



THE TRIAL DEVOTIONAL

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12 JOURNEYS THAT SHAPE YOUR FUTURE

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Living Again

Devotion #1

The challenges of life have a way at times of sucker-punching us in the gut, and we find ourselves lying on the canvas, gasping for air. In the opening moments of *The Trial*, Mac McClain is asked by Judge Danielson to take a murder case after years of being absent from the courtroom. Mac is not interested, still grieving the losses of his wife and son. The judge asks him, *"When are you going to start living again, Mac?"*

Rising above the challenges, tragedies, and disappointments of life can seem as monumental as traversing a mountain in the Rockies. We are often afraid of the potential risks of once again living, loving, trusting, and believing. We may wonder, *"What is the use? I'll only be hurt again!"* Life was never meant to be lived in isolation. We are built and designed for community, for relationships, and according to Ephesians 2:10, to *"do good works"*.

Giving yourself adequate time to heal, reflect, take inventory, and evaluate life after a tragedy or disappointment is healthy and normal. But there does come a time in which we must allow ourselves to live again. We must CHOOSE to live again. We find these words in Deuteronomy 30:19 - *"This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life..."* After grieving the loss of his first son with Bathsheba, 2 Samuel 12:20 says, *"Then David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes, he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped."*

- As you navigate your way through the challenges of life, are the choices you are making leading you towards life or towards death?
- As you read David's story in 2 Samuel 12, make a list of other decisions David made that helped him to start living again.
- What challenge or tragedy in life has caused you to stop living? What is one thing you could do today that would represent a step towards living again?
- In your lifetime, who has inspired you the most to really live life to the fullest? What things have you seen in them that has inspired you?

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The River of Grief

Devotion #2

Still mourning the loss of his wife and son years later, Mac shows up at the end of a grief support group meeting in order to discuss his new court case with Dr. Anna Wilkes. Some of the comments he overhears, and some of the discussion that follows, seem to catch Mac by surprise. In response to an embarrassing incident described by one of the attendees, Dr. Wilkes says, *"Grief is like a river. You can't damn it up. And you can't make it go faster. You just have to allow God to take you at His pace."*

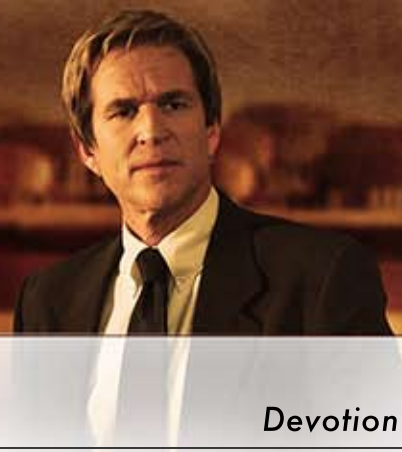
In his book, *"When Grief Comes"*, Kirk Neely says, *"Months, even years, after our loss there comes a moment or a series of events when the reality of our loss sinks in, and we pour out our hearts in a flood of grief."* Possibly one of the most frustrating things about grief is that we cannot control the flow of the river, or what seems to trigger the release of the flood waters of tears at times.

In describing his grief, Job says in Job 17:7, *"My eyes have grown dim with grief; my whole frame is but a shadow."* Grief is a powerful force that can make us stronger and more skilled in navigating the challenges of life, or that can wipe us out. Learning to grieve and heal is essential and achievable. In the movie, Mac asks Dr. Wilkes about her success rate in helping people heal from grief. She replies by saying, *"When you try to do it by yourself, not so good. But when you ask God for help, the odds go up."*

In Psalm 88:9, David says *"my eyes are dim with grief. I call to you, O LORD, every day; I spread out my hands to you."* A language most children do not have to be taught is the language of *"I want"* or *"I need"*, and is often communicated non-verbally with an open, outstretched hand. What makes it so difficult for us to stretch out our hands to God for help in our times of sorrow and grief? In many cases, it is because we blame God for our loss; therefore, we do not want to turn to Him for help.

In his book, Neely also says, *"Sorrow will be a part of every life. A part of learning to grieve is to understand that we will not be exempt. Once we accept that reality, we can make decisions that will move us along through grief to resolution."* God sorrowed over the unfair torture and death of His son. He understands profound grief and sadness. And He makes available to you everything you need spiritually and emotionally to survive the turbulent rapids of the river of grief, and to lead you to the *"still waters"* that restore your soul we read of in Psalm 23.

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The River of Grief

Devotion #2

- When it comes to the river of grief, would you say that you are:
 1. Successfully navigating the rapids?
 2. Hanging on for dear life?
 3. Capsized?
- List the people that are in your boat helping you paddle your way through the river.
- Are you at the place that you can stretch out your hands to God for help? If not, what is the greatest obstacle that prevents you from doing so?
- Read 1 Peter 1:5-7 (NIV). Decide today, that with God's help, this too will be the description of your life.



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An Antidote for Healing

Devotion #3

Dr. Anna Wilkes makes the statement to Mac that *"a lot of people need a time and a place to heal....including me."* This comes after Mac makes a surprise visit to her house to discuss the findings of psychological testing on his client. He finds Dr. Wilkes attempting to teach her son to throw a baseball, but steps in to "rescue" the boy from a fiasco. While talking with Hunter, Mac discovers that his father is deceased.

Minutes later, Mac offers words of sympathy to Anna for her loss. She then tells Mac that Hunter does not know the whole story, that her husband's death was the result of suicide. *"Eventually he's going to ask me questions that I, uh, don't know how to explain."*

The harshness of life presents many scenarios that are beyond explanation. At times, it is easier to hide behind denial, fantasy, or falsities in hopes that the pain will eventually subside or disappear. Mac shares an antidote for healing that is rooted in a time-tested principle: *"Tell him the truth."* John 8:32 says, *"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

True freedom is never found in denial, lies, or some pretty fantasy. The sting of hurt, loss, or disappointments in life can leave a residue of poison that, left untreated, will spread throughout our being. The temptation for many is to cover the wound and hide it rather than to administer proper treatment that will draw out the poison and bring healing. Being willing to face the truth and tell the truth in the midst of painful situations is never easy, but it is so FREEING and moves us forward on the pathway to healing.

According to Dr. Abraham Kryger, there are many benefits to telling the truth, which include:

- Less anxiety/worry/guilt
- Increased ability to deal with crises/breakdowns
- Improved problem solving abilities
- Improved interpersonal relationships
- Greater emotional health/control of one's emotions
- Increased ability to influence others
- Better sleep
- Better health
- Increased ability to think well/reason soundly
- Less need to control

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An Antidote for Healing

Devotion #3

- Good humor
- Greater self-expression and self-satisfaction

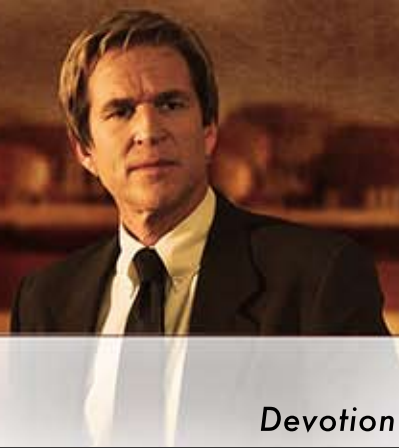
On the other hand, there are also many consequences to not facing the truth. They are:

- More frequent failures/frustrations in life
- Being distrusted by others
- Lack of self-esteem/self-confidence
- Dysfunctional interpersonal relationships
- Inability to self-correct
- Stress of many kinds (virtually all types of human stress can be traced to not telling the truth at one level or another).

In the challenges of life, facing the truth and telling the truth is the best antidote for healing, and can prevent the spread of poison in your life that will eventually destroy your spirit. In a later scene in the movie, back on the same front porch with Dr. Wilkes, Mac makes this statement: *"I want to believe that there is a time and a place to heal. But when is that time, and where is that place for me?"* You may be asking the same questions. Your healing can begin today, and it begins at the starting point of truth.

- Read 2 Samuel 11 and 12. What negative consequences were brought about for King David and for others by his unwillingness to tell the truth?
- In Psalm 40:11, David says that love and truth protect him. What types of protection does truth provide in your life?
- Think of times in the past when you were not willing to face the truth. How did that decision affect you?
- Take a moment to re-read John 8:32 aloud a few times, and then commit it to memory.

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Your Valuable Life

Devotion #4

In the final courtroom scenes of *The Trial*, Mac McClain presents his closing statements to the jurors at the sentencing trial for his client Pete Thomason. He asks the jury to think about life, and to choose life for Pete. He makes the statement that, *"We live in a world where human life is cheap. People suffer and people starve and nobody seems to notice, nobody seems to care."*

The first part of his statement is true. In our society, life has been cheapened by drive-by shootings, abortions by the millions, child trafficking, and senseless acts of violence and abuse. People do suffer and starve daily, and although many choose to ignore their plight, there is One who notices every act, hears every cry, and feels every heartache. In Matthew 10:29-31, Jesus says, *"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."*

In Ephesians 2:10, Paul writes, *"For we are God's workmanship..."* The New Living Translation uses the word *"masterpiece"* instead of *"workmanship"*. It comes from the Greek word *"poiema"* which means a work of God the creator. Imagine God as a great artist or sculptor, looking at the blank canvas of Earth. He speaks and begins to shape, create, and form mountains, sequoia trees, glaciers, rock caverns, canyons, rivers, oceans, animals, sea creatures, sunsets, stars, and galaxies. Picture him as He steps back from the canvas and a smile of satisfaction spreads across His face. The angels applaud His great work, and all that He has just created begins to join in the applause and worship. *"If you like that, then you will love this!"* he says. *"I have saved my best work for last. Now I will create a true masterpiece."* He steps up to the canvas once again, and creates you!

You are valuable and priceless to the Lord. He created you in His image and God doesn't make junk! The devil wants to try to convince you that you are nothing but yard sale material at best, but as a masterpiece of the hands of God himself, he wants to proudly display you in His collection of fine art. In his closing statements, Mac goes on to say, *"Life has value, no matter how dark the past or tortured the present."*

- How has life sought to de-value you?
- Read Psalm 139:1-16. Have any of the events of your life caught God by surprise? Have the events of your life changed the God David describes in this Psalm?

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Your Valuable Life

Devotion #4

- Now read Jeremiah 29:11-12. Take a moment to call upon the Lord, trusting that He will listen to you. Listen as He reveals His plans for you for today.
- As you consider your own future and destiny, will you hand yourself a life sentence, or a death sentence? Your life has great value!



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Hidden Treasure

Devotion #5

Near the end of the movie, Joe Whetstone, the high-powered lawyer from Atlanta, is having a poolside conversation with Alex Hightower, whose daughter Angela was murdered. Joe is sharing with Alex all of the details of the murder that were truthfully uncovered and revealed during the trial. He credits Mac McClain, and says if he had not kept on digging for the truth, no one knows what would have happened. Alex says, "Thomason owes McClain a lot." Joe replies, "I think we all do."

Someone once said, "Let those who drink the water remember those who dug the well." We are all beneficiaries of the persistent and consistent love and commitment of others. They loved even at times we were unlovable or were so wounded that we lashed out at those who extended a hand of rescue. Consider this:

- Who are the people in your life who never stopped believing in you?
- What types of things have they done to communicate their unconditional love?

Pete Thomason, in a sense, owes his life to Mac McClain. Mac continued to believe when others would have settled for a plea bargain. There is One who has continued to believe in you, and who consistently extends His hand of mercy, help, and grace. In Isaiah 45:1-3, we read these words:

- ¹ *"This is what the LORD says to his anointed,
to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of
to subdue nations before him
and to strip kings of their armor,
to open doors before him
so that gates will not be shut:*
- ² *I will go before you
and will level the mountains;
I will break down gates of bronze
and cut through bars of iron.*
- ³ *I will give you the treasures of darkness,
riches stored in secret places,
so that you may know that I am the LORD,
the God of Israel, who summons you by name."*

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Hidden Treasure

Devotion #5

The Lord knows you by name, and He sees hidden treasure in you. When others want to give up and walk away, he continues to mine for the rich vein of treasure that lies inside of every person. Why not take a moment and express your gratitude to the One who paid for your freedom, turned a death sentence into a not-guilty verdict, and has stamped your legal fees *"Paid in full."*



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On Eagle's Wings

Devotion #6

It has been said that your attitude will determine your altitude. Rising above tragedy and adversity at times seems impossible. We have all experienced things that seem to clip or cripple our wings, making it difficult to soar above our circumstances. The common emotions of sadness, anger, loneliness, or hurt can anchor us to depths where we were never meant to dwell.

The object of our focus will determine the outcome of our situation. If a carpenter is consumed with the fear of hitting his thumb every time he drives a nail, and focuses on his thumb rather than the nail, he greatly increases the likelihood of hitting his thumb rather than the nail. Likewise, if we are constantly focused on our pain, loss, or the unfairness of life, we prevent ourselves from rising above negativity. There must come a moment when we allow our focus to shift to the positive. We must choose to focus on what we do have, rather than what we don't have.

In the final minutes of *The Trial*, Mac finds himself attending Dr. Wilkes grief support group again. He makes a powerful statement to those in the circle when he says, *"My life changed the moment that I stopped asking God why my family was gone, and started thanking Him that I was still here."*

In Psalm 121:1-2, David writes *"I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? 2 My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth."* He is shifting his focus from despair to hope, elevating his spirit with the acknowledgment that God can cause him to rise above discouragement and distress. Isaiah speaks of rising above our circumstances on eagle's wings when he writes in Isaiah 40:31, *"but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles..."*

- In this season of your life, what is the primary object(s) of your focus? Is this causing you to soar to new heights, or to remain in the pit of despair?
- Read Philippians 4:8-12. What is the object of Paul's focus? What is his attitude while writing from prison?
- What are three things you can do to develop an attitude of gratitude?

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On Eagle's Wings

Devotion #6

While walking through the forest one day, a man found a young eagle who had fallen out of his nest. He took it home and put it in his barnyard where it soon learned to eat and behave like the chickens. One day a naturalist passed by the farm and asked why it was that the king of all birds should be confined to live in the barnyard with the chickens. The farmer replied that since he had given it chicken feed and trained it to be a chicken, it had never learned to fly. Since it now behaved as the chickens, it was no longer an eagle.

"Still it has the heart of an eagle," replied the naturalist, *"and can surely be taught to fly."* He lifted the eagle toward the sky and said, *"You belong to the sky and not to the earth. Stretch forth your wings and fly."* The eagle, however, was confused. He did not know who he was, and seeing the chickens eating their food, he jumped down to be with them again.

The naturalist took the bird to the roof of the house and urged him again, saying, *"You are an eagle. Stretch forth your wings and fly."* But the eagle was afraid of his unknown self and world and jumped down once more for the chicken food. Finally the naturalist took the eagle out of the barnyard to a high mountain. There he held the king of the birds high above him and encouraged him again, saying, *"You are an eagle. You belong to the sky. Stretch forth your wings and fly."* The eagle looked around, back towards the barnyard and up to the sky. Then the naturalist lifted him straight towards the sun and it happened that the eagle began to tremble. Slowly he stretched his wings, and with a triumphant cry, soared away into the heavens.

Now is your time to fly, so mount up on eagle's wings, point your face towards the Son, refuse to look back at the past and soar.