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Once-a-Day Devotional for Teens
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A NOTE ON THE DEVOTIONAL LAYOUT

As you begin using this book, you may notice the Scriptures for each devotion follow a unique pattern—somewhat chronological, but bouncing from the Old to New Testaments and Psalms and Proverbs, and then back. That’s because this devotional is tied to the Once-A-Day reading plan, which takes a short, chronological selection from each of those “sections” of the Bible each day to help you read through the Bible in one year. We’ve tied each devotion to a key verse from the reading plan for that day—which may mean, for example, you’re reading a devotional thought based around Genesis 1:1 one day, Proverbs 2 the next, and Matthew 3 the day after.

You can use this book on its own for your daily devotional time, of course. As an everyday devotional, this book will let you explore key ideas and verses from across Scripture and see how they apply to your life today. If you choose, you can also use this devotional alongside the full Once-A-Day reading plan, so the devotion for each day will correspond with your Bible reading for that day, deepening your understanding of God’s Word and enhancing what you’ve read.

We’ve included the Once-A-Day reading plan alongside each devotion (under Read It) so you can follow along with the one-year plan if you desire. Or if you want a simple way to follow the reading plan, the *Once-A-Day Bible for Teens* works alongside this devotional by presenting the readings for the day in order, making tracking your progress and staying on track easy.

READ IT

Genesis 1:1–2:17, Matthew 1:1–25, Psalm 1:1–6

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

GENESIS 1:1

LIVE IT

It’s tough to wrap your head around the start of everything. But the Genesis account of the world’s beginnings is more than a tale of distant history. It’s more than a reason to debate with modern scientific theory. The first chapters of the Bible tell why you exist.

Suppose you make a clay sculpture in art class. Suddenly you hold in your hands an object that belongs uniquely to you. Because you made it, you own it. When God created the world, he instantly became master of all his handiwork. Psalm 24:1–2 says, “The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.” The world belongs completely to God.

You might never be satisfied with what you shape from a lump of clay. But God was incredibly pleased when he made people. First he dreamed up our design. He determined our purpose. He thought of everything humans need for a happy existence. Then he went to work. He put us in the most perfect place ever. He made us partners with each other and gave us solid work to do. Because we belong to him, he expects us to follow his commands.

So why did God make you? He created you to enjoy life close to him—and to people.

PRAY IT

God, you made the world. So I belong to you now and forever. Teach me to live for you.

READ IT

Genesis 2:18–4:16, Matthew 2:1–18, Psalm 2:1–12

“The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the LORD and against his anointed.”

PSALM 2:2

LIVE IT

Everyone knows what it’s like to make another person angry. But only God knows what it’s like to have the whole human race up in arms against him.

Human rebellion started back with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1–24). But sin quickly spread to every person and place on earth. Psalm 2 shows the entire world rising up against the Lord. Nations scheme. Groups hatch useless plots. The earth’s rulers want to break loose from God’s control.

God studies this crowd of puny rebels and laughs because their might is nothing compared to his. And the Lord has a secret power: he has installed his Son as ruler over the earth. That’s an astonishing Old Testament picture. Hundreds of years before Jesus showed up as a baby in Bethlehem, this Scripture reveals him reigning as king of everything. Even when human beings join together to fight God, they can’t beat his “anointed,” or chosen one. The whole world belongs to Jesus, and wise people everywhere submit to his authority. No one can stop the Lord’s plan to save people, and he blesses everyone who runs to him for help.

Glance around and you’ll see plenty of people living against God. But you can serve God with utter respect. You can celebrate his reign. You can bow to him with every part of who you are.

PRAY IT

God, you reign over everything. But people all around me rebel against you. I choose to serve you in awestruck respect.

READ IT

Genesis 4:17–6:22, Matthew 2:19–3:17, Psalm 3:1–8

“In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’”

MATTHEW 3:1–2

LIVE IT

Even before Jesus began to teach and do miracles, people knew someone amazing was on the way. That’s because John the Baptist had come on the scene and prepared people to meet the Lord.

John’s arrival was no surprise. Isaiah, the Old Testament prophet, once predicted a voice in the wilderness would clear a path for God (Isaiah 40:3). And an angel announced that Elizabeth, a relative of Mary the mother of Jesus, would give birth to the Lord’s messenger.

John wore rough clothes and ate a plain diet. His grueling life in the desert reminded everyone of God’s ancient messengers. When he commanded everyone to repent—to stop sinning and turn back to God—his challenging words drew crowds from every direction. John confronted not only the masses but Pharisees and Sadducees, religious rulekeepers who considered themselves too good to need cleansing from sin. He baptized everyone who accepted his message, dipping them in the Jordan River as a way of demonstrating remorse for doing wrong. His every word and action pointed to one fact: someone much greater was coming.

You would be startled if John the Baptist showed up shouting in your street. But his message hits home no matter where you live. You want to be prepared for Jesus. You need to recognize the awfulness of sin and be ready to meet your Savior.

PRAY IT

Lord, I’m tired of sin and the hurt it causes me, others, and you. I want to be done with doing wrong. I’m ready for your forgiveness.

READ IT

Genesis 7:1–9:17, Matthew 4:1–22, Proverbs 1:1–7

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

PROVERBS 1:7

LIVE IT

Fearing God might not sound fun. But again and again Scripture says it’s your first step to getting the wisdom you need to survive real life.

The meaning of the word for “fear” ranges from feeling terror in the midst of a deadly storm (Jonah 1:10) to overflowing with awe in a king’s presence (1 Kings 3:28). When you experience “the fear of the LORD” you simultaneously wonder about backing away in dread but can’t help but draw close in amazement. This healthy reverence doesn’t leave you quaking. It does remind you to honor God and not treat him casually, like some kind of heavenly buddy.

Proverbs says good things result when you choose to live for God with utter respect. You get insight, a grasp of what’s sensible, right, and fair. Everyone will notice you’re wise beyond your years, and your understanding will stay fresh until your final breath. You will gain an intelligence that guards you from acting recklessly or caving into evil peer pressure.

Proverbs is the Bible’s most densely packed collection of wisdom. If you respect God, you will think hard about the instructions you find in these pages. And you won’t hesitate to put your discoveries into action. After all, rejecting the Lord’s choice wisdom will send you tripping down a fool’s path. And nothing about that sounds enjoyable.

PRAY IT

God, I will live for you with complete respect. You fill me with awe and constantly amaze me. I need you to teach me through your wise words.

READ IT

Genesis 9:18–11:9, Matthew 4:23–5:20, Psalm 4:1–8

“Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer.”

PSALM 4:1

LIVE IT

Picture collapsing on your bed after your most unpleasant day ever. It’s not hard to recall what pushed you into the misery zone. But you might wonder if God was around when you were hurting. He was. And he is.

Psalm 4 doesn’t say why King David wrote these words, but the shape of his problem isn’t hard to detect. He’d prayed but hadn’t received an answer. He’d waited for compassionate relief from distress, after being humiliated by people who don’t worship God. He trembled on his bed, trying to figure out where he went wrong. He was so tired of people doubting God’s goodness that he just wanted to fall asleep and forget the day.

David’s head was spinning with frustration. His heart was thick with sadness. But he fought back with true facts. He reminded himself that God watches over his followers and hears their cries. His own shaking wasn’t an excuse to sin in what he thought, said, or did. His pain was a chance to trust, look for God’s shining brilliance, and enjoy the Lord’s simple gifts. He could sleep peacefully because the Lord kept him safe.

When you feel overwhelmed, you can be sure you’re not praying to empty sky. God was listening when you felt deep pain. He’s listening now.

PRAY IT

Lord, I trust that you’re there for me when I feel pain. I trust you to answer my prayers and help me deal with my problems. I count on you to be completely good.

READ IT

Genesis 11:10–13:18, Matthew 5:21–42, Psalm 5:1–12

“The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.’”

GENESIS 12:1–2

LIVE IT

You know how it feels to have a plan where nothing turns out? When problems seem impossible, no one faults you for giving up.

Not long after Adam and Eve sinned back in the garden of Eden, God looked at the human race and concluded, “every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time” (Genesis 6:5). Even after the Lord started over with Noah—the one good person he could find—everyone slid back into sin.

God had every reason to be done with the human race. Instead he picked Abram as the beginning of a new plan. When he told Abram to go to a distant, unnamed land, this faith-filled man heeded God’s command. He immediately obeyed, packing up and moving his entire household without any idea where he was going.

God had an extraordinary future in store for Abram, but this blessing wouldn’t stop with one man. The Lord would make him a powerful nation and use him to bless everyone on earth. Abram was the start of the plan that comes to completion in Christ.

Abram—later known as Abraham—is your spiritual ancestor (Romans 4:16). When God blessed that ancient nomad, he had you in mind. The Lord wanted so much for you to know him that he refused to give up. He dreamed up a plan to lead you to him.

PRAY IT

Lord, I’m amazed you were thinking of me when you gave Abram a new life. Thanks for including me in your plan.

READ IT

Genesis 14:1 – 16:16, Matthew 5:43–6:24, Psalm 6:1 – 10

“This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.’”

MATTHEW 6:9

LIVE IT

You might have heard the Lord’s Prayer a thousand times. It’s the famous words Jesus gave his disciples when they said, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1).

Matthew showcases this prayer in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, the longest message we have from the mouth of Jesus. The Lord tells us how to live for him in every part of life. But he’s doing the opposite of trying to pile up religious rules. He aims to teach you how to have a real relationship with God. Jesus criticizes people who assume they have to pray loud and long to be heard, calling out hypocrites who make prayer a show or spew streams of babble to get to their point.

Then Jesus gives a model prayer. While there’s nothing wrong with praying these exact words, they also give the gist of what prayer can be. Start by honoring God as your heavenly Father. Commit to fully obeying his will. Tell him about your daily needs, whether those requests are big or small. Ask for forgiveness, the same measure of mercy you show others. And ask him to guard you from overwhelming temptation.

When you pray like that, prayer doesn’t have to feel scary. It’s a simple conversation with the God who never stops caring for you.

PRAY IT

God, you’re my Father in heaven. I want to honor you and do your will. Please give me everything I need today. Forgive my sins and keep me from letting evil draw me in.

READ IT

Genesis 17:1–18:33, Matthew 6:25–7:23, Proverbs 1:8–19

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

MATTHEW 7:1–2

LIVE IT

It’s tough to find a Bible verse more misused than Matthew 7:1. It’s a phrase everyone knows but hardly anyone understands. Like it says in a classic version, “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (KJV).

Most people think those words mean you shouldn’t criticize another person’s decisions about right and wrong—that if a friend tells you she snuck out of the house without her parents knowing, you shouldn’t tell her that’s a bad idea. Or if you hear a friend planning to cheat on an exam, you shouldn’t remind him cheating is wrong. Speaking up would be “judging” or “judgmental.”

Keep reading in Matthew 7:1–4 to see what Jesus really means. He doesn’t tell you to ignore the difference between good and evil but to be wise in how you respond to other people’s failings. If you’re arrogant in sizing up others, don’t be surprised when they don’t show you mercy. If you have a plank-sized sin of your own, get rid of it before you brush away the speck of sin you spot in someone else. Once you deal with your own problems, you can genuinely help others.

Offering unhypocritical help is what the Lord wants you to do. Like another Bible verse says, “If someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently” (Galatians 6:1).

PRAY IT

Lord, teach me to deal with my own problems before I point out other people’s sins. When a friend clearly needs my help, teach me to boldly speak up.