Message: We are all prone to worrying and can worry about a wide range of things; what other people think about us, when we are going to have time to clean the house, will I still have my job this time next year. We can worry about things that are going to happen tomorrow or a few years from now, and this can take over our lives.

When we are worrying we tend to think about how we are going to get ourselves out of a certain situation and what our solution is going to be. When we are worrying about these things we can usually feel negative as we feel that our solutions or methods just won't work. This is what happens when we rely on ourselves, ultimately it will all fail, we are not in control and by trying to be we are asking for trouble. When we find ourselves worrying about various situations, what we need to do is give it all to God and trust his control. He understands our lives much more than we do, as he planned it all and he knew we would feel this way, which must mean that he has planned a way for us to get through it.

One way we can move our minds away from worry is to worship him instead, as this will be a much more pleasant use of our time. If we can feel ourselves starting to worry about a situation instead of letting our minds think about it too much, grab your bible. If you can think of a verse that fits your situation, find that verse and pray through it with God, and read it and take in the comfort. If you can't think of a specific verse, then find a passage that provides comfort and pray to God and thank him for his word and the fact he has provided this comfort for us.

God has provided his word for us to use and he wants us to show gratitude for it, but he does not want to spend time worrying about situations that are out of our control but are fully in his control. He knows what is going to happen and all we need to do is trust him and turn to his word for comfort.

Prayer: Lord I can't seem to stop worrying today and it is taking over my thoughts, I pray you will take this worry away from me and help me to trust you. Thank you for providing me with your word which provides endless comfort, and in these times of worry, I pray you will remind me to worship you instead.

Day 22 (Prayers aren't answered?)

Reading: 1 John 5:14-15 "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him."

Message: If we ask someone for a favour we usually expect it to happen straight away; you could ask your partner to make us a cup of tea, your child to pick you up some bread on the way home or a friend to lend us that book we have wanted to read. If we ask these things it

is not something we want to wait that long and if we do wait it can become frustrating, and this is how we can feel when we have prayed to God and he doesn't answer straight away.

When God doesn't answer our prayers when we think he should, our mind can fill with questions and concerns; are we praying enough, are not using the right words, is it what God wants, should I just give up? It is easy to think that if God was going to answer our prayers he would have done it by now, so why should we keep on praying for something that might not happen. Well here is the thing, we don't know what his plan is, and that is part of the mystery that is his power and while we are here on earth we will never understand this power.

To us we might feel that God is saying no to our prayers, but really he is just saying wait or not yet, and we need to be patient with it. This is where I feel that the above verse is particularly helpful, as it encourages all our negative feelings. It reminds us that we can have confidence in him and when we pray, he hears us every time. However this verse also has a key point that has to be emphasized, is that the verse says "according to his will", which is what we need to remember, is that our prayers will never go against his perfect plan.

From this we can trust that whatever happens will be for our benefit and we have to trust this, even if it goes against our plans. At times it may be difficult but we need to persevere in our prayers and keep going, knowing that God will hear and he will answer our prayers according to his perfect will.

Prayer: Lord I feel so frustrated right now, the plans I had are not going the way I think they should. I know I need to trust in you Lord as you do know what is best for me, but I pray that you will help me to trust you and to keep going. I thank you for the gift of prayer and how amazing it is that you hear me when I call you. I thank you for your perfect plan for my life and I pray that you will reveal this plan to me now and help me to trust that you know what is best for me.

Day 23 (Awake for no reason?)

Reading: Psalm 4:8 "In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety."

Message: These last few weeks I have spoken a lot about difficult situations or when you are experiencing negative feelings, which can happen at any time. However, we are not always going to be going through something negative, as this would make life pretty difficult. There will be times when everything is going okay, we feel content and calm and everything is going right, but yet we still struggle to fall asleep.

This sounds like a contradiction, as everything is okay and we are feeling relaxed, but then we can't seem to drift off to sleep, which can cause us to feel a bit worked up and just fed up which is not how we want to feel when we turn in for the night. We can then start to focus on everything that is going to happen if we don't get enough sleep and what will go wrong. It is very easy to see this as a negative situation and a waste of our time, but this is not how we should be seeing this time. If we are lying in bed when everyone else is asleep and we have a time of quiet, why not spend this time with God. This time will be uninterrupted, and we can

solely focus on him, and in a busy time it is rare to find time to stop and focus completely on God, so we can make the most of this time. We can think back over the last day and see how God has blessed us and thank him for these blessings and praise him for who he is. It would also be a good time to think of loved ones and pray for them, or even pray for yourself for the day to come.

I have said this a few times this last month but any time we spend with God in prayer is not wasted and is a much better use of our time than just sitting and worrying. We have a God who loves it when we pray to him and cannot listen to us enough, so what is stopping us from doing so? If we have this time to relax and unwind from the day we have just had, turn to him and spend that time with your loving, heavenly father who grants you peace and will keep you safe through anything you go through.

Prayer: Lord I am struggling to fall asleep tonight and can't seem to shut off, but I thank you that you are here for me to turn to and I can pray to you about anything. I pray that in this time you will help me to focus on you and what it is you have done for me. I thank you for every blessing you have given me today and I just pray that you will be with me when I wake up tomorrow and you will help me face the day ahead.