

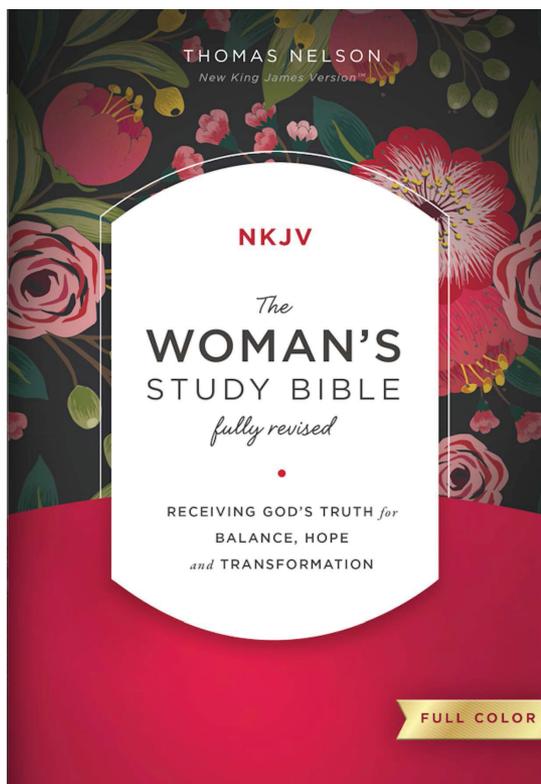


HOPE THROUGH LIFE'S CHALLENGES

7-Day Devotional



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This 7-day devotional offers hope and perspective amidst the often challenging trials of daily life. Drawn from *The Woman's Study Bible*, the devotions contain numerous additional references for even deeper study. Topics include experiencing God's goodness through adversity, how Jesus identifies with our grief, hope through persecution, and reflections on God's omnipresence, love, peace and blessings.

DAY 1: Experiencing God's Goodness in the Midst

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DAY 1

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Romans 8:28

Experiencing God's Goodness in the Midst

God's goodness is nowhere more apparent than in the midst of suffering. His history of providential care and deliverance for his people remains a constant reminder in every generation that he is to carry us through every adversity and trial. His presence is sufficient to banish fear. His power is enough to deliver from despair. His ultimate purpose is always for our good (Romans 8.28).

Much of our suffering as human beings is rooted either in circumstances beyond our control or in relationships.

Everyone is affected by circumstances that bring suffering. Mary Magdalene, for example, had been possessed of demons. She testified to the suffering of body and mind she endured before meeting Jesus. The outpouring of devotion that she showed in following Jesus to the cross (Mark 15:40, 47), as well as the unutterable joy she displayed to Jesus at the garden after his resurrection (John 20:11-18), left little doubt that she had known at a very deep level a response of love from our Lord that had liberated her from the demon possession she had previously suffered. In the light of his love, she experienced status, acceptance and peace.

The Scriptures have a number of stories of suffering that are rooted in a woman's relationships: mother, wife, sister, daughter, friend. One example is Mary, the mother of Jesus. As a result of her openness and obedience to God, she exposed herself to the suffering that was to manifest itself in various ways: She endangered her engagement to Joseph (Matthew 1:18-25); she fled into exile once Jesus was born in order to safeguard his life (Matthew 2:14-15); she suffered the rejection of Jesus as he moved out of the exclusiveness of his family to the inclusiveness of the kingdom of God (Mark 3:31-35); and finally, she suffered the agonies of watching her son's cruel death on Calvary. As with the other biblical motifs, suffering, however, does not have the final word; for with the resurrection of the Lord, the arrows that pierced Mary's soul were turned to the joy that every believer will experience at the Lord's return.

DAY 2

He is Omnipresent

The active presence of God, both in places and in relationships, is one of the chief presuppositions running through Scripture. There is no place without God, no place beyond Him (2 Chronicles 6:18), and He is everywhere simultaneously (Ephesians 4:6). Yet God is not bound by, nor dependent upon, any place or anyone (Jeremiah 23:23, 24).

God's universal presence encompasses all space—extending to every geographical location (Psalm 33:18; 34:15; 121:1–8), creation (Psalm 104), and all human affairs (Isaiah 40:21–23). This in no way suggests that He is immersed in His creation, as pantheism suggests. God is always distinct from His creation because He, as the Creator, brought all into existence (Genesis 1:31). His relational presence is experienced only by believers. He indwells His children (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). In “taking up residence,” He establishes ownership, provision, love, workmanship, guidance, teaching, and personal friendship (Psalm 139.)

Jesus reveals what God's presence is like. In a created universe filled with energy and wonder, God's passion was and is to have a relationship with every man and woman (John 1:1–18). God does not come and go in our lives—rather, we live and move and have our being in Him (Acts 17:27, 28; Philippians 1:6).

*O Lord, You have searched me and known me.
You know my sitting down and my rising up;
You understand my thought afar off.
You comprehend my path and my lying down,
And are acquainted with all my ways.
For there is not a word on my tongue,
But behold, O Lord, You know it altogether.
You have hedged me behind and before,
And laid Your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
It is high, I cannot attain it.
Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Or where can I flee from Your presence?
If I ascend into heaven, You are there;
If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.*

Psalm 139:1-8

DAY 3

Sorrow of Soul

Sorrow of soul, such as the disciples experienced at the imminent death of Jesus, is a very real thing (Luke 22:45). God expects us to grieve when we are brokenhearted (John 11:19, 31-35).

Unexpressed grief often brings complex emotional and physical illness. Release from grief and inner happiness come only when you offer your unique circumstances to God so that he can cause them to bear fruit on your behalf (John 7:37-38). As Jesus used the words of the prophet Isaiah to describe himself and his Messianic role, he included the replacements of the signs of sorrow—ashes, mourning or the spirit of heaviness—with the marks of victory—beauty, joy and the garment of praise (Isaiah 61:1-3; Luke 4:18-21).

Jesus identifies with your broken heart because he is “A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” He understands when you hurt (Isaiah 53:3-4).

*He is despised and rejected by men,
A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him;
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.
Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God, and afflicted.*

Isaiah 53:3-4

Jesus wept (John 11:35) and taught his children by example at the cross to express openly feelings of protest, sadness, anxieties and fears (Matthew 26:39; 27:46).

For women, grief is not confined to the death of a loved one. It also includes sorrow at the tearing apart of anything that they have thought to be secure, such as a marriage, possessions, job, health, relationships or finances.

Believers must remember that grief is not forever. It is healed through a deliberate, personal, lived-out experience of the unfailing grace of God (2 Corinthians 12:9).

DAY 4

In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

1 John 4:9-10

He Is Love

Love is not a definition of God—God is infinitely more—but God is the definition of love. Without Him, love does not exist (John 3:16; 1 John 4:8–10). Biblical love (Greek *agapē*) is active, yet selfless. Though most graphically and fully illustrated in God’s love for us, *agapē* love is also God’s pattern for our love for Him (1 John 4:19) and for our love for one another (Ephesians 5:25; 1 Peter 1:22). Its basis is God’s deliberate, active, sacrificial giving of His Son for our redemption. To be loved by God means that He has set His sights on us and is actively wooing us toward Himself at all times.

God’s love is self-starting (1 John 4:10), indestructible (Romans 8:38, 39), undeserved (Romans 3:23), compassionate (Isaiah 49:15), constant (Jeremiah 31:3), immeasurable (Ephesians 3:18, 19), voluntary (Romans 5:8), and a gift (John 3:16). He did not begin loving at the Cross, nor will He love us more tomorrow than He does today. There is nothing we can do, think, or say that will change His love because there are no surprises for God—He knows us totally and loves us anyway (Psalm 139:1–5).

The goal of God’s love is to have us with Him throughout eternity (1 John 4:16). He presented and made possible the accomplishment of this goal through Jesus and His sacrifice on the Cross (John 1:14–18).

DAY 5

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Mathew 5:10-12

Hope Under Fire

The Bible records examples of persecution for the faith in both Old and New Testaments. Accounts of persecution in the Old Testament involved nations as a whole and individuals in particular. The prophets were persecuted because of their faith in God and their obedience to His will (Acts 7:52). In the New Testament, the church body, the 12 disciples, and individual Christians were persecuted for taking a stand for the Lord (Matthew 5:11, 12; 1 Corinthians 15:9). Jesus suffered great persecution from the religious leaders of His day (John 5:16).

Persecution typically involves harassment and oppression for religious convictions, which results in physical or emotional suffering and affliction. Tribulation is to be an expected aspect of the Christian's life, in part because Christians are to live according to standards and principles that are more righteous than those advocated by unbelievers (2 Timothy 3:12). However, persecution for the faith is neither unbearable nor useless (John 16:33).

Although persecution may be an inevitable part of a Christian woman's life, she is neither to seek out persecution nor to bring persecution on herself. Much of what is perceived as persecution

may actually be a consequence of abuse, a matter of poor self-esteem, or the result of an error in judgment. Believers must be wise in discerning the true source of persecution and the motives that evoke it.

Persecution is also inevitable for these reasons: (1) The sinful world hates God (John 15:18); (2) the things of the flesh battle the things of the Spirit (Galatians 4:29); (3) tribulation is inevitable in the midst of righteous living (Matthew 5:10); yet (4) believers are undergirded with help, strength, and power from God to face their tribulations (Romans 8:35–39). Christians are to face persecution with patience, endurance, and steadfastness (Romans 12:12; James 5:7–11).

They are to endure persecution and, in the process, receive strength and power to be "more than conquerors" (Romans 8:35–39). Blessing can actually be experienced in the midst of persecution (1 Peter 3:14; 4:12–14) because the Christian facing persecution for the kingdom's sake is not forsaken by God (2 Corinthians 4:7–10).

DAY 6

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Romans 5:1-2

Peace

In both the Old and New Testaments, peace is described as the result of having a right relationship to God and with others (see Romans 5:1, 2). The Greek word *eirene* has a meaning similar to the Hebrew word *shalom*. Spiritual peace describes a sense of well-being and fulfillment that comes from God and is dependent on His presence alone (Galatians 5:22).

Inner spiritual peace is experienced by any believer who walks in the Spirit despite surrounding turmoil. The true “peace of God” protects the hearts and minds of believers from worry, fear, and anxiety. It transcends all logic or rationale (Philippians 4:7). The God of Peace who offers salvation also promises His presence and power in the lives of His children. His presence creates in us a quiet confidence, regardless of circumstances, people, or things.

Though impossible to comprehend fully, true peace is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22) and a part of the “whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6:11, 13). According to the apostle Paul, our understanding and experiencing of the gospel produces peace that allows us to walk boldly into spiritual battle (Ephesians 6:11, 13) and to survive all manner of difficulty and danger. The believer receives peace from God as a virtue of holy living and a protection from evil forces. Where the peace of God is present, there is no room for worry.

DAY 7

Gifts from a Loving Father

The blessings of God are abundantly bestowed on all those who follow Him. God's blessings are not simply a reward for godly living but a gift from a loving Father. Life's blessings are not a measure of who we are but of who God is. God promises personal blessings to those who follow Him in obedience and exhorts His people to be a blessing to others (Genesis 12:2, 3).

Christians need only to reflect back over their own lives to discover blessings from God. While blessings are experienced in different ways, provision, protection, and salvation are among God's greatest blessings. The goodness of God is also apparent when Christians look around at present blessings. Health, family, friends, and ministry are among God's choicest blessings. Christians can also look ahead to future blessings. God promises continual blessings on earth and eternal blessings in heaven.

The wonderful blessings of God should be remembered, not forgotten. The same gracious God who forgives sin, heals diseases, redeems lives, and bestows mercy, also promises abundant blessings (Psalm 103:2–5).

*Bless the Lord, O my soul,
And forget not all His benefits:
Who forgives all your iniquities,
Who heals all your diseases,
Who redeems your life from destruction,
Who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies,
Who satisfies your mouth with good things,
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

Psalm 103:2-5