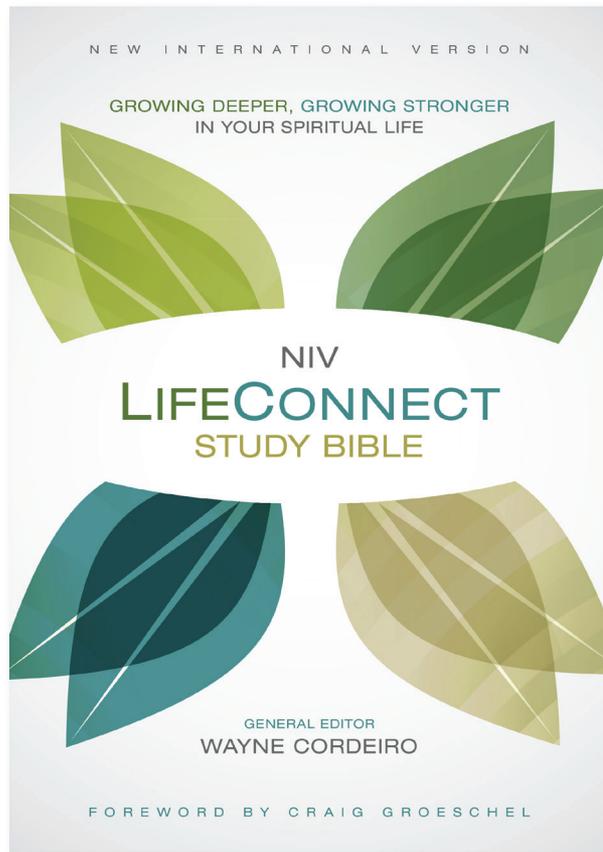




NIV
LIFECONNECT
7-Day Devotional



LIFE CONNECT 7-DAY DEVOTIONAL

Grow deeper and stronger in your spiritual life with this 7-day devotional offering SOAP—**S**cripture, **O**bservation, **A**pplication, **P**rayer—articles found within the LifeConnect Study Bible. Author Wayne Cordeiro offers insight and thoughts drawn from his own use of the method in his spiritual journey.

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Day 1

The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.

Exodus 17:1

Water Is on Its Way

Observation

At the command of the Lord, the Israelites camped, but there was no water to drink. You'd think that if God commanded a camping spot, there'd be immediately plenty of water, as well as a buffet line and waiters to bring them coffee and dessert. You'd think that if God had planned it, all the logistics would have been taken into consideration and a catering company would be waiting for the Israelites as they arrived.

Application

There will be times, even though the Lord leads us, when we will find ourselves with sparse resources. Not enough money. Not enough help. Not enough encouragement. But it doesn't mean that God is not in the situation.

Maybe you're like me . . . being patient comes hard when I am thirsty after a "long trek." We can react prematurely,

jumping to the wrong conclusions about how God is working. In doing so, we make the desert a hotter place than it needs to be. God is not finished yet. Think about it — God had water stored in a rock!

How often, from a source we least expect, God provides. He did for the Israelites, and he will again for you and me today!

Prayer

Lord, thank you for helping me to understand that just because there is a shortage of resources, it doesn't mean that you haven't led me to this place. I will wait on you to provide, knowing that you still have more to come. Remind me of this when I panic or complain.

Day 2

“To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the devious you yourself shrewd. You save the humble, but your eyes are on the haughty to them low.”

2 Samuel 22:26-28

The God of Empathy

Observation

God accepts everyone regardless of their season of life or the state of their maturity. He isn't a one-size-fits-all God but rather one who knows us inside and out: “The LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust” (Psalm 103:13 – 14).

If we come to God with humility, he will respond with compassion, but if we come to him proud or thinking we are right and everyone else is wrong, then he will humble us.

The Pharisees came to Jesus proud, and he pressed hard against them. On the other hand, the woman caught in adultery came to Jesus with humility, and he forgave her with kindness.

Application

Let us be careful as to how we approach the things of God, for he is holy. Ecclesiastes 5:1 – 2 tells us: “Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.”

Prayer

Lord, thank you for reminding me of your holiness. I am privileged to relate to you in honor and fear. You are a great and awesome God, yet you are merciful and kind. Thank you for allowing me to learn your ways in order that I might cooperate with you each day.

Day 3

My son, if your heart is wise, then my heart will be glad indeed; my inmost being will rejoice when your lips speak what is right.

Proverbs 23:15-16

Courageous Wisdom

Observation

In this proverb, God reveals what brings him pleasure: people who live with wise hearts and who speak what is right.

Notice that shrewd minds do not please God. Neither do talents, successful businesses or large ministries. The bottom line is that he delights in people who are wise in heart and have the courage to speak what is right.

Application

Making wise decisions and speaking what is right will not win us any popularity contests. It may even be contested by those closest to us, but we must still take time to consider the situation, ponder it deeply and make decisions that will be the best for all involved.

Courage to stand up for what is right sometimes seems in short supply, but it is abundant in those who refuse anything less than God's best. Here is the prerequisite: a deep desire to do what is best, regardless of the emotional trauma the soul must endure in pressing forward, anticipating push-backs and possible rejections. No one likes it when their faults are exposed or they are called to change. But following God includes handling confrontation and disagreement in a godly manner.

Prayer

Father, give me the courage to be wise, to be committed to each person's best in my life, and in return, to feel your pleasure and delight.

Day 4

“Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fast-ing and weeping and mourning.” Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity . . . Then the LORD was jealous for his land and took pity on his people. The LORD replied to them: “I am sending you grain, new wine and olive oil, enough to satisfy you fully; never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations.”

Joel 2: 12-13; Joel 2:18-19

Answers and Promises

Often an answer from God will come packaged and delivered in a promise — as something potentially available. That is how God dealt with his people through the prophet Joel. He answered their pleas with a call to return to him so that he could make good on promised blessings.

Application

We’d rather the answer come in concrete form — fully assembled and ready to use, with a full guarantee. But God has spoken more than 7,000 answers to our problems and questions in promise form. So how do we get these answers wrapped in “potential packaging” to become reality? God gives his answers in potential form because his greatest goal for us is not making us comfortable, it is building our characters. He makes promises reality, not through obligation, but through obedience. God’s promises are converted from potential into reality by steadfast faith and adherence to his

commands. God’s promises require us to walk with him in a covenant — his promises are converted from potential into present reality through patiently waiting on him.

As we understand why his answers come in promise form, we better understand how “His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Peter 1:3 - 4).

Prayer

Father, help me to be obedient and faithful, not only to benefit from your promises, but also to partake in your divine nature — to look more like you and give you glory!

Day 5

Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

Luke 5:16

The Garden No One Visits

Observation

In the middle of the bustling Honolulu Airport, where travelers scurry around the clock to their destinations, a garden awaits. The green repose, which seems almost out of place in the chaos, is a quiet place. It invites frazzled passengers to sit awhile under beautiful trees offering protective shade.

The garden is beautiful. Birds perch by the dozens in the branches of the trees, but humans seem to avoid the garden. The last time I was there, one lady was using it — to walk her dog. One man sat and finished his lunch on the bench. But I passed it by — for some undecipherable reason, I hurried past that quiet place. I was hurrying to get to my departure gate, even though I would sit there for another 45 minutes before boarding.

The business of the world is a vortex that claims much of our richest potential, only to replace it with empty activity. Out of all that's going on in the book of Luke,

this one out-of-the-way verse is like a garden, inviting me to stop and sit awhile. Jesus would slip away, not just on occasion, but often. He'd take time to recalibrate his heart and reorient his course, regain balance and return to communion with his Father.

Application

Often I think I will be less fruitful if my activity is replaced by quiet times with God. How I want to see fruitfulness — but the only way is to stop by the garden and sit with the Savior for a while, to return to what is most eternal.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I have been moving at Mach IV for quite a while, and I need to take more time to be like Jesus. Teach me that fruitfulness is only possible when I take time to slip away with you to pray.

Day 6

When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.

Acts:24.27

The Two-Year Wait

Observation

Joseph had been falsely accused and thrown into prison, forgotten and discarded (see Genesis 39:19 – 23). But after this forgotten season, he emerged to be made second-in-command to Pharaoh.

There must have been some reason God did the same with Paul, factoring into the cadence of the apostle's life a break, a rest, a long caesura of two years in prison.

I am sure that Paul, like Joseph, spent long evenings in the hollow prison cell thinking of all the things he could accomplish if he were free to do what he wanted to. I'll bet he fought going stir-crazy. Paul was not a laid back or passive person. He was entrepreneurial and an initiator. I'm sure he struggled with the Divine Conductor's timing of this song, which so affected his life. Yet Paul had to wait.

Application

There have been times when I have wondered why I was on "hold" — my prayers not answered and my desires left unfulfilled. Some things that I have prayed for never

materialized. God doesn't seem to be in a hurry to answer my frantic prayers. He doesn't drop everything and rush to fulfill my desires.

I am realizing that I am not as mature as I thought. I am not as patient as I thought. I am not as wise, not as thoughtful, not as strong. Our Divine Conductor knows the timing of our growth. God is building things in me and knows how long it will take for me to develop the qualities necessary to survive my own prayers.

I, like Joseph and Paul, must learn to be patient. I cannot rush into the future. Neither can I hurry God's timing for a certain score. If I do, the music turns sour and its beauty will be compromised. I wait for the proper timing.

Prayer

Dear Father, thank you for your timing. My willingness to be patient is a part of my trust and my faith — not in the music, but in the Conductor. I put my trust in you.

Day 7

For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

1 Peter 3:17

So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

1 Peter 4:19

What Will You Suffer For?

Observation

Suffering is not optional. We might wish it were. We spend millions of dollars to avoid it, ignore it and get immunized for it, but we can never be immune from it.

We mostly think of suffering as negative. And much suffering is synonymous with the consequences of sin or ignorance. But sometimes good comes from pain and suffering. A child is born into the world through pain. When we get a speck of dirt in our eye, pain signals us to do something about it before it does damage. When we have a virus, the pain signals a need for rest or medication before the disease turns into something deadly.

Pain and suffering are inevitable. However, Peter tells us in 3:17 that since we are going to suffer, we are to suffer for doing right. We can choose what we suffer for. We can suffer because we are doing evil, or we can suffer to give life.

Application

We can suffer as a result of stupidity. We can suffer as a result of sin. Or we can choose to suffer. We can suffer for speaking the gospel or defending it. We can suffer for doing the right thing even though we are mocked or misunderstood. We can suffer by biting back angry words when something unfair occurs to us. We can choose to suffer with others when they are hurting, and it forces us to pray, learn, act and minister.

Prayer

Father: I pray that when I suffer — and it is inevitable that I will — I will suffer in doing the right and the good. If I suffer, let me do so with a contrite heart — a heart that desires to follow you.