

**DEVOTIONS
FOR PEOPLE
WHO
DON'T DO
DEVOTIONS**

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**Forward
Movement**

inspire disciples. empower evangelists.

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Cincinnati, Ohio**

To my brother Matt, whose entrepreneurial spirit
and passion for life never ceases to inspire me.

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INTRODUCTION

I'm not a big fan of devotional books. You know, the kind you get for Christmas from your Aunt Thelma, whose big smile always comes with a side of judgment. With titles like *Devotions for Dads* or *365 Daily Devotions to Strengthen Your Marriage*, she's not-so-subtly trying to fix what she thinks is wrong with you by jamming religious books into your stocking.

Maybe it's the saccharine sweet, holier-than-thou tone of most of the devotionals I've browsed in the Religion & Spirituality section at Barnes & Noble. Okay, most of those were put out by Joel Osteen, Inc. But still, there's a Ned Flanders-esque vibe to many spiritual books that leaves you wondering if the people who write them even inhabit the same planet. And surely that's not helpful for those of us seeking the divine presence in the midst of our daily lives.

So, here are a few things you should know about this little book. First, there are not 365 devotions. Frankly, I'm just not that prolific. But mostly, I don't want this book to become a source of spiritual guilt, staring at you from your nightstand, begging you to read 12 straight devotions in a single day just to catch up.

Rather, I hope you take as much time with each devotion as you like. That may be 30 seconds, or it may be a week. If the

words resonate, lean into them. If they don't, turn the page and keep moving. These are meant to be starting points, not megaphone-style declarations of certainty. The hope is that you will bring your own experience and imagination to these brief reflections and that, through engagement with them, they will offer some inspiration and perspective.

You can certainly read these through a profound theological lens, but that's not really the point. I've tried to simply offer small morsels of real life to be chewed upon. Some will be more flavorful for you than others—those are the ones to spend time with and savor.

Following each devotion, you'll find a brief section called *Reflect & Engage*. You can think about these questions on your own, perhaps with your morning coffee or afternoon tea. Better yet, find a small group of friends or fellow seekers and use these prompts as jumping-off points to get to know one another—and God—in deeper ways. I've found that following a global pandemic, many people want to gather to talk about their lives in the context of faith. Here is an accessible, non-threatening way to do just that.

I firmly believe that God is often most present just beneath the surface of the visible world. If we have eyes to see the divine hand at work in the day-to-day interactions and experiences of our lives, in both the mundane and the miraculous, our lives will be forever enriched. I pray our journey together will help you see things that so often remain unseen. And, in so doing, perhaps this process will

help you to unlock your own unique ability to glimpse God in your daily life.

I look forward to spending a bit of time with you throughout these pages. And perhaps we'll even have some fun meeting Jesus along the way.

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SAMPLE

WALK IT OFF

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. —2 Corinthians 12:9

“Walk it off.” That was Coach Spencer’s answer to everything. Hit in the face with a dodgeball thrown by the biggest bully in school? “Walk it off.” Dying of thirst with a touch of heatstroke after the forced one-mile sprint around the perimeter of the campus? “Walk it off.”

Coach Spencer’s primary role was varsity football coach. This was an exalted position at my school, and a certain aura surrounded Coach Spencer wherever he went. His “other duties as assigned” included overseeing a few sections of middle school gym class, and he clearly believed this was beneath him. That may be why he tortured us with various obstacle courses, cutting us spoiled brats down to size while keeping his eyes peeled for the next star running back.

One day, I tripped and banged my head on the concrete floor during one of his sadistic exercise routines, hard enough that I literally saw stars. The first thing I remember was Coach Spencer standing over me, muttering, “Walk it off, walk it off.”

We often take Coach Spencer’s approach to life’s challenges: we try to “walk it off.” We get knocked down, and then

we get back up and keep going. And there are absolutely times to demonstrate such resilience: minor setbacks, disappointments, and the various challenges that life sends our way. We're told that nobody wants to hear about our problems, so we suck it up.

But sometimes, we can't just "walk it off." When it comes to our mental and spiritual health, it's okay to let others know when we're struggling. Reaching out to a friend or therapist is not an admission of defeat but strength.

Jesus reminds us that his "power is made perfect in weakness." It's okay to let Jesus do the walking for us while we rest awhile, to allow his grace to carry us. The good news is that Jesus is often most fully present during those times when we feel completely and utterly overwhelmed. The trick is to allow him to walk with us as a true companion along the journey.



Reflect & Engage

Name a time when you couldn't face something alone—a spiritual, emotional, or physical challenge. Did you reach out for help? In retrospect, what might you have done differently?

CEMETERY WANDERINGS

The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God endures forever. —Isaiah 40:8

One of the things I like to do when things are feeling particularly uncertain in the world or I'm just feeling out of sorts in my life is to walk through the historic cemetery down the street.

I know that for some, there is no more depressing place than a cemetery. There's a reason I used to hold my breath whenever I'd drive past one as a kid. In a cemetery, you are literally surrounded by death, and with each gravestone, you come face-to-face with the fleeting nature of life.

But I find that walking through a cemetery is good for the soul. Rather than ghoulish or gloomy, I experience it as a place to reflect on life and faith. A cemetery offers perspective and reminds us that our own troubles, whether personal or professional, placed in the broad context of human history are neither unique nor important.

As I stroll among the headstones, I always return to the prophet Isaiah's verse at the beginning of this devotion. Everything we see, like the grass or the flowers, does indeed pass away, along with our mortal bodies, no matter how much care and attention we've given them over the years.

And our earthly concerns, no matter how seemingly urgent, are of little account in the grand scheme of things. What remains is the eternal nature of God. In these headstones, rather than death, I see hope.

It's helpful to recognize that hope does not come without grief or burden. It is not untouched by pain and brokenness; it is not cut off from sadness or despair. Rather, hope is the light that shines in the darkness. So that whatever we're facing, whatever we're struggling with, whatever difficult situation we're confronting, our hope in the eternal abides.

These are some of my fleeting thoughts as I wander past the seventeenth-century town mothers and fathers in one section and a couple of governors in another and pause to say a quiet prayer at the graves of those parishioners I've buried on this hallowed ground.



Reflect & Engage

When was the last time you visited a cemetery? Was it just for a stroll or were you visiting someone in particular? In what ways does wandering through the tombstones of those who have come before you shift your perspective on life?

PASS/FAIL

Do not judge, so that you may not be judged.

—Matthew 7:1

The single, ubiquitously American rite of passage must be the driver's license road test. Pass, and you receive a ticket to freedom that accompanies your invitation to the open road. Fail, and you suffer the shame and indignity of being subjected once again to the diabolical whims of the Department of Motor Vehicles.

Everybody remembers their driver's test no matter how many years have passed. Some recall the euphoria of miraculously nailing the dreaded parallel parking portion of the exam. For others, the tester's disappointed face is forever seared into their memory, and they can still viscerally feel the bump of the curb that signaled failure.

Regardless of the outcome, everyone I know shares a memory of profound anxiety in the moments before meeting the evaluator and taking the test. Few times in life are you so intimately and irrevocably judged by another human being. Sure, there are tests in school and performance evaluations at work. But toss in the requisite insecurity of your average 16-year-old and add the discomfort of a stranger with a clipboard sitting next to you, and the driver's test is a recipe for existential teenage angst.

A couple of years ago I discovered something interesting: 16-year-olds don't have a monopoly on pre-road test jitters. My brother bought me a long-coveted scooter for my fiftieth birthday, which was amazing! But it meant I had to take a motorcycle road test. So I found myself lined up with a bunch of nervous teenagers.

Fortunately, with the passage of time comes perspective. Moments that once seemed heartrendingly fraught fade into the blur of memories that make up our lives. I recognized that if I failed my first road test in 35 years (I didn't, thanks be to God), I would live to ride another day.

And as we age, we encounter rivers of uncertainty and fear that matter more than whether we'll be able to drive to the local convenience store for an energy drink now or next month after we retake the road test. All we can do is take each day as it comes and recognize that whatever we're dealing with today is enough. Tomorrow is another day.



Reflect & Engage

Do you remember the emotions you experienced when you took your first road test? How did that day go for you? What other moments in your life have felt like the most important thing at the time but actually were not?

SKUNKED!

Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. —Galatians 6:2

The unmistakable smell wafted through the kitchen. Having been down this smelly road once before, Bryna and I knew exactly what had transpired. Delilah, our sweet, then nearly 16-year-old lab/husky rescue dog, had been sprayed by a skunk.

We quickly brought her inside and up to our second-floor bathroom with the walk-in shower, held our noses, and Googled the correct ratio of dish soap, baking soda, and hydrogen peroxide. Within moments, I found myself stripped down and lathering up a wet, smelly, traumatized dog.

While Delilah didn't exactly enjoy the process, she tolerated it. Mostly, I think she realized she needed help and couldn't deal with this experience alone. At least, that was my human projection as she stood stoically in the shower, enduring the frantic machinations around her. If the odor was offensive to my nostrils, I can't imagine what it was like for a dog whose sense of smell is at least 100 times more sensitive than mine.

For non-dogs like you and me, admitting we need help is challenging. After all, we're taught to be independent, and self-sufficiency is held up as a grand American virtue. Yet there are times in our lives when we, like Delilah, simply can't do it alone; moments when we need help and must rely on others.

Most of us would much rather *help* others than *accept help* from others. It's hard to admit when we can't get by on our own merits and sheer will. Yet needing and accepting help isn't admitting weakness; it's simply admitting our humanity.

From a faith perspective, awareness of the divine presence reminds us that, in the end, nothing we do or accomplish is done without God's help. This knowledge eliminates the hubris that we're fully in charge of our lives: we can fool ourselves only until we actually need help, at which point the house of cards comes crashing down around us.

At the same time, we also know that regardless of the particular situation we're facing or the seemingly helpless place we find ourselves, God is present with us through it

all. And there's both great freedom and immense comfort in this promise.



Reflect & Engage

What's an example of a time when you needed physical or emotional support? Did you accept the help gracefully, or did you struggle with the notion of needing assistance? Would you say you're better at giving or receiving help? Why?