

Fasting Devotionals

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The Heart of Fasting

The fasts . . . will become joyful and glad occasions and happy festivals for Judah. Therefore love truth and peace.- Zechariah 8:19

Today's Scripture & Insight: [Zechariah 7:1–10](#)

Hunger pangs gnawed at my nerves. My mentor had recommended fasting as a way to focus on God. But as the day wore on, I wondered: *How did Jesus do this for forty days?* I struggled to rely on the Holy Spirit for peace, strength, and patience. Especially patience.

If we're physically able, fasting can teach us the importance of our spiritual food. As Jesus said, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Yet, as I learned firsthand, fasting on its own doesn't necessarily draw us closer to God!

In fact, God once told His people through the prophet Zechariah that their practice of fasting was useless since it wasn't leading to service for the poor. "Was it really for me that you fasted?" God asked pointedly (Zechariah 7:5).

God's question revealed that the primary problem wasn't their stomachs; it was their cold hearts. By continuing to serve themselves, they were failing to draw closer to God's heart. So He urged them, "Administer true justice; show

mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor” (vv. 9–10).

Our goal in any spiritual discipline is to draw closer to Jesus. As we grow in likeness to Him, we’ll gain a heart for those He loves.

By: **Tim Gustafson**

Reflect & Pray

How can God use spiritual disciplines as tools to break up the rocky soil of our hearts? What’s helped you draw closer to Jesus recently?

God, I am so prone to seek my own pleasure and the approval of others. Help my life please You as I serve others.

From the Heart

Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate.- Joel 2:13

Today's Scripture & Insight: **Joel 2:12–17**

In many cultures, loud weeping, wailing, and the tearing of clothing are accepted ways of lamenting personal sorrow or a great national calamity. For the people of Old Testament Israel, similar outward actions

expressed deep mourning and repentance for turning away from the Lord.

An outward demonstration of repentance can be a powerful process when it comes from our heart. But without a sincere inward response to God, we may simply be going through the motions, even in our communities of faith.

After a plague of locusts devastated the land of Judah, God, through the prophet Joel, called the people to sincere repentance to avoid His further judgment. “ ‘Even now,’ declares the Lord, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning’ ” (Joel 2:12).

Then Joel called for a response from deep inside: “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” (v. 13). True repentance comes from the heart.

The Lord longs for us to confess our sins to Him and receive His forgiveness so we can love and serve Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Whatever you need to tell the Lord today, just say it—from the heart.

By: David C. McCasland

Reflect & Pray

**Lord, please give me a heart of repentance to see myself as You do. Give me
the grace to respond to Your merciful call for change.**

God wants to hear your heart.

Not Like Yesterday

**Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth
of the Lord. Deuteronomy 8:3**

Today's Scripture & Insight: [Matthew 4:1–11](#)

**When our grandson Jay was a child his parents gave him a new T-shirt
for his birthday. He put it on right away and proudly wore it all day.**

**When he appeared the next morning in the shirt, his dad asked him,
“Jay, does that shirt make you happy?”**

“Not as much as yesterday,” Jay replied.

That's the problem with material acquisition: Even the good things of life can't give us the deep, lasting happiness we so strongly desire.

Though we may have many possessions, we may still be unhappy.

The world offers happiness through material accumulation: new clothes, a new automobile, an update to our phone or watch. But no material acquisition can make us as happy as it did yesterday. That's because we were made for God and nothing less will do.

One day, when Jesus was fasting and faint with hunger, Satan approached Him and tempted Him to satisfy His hunger by creating bread. Jesus countered by quoting from Deuteronomy 8:3: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

Jesus didn't mean that we *shouldn't* live only on bread. He's rather stating a fact: We're spiritual beings and thus we *can't* exist on material goods alone.

True satisfaction is found in God and His riches.

By: David H. Roper

Reflect & Pray

Why do material acquisitions not provide long-term happiness? What have you learned from past expectations?

Teach me, God, what it means to live by Your riches today. You possess all I truly need!

A Big Deal

This is the kind of fasting I want: . . . Let the oppressed go free, and remove the chains that bind people.- Isaiah 58:6 nlt

Today's Scripture & Insight: [Isaiah 58:6–9](#)

A family member needed help with his December rent. To his family, the request felt like a burden—especially with their own unexpected expenses at year’s end. But they dug into their savings, grateful for God’s provision—and blessed by their relative’s gratitude.

He handed them a thank-you card filled with grateful words. “There you go again . . . doing nice things, probably passing it off as no big deal.”

Helping others is a big deal, however, to God. The prophet Isaiah made that point to the nation of Israel. The people were fasting but still quarreling and fighting. Instead, said Isaiah: “Free those who are wrongly imprisoned; lighten the burden of those who work for you. . . . Share your food with the hungry, and give shelter to the homeless. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help” (Isaiah 58:6–7 nlt).

Such a sacrifice, said Isaiah, shares God’s light but also heals our own brokenness (v. 8). As the family helped their relative, they looked hard at their own finances, seeing ways they could manage better all year. This was God’s promise for being generous: “Your godliness will lead you forward, and the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind” (v. 8 nlt). In the end, giving to their kin blessed them more. And God? He already gave His all—with love.

By: Patricia Raybon

Reflect & Pray

Lord, light the path of generosity, helping us to give like You.

God gave His all. Let’s follow as He leads.

Ripple Effect

Because the hand of the Lord my God was on me, I took courage and gathered leaders from Israel to go up with me.- Ezra 7:28

Today's Scripture & Insight: [Ezra 8:15–21](#)

The little Bible college in northern Ghana didn't look impressive—just a tin-roofed cinder-block building and a handful of students. Yet Bob Hayes poured his life into those students. He gave them leadership roles and encouraged them to preach and teach, despite their occasional reluctance. Bob passed away years ago, but dozens of thriving churches, schools, and two additional Bible institutes have sprung up across Ghana—all started by graduates of that humble school.

During the reign of King Artaxerxes (465–424 bc), Ezra the scribe assembled a band of Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem. But Ezra found no Levites among them (Ezra 8:15). He needed Levites to serve as priests. So he commissioned leaders to “bring attendants to us for the house of our God” (v. 17). They did so (vv. 18–20), and Ezra led them all in fasting and prayer (v. 21).

Ezra's name means “helper,” a characteristic that resides at the heart of good leadership. Under Ezra's prayerful guidance, he and his protégés

would lead a spiritual awakening in Jerusalem (see chapters 9–10). All they had needed was a little encouragement and wise direction.

That's how God's church works too. As good mentors encourage and build us up, we learn to do the same for others. Such an influence will reach far beyond our lifetime. Work done faithfully for God stretches into eternity.

By: Tim Gustafson

Reflect & Pray

Who is your primary spiritual mentor? (If you don't have one, who might you ask to mentor you?) Why is mentoring in Christ something vital for you to receive and extend to others?

Father, show me someone I can mentor.

Live Like It's Morning

The fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth.-

Ephesians 5:9

Today's Scripture & Insight: [Ephesians 5:1–9](#)

When I have to travel across time zones by air, I try various remedies to avoid jet lag. I think I've tried them all! On one occasion, I decided to adjust my in-flight eating to the time zone where I was heading. Instead of eating dinner with the rest of the passengers, I kept watching a movie and tried to fall asleep. The hours of elective fasting were difficult, and the breakfast that came right before we landed left much to be desired. But living "out of sorts" with those around me *worked*. It jolted my body clock into a new time zone.

Paul knew that if believers in Jesus were to truly reflect Him in their lives, they would need to live out of step with the world around them. They "were once darkness" but now they were to live as "children of light" (Ephesians 5:8). And what might that look like? Paul goes on to fill out the picture: "The fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth" (v. 9).

Sleeping through dinner may have seemed foolish to the people on my flight, but even as it's midnight in the world, as believers, we're called to live like it's morning. This may provoke scorn and opposition, but in Jesus we can "walk in the way of love," following the example of the One who "love[s] us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (v. 2).

By: Glenn Packiam

Reflect & Pray

Where have your actions and choices lined up too closely with the world around you? What would the fruit of goodness, righteousness, and truth look like in your life?

Jesus, wake me up to the new day that has come in You. Fill me with Your power to live in a “different time zone.” Open my eyes to choose goodness, righteousness, and beauty.

To learn more about the characteristics of a believer in Jesus, visit ChristianUniversity.org/SF132.

Secret Giver

Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them.- Matthew 6:1

Today's Scripture & Insight: [Matthew 6:1–4](#)

For Christopher, a physically disabled veteran, everyday activities had become more challenging, took longer to finish, and increased his pain. Still, he did his best to serve his wife and child. Passersby would see him using a push-mower to cut his lawn every week.

One day, Christopher received a letter—and an expensive riding lawnmower—from an anonymous donor. The secret giver’s satisfaction came through the privilege of helping someone in need.

Jesus doesn’t say that all our giving should be in secret, but He does remind us to check our motives when we give (Matthew 6:1). He also said: “When you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others” (v. 2). While God expects us to be openhanded givers, He encourages us to avoid doing good deeds in front of people for the purpose of receiving accolades or special recognition (v. 3).

When we realize everything we have comes from God, we can be secret givers who don’t need to pat our own backs or gain the admiration of others. Our all-knowing Giver of all good things delights in the genuine generosity of His people. Nothing beats the reward of His approval.

By: Xochitl Dixon

Reflect & Pray

How has God helped you through someone else’s secret giving? Who can you help with an anonymous gift today?

Loving God, please bless me with opportunities to give as selflessly and sacrificially as You have given to me.

Read Compassion: Learning to Love Like Jesus at DiscoverySeries.org/Q0208.

Pleading with God

I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures. . . . So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition.- Daniel 9:2–3

Today's Scripture & Insight: [Daniel 9:1–5, 17–19](#)

A family's prayer time ended with a surprising announcement one morning. As soon as Dad said, "Amen," five-year-old Kaitlyn proclaimed, "And I prayed for Logan, because he had his eyes open during prayer."

I'm pretty sure praying for your ten-year-old brother's prayer protocol isn't what Scripture has in mind when it calls us to intercessory prayer, but at least Kaitlyn realized that we can pray for others.

Bible teacher Oswald Chambers emphasized the importance of praying for someone else. He said that "intercession is putting yourself in God's place; it is having His mind and perspective." It's praying for others in light of what we know about God and His love for us.

We find a great example of intercessory prayer in Daniel 9. The prophet understood God's troubling promise that the Jews would have seventy years of captivity in Babylon (Jeremiah 25:11–12). Realizing that those

years were nearing their completion, Daniel went into prayer mode. He referenced God's commands (Daniel 9:4–6), humbled himself (v. 8), honored His character (v. 9), confessed sin (v. 15), and depended on His mercy as he prayed for His people (v. 18). And he got an immediate answer from God (v. 21).

Not all prayer ends with such a dramatic response, but be encouraged that we can go to God on behalf of others with an attitude of trust and dependence on Him.

By: Dave Branon

Reflect & Pray

When you pray for others, how are you seeking the mind of God? How do you seek His perspective?

Dear heavenly Father, help me to know You better so that when I pray for others, I can filter my requests through my knowledge of Your will.

Starting Upstream

Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.- Matthew 6:8

Today's Scripture & Insight: [Matthew 6:5-10](#)

My home sits along a creek in a canyon in the shadow of a large mountain. During the spring snowmelt and after heavy rains this stream swells and acts more like a river than a creek. People have drowned in it. One day I traced the origin of the creek to its very source, a snowfield atop the mountain. From there the melted snow begins the long journey down the mountain, joining other rivulets to take shape as the creek below my house.

It occurs to me, thinking about prayer, that most of the time I get the direction wrong. I start downstream with my own concerns and bring them to God. I inform God, as if God did not already know. I plead with God, as if hoping to change God's mind and overcome divine reluctance. Instead, I should start upstream where the flow begins.

When we shift direction, we realize that God already cares about our concerns—a loved one's cancer, a broken family, a rebellious teenager—more than we do. Our Father knows what we need (Matt. 6:8).

Grace, like water, descends to the lowest part. Streams of mercy flow. We begin with God and ask what part we can play in His work on earth. With this new starting point for prayer, our perceptions change. We look at nature and see the signature of the grand Artist. We look at human beings and see individuals of eternal destiny made in God's image. Thanksgiving and praise surge up to Him as a natural response.

By: Philip Yancey

Reflect & Pray

Dear Lord, I praise You for loving and caring for me so much. What would I ever do without You?

Prayer channels God's supply to our needs.

Not Fatherless

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.- Romans

8:16

Today's Scripture & Insight: Matthew 6:5–13

John Sowers in his book *Fatherless Generation* writes that “No generation has seen as much voluntary father absence as this one with 25 million kids growing up in single-parent homes.” In my own experience, if I’d bumped into my father on the street, I wouldn’t have known him. My parents were divorced when I was very young, and all the photos of my dad were burned. So for years I felt fatherless. Then at age thirteen, I heard the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13) and said to myself, *You may not have an earthly father, but now you have God as your heavenly Father.*

In Matthew 6:9 we're taught to pray, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name." Previously verse 7 says not to "keep on babbling" when praying, and we may wonder how these verses are connected. I realized that because God remembers, we don't need to repeat. He truly understands, so we don't need to explain. He has a compassionate heart, so we don't need to be uncertain of His goodness. And because He knows the end from the beginning, we know His timing is perfect.

Because God is our Father, we don't need to use "many words" (v. 7) to move Him. Through prayer, we're talking with a Father who loves and cares for us and made us His children through Jesus.

By: Albert Lee

Reflect & Pray

When have you tried to "move God" in prayer by using many words? How does having a relationship with Him as your Father help you to trust Him?

Dear heavenly Father, thank You for making me Your child and for being a Father that welcomes me into Your presence through prayer.

Read Talking with My Father at DiscoverySeries.org/HP171.

Heart Hunger

I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.--John 6:35

Today's Scripture & Insight: John 6:32–40

Riding along with my husband on some errands, I scrolled through emails on my phone and was surprised at an incoming advertisement for a local donut shop, a shop we had just passed on the right side of the street. Suddenly my stomach growled with hunger. I marveled at how technology allows vendors to woo us into their establishments.

As I clicked off my email, I mused over God's constant yearning to draw me closer. He always knows where I am and longs to influence my choices. I wondered, *Does my heart growl in desire for Him the way my stomach did over the idea of a donut?*

In John 6, following the miraculous feeding of the five thousand, the disciples eagerly ask Jesus to *always* give them “the bread that . . . gives life to the world” (vv. 33–34). Jesus responds in verse 35, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” How amazing that a relationship with Jesus can provide constant nourishment in our everyday lives!

The donut shop's advertisement targeted my body's craving, but God's continuous knowledge of my heart's condition invites me to recognize my ongoing need for Him and to receive the sustenance only He can provide.

By: Elisa Morgan

Reflect & Pray

Dear God, remind me of my need for Your daily bread of presence.

Jesus alone offers the only bread that truly satisfies.

Water Where We Need It

Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst.--John 4:14

Today's Scripture & Insight: John 4:7–14

Lake Baikal, the world's deepest lake, is vast and magnificent. Measuring one-mile-deep and nearly 400 miles (636 km) by 49 miles (79 km) across, it contains one-fifth of all the surface fresh water in the world. But this water is largely inaccessible. Lake Baikal is located in Siberia—one of the most remote areas of Russia. With water so desperately needed for much of our planet, it's ironic that such a vast

supply of water is tucked away in a place where not many people can access it.

Although Lake Baikal may be remote, there is an endless source of life-giving water that is available and accessible to those who need it most. When at a well in Samaria, Jesus engaged a woman in conversation, probing at the edges of her deep spiritual thirst. The solution to her heart-need? Jesus Himself.

In contrast to the water she had come to draw from the well, Jesus offered something better: “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:13–14).

Many things promise satisfaction but never fully quench our thirsty hearts. Jesus alone can truly satisfy our spiritual thirst, and His provision is available to everyone, everywhere.

By: Bill Crowder

Reflect & Pray

Where are you seeking fulfillment or satisfaction in life? Why is the search for true satisfaction impossible apart from Christ?

Loving God, thank You for the life You provide and the purpose and meaning You give to me. Teach me to find my truest satisfaction in You and Your love.

To learn more, listen to “The Woman at the Well,”
DiscoverTheWord.org/series/the-woman-at-the-well/

Bread!

I am the bread of life.--John 6:48

Today's Scripture & Insight: John 6:34–51

I live in a small Mexican city where every morning and evening you can hear a distinctive cry: “Bread!” A man with a huge basket on his bike offers a great variety of fresh sweet and salty breads for sale. I used to live in a bigger city, where I had to go to the bakery to buy bread. So I enjoy having fresh bread brought to my door.

Moving from the thought of feeding physical hunger to spiritual hunger, I think of Jesus’s words: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever” (John 6:51).

Someone has said that evangelism is really one beggar telling another beggar where he found bread. Many of us can say, “Once I was spiritually hungry, spiritually starving because of my sins. Then I heard the good news. Someone told me where to find bread: in Jesus. And my life changed!”

Now we have the privilege and the responsibility of pointing others to this Bread of Life. We can share Jesus in our neighborhood, in our workplace, in our school, in our places of recreation. We can talk about Jesus in the waiting room, on the bus, or on the train. We can take the good news to others through doors of friendship.

Jesus is the Bread of Life. Let’s tell everybody the great news.

By: Keila Ochoa

Reflect & Pray

Lord Jesus, I want to be Your witness everywhere I go.

Share the Bread of Life wherever you are.

The Ultimate Satisfaction

**Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!--Isaiah 55:1**

Today's Scripture & Insight: Isaiah 55:1–7

As we distributed snacks for children at a Bible School program, we noticed a little boy who devoured his snack. Then he also ate the leftovers of the children at his table. Even after I gave him a bag of popcorn, he still wasn't satisfied. As leaders, we were concerned as to why this little boy was so hungry.

It occurred to me that we can be like that boy when it comes to our emotions. We look for ways to satisfy our deepest longings, but we never find what fully satisfies us.

The prophet Isaiah invites those who are hungry and thirsty to “come, buy and eat” (Isaiah 55:1). But then he asks, “Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?” (v. 2). Isaiah is talking about more than just physical hunger here. God can satisfy our spiritual and emotional hunger through the promise of His presence. The “everlasting covenant” in verse 3 is a reminder of a promise God made to David in 2 Samuel 7:8–16. Through David's family line, a Savior

would come to reconnect people to God. Later, in John 6:35 and 7:37, Jesus extended the same invitation Isaiah gave, thus identifying Himself as the Savior foretold by Isaiah and other prophets.

Hungry? God invites you to come and be filled in His presence.

By: Linda Washington

Reflect & Pray

Father, I long to know You more. Only You can satisfy my deepest desires.

Only God will satisfy our spiritual hunger.

The Secret

I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation. –Philippians

4:12

Today's Scripture & Insight: Philippians 4:10–19

Sometimes I suspect my cat Heathcliff suffers from a bad case of FOMO (fear of missing out). When I come home with groceries, Heathcliff rushes over to inspect the contents. When I'm chopping vegetables, he stands up on his back paws peering at the produce and begging me to

share. But when I actually give Heathcliff whatever's caught his fancy, he quickly loses interest, walking away with an air of bored resentment.

But it'd be hypocritical for me to be hard on my little buddy. He reflects a bit of my own insatiable hunger for more, my assumption that "now" is never enough.

According to Paul, contentment isn't natural—it's learned (Philippians 4:11). On our own, we desperately pursue whatever we think will satisfy, moving on to the next thing the minute we realize it won't. Other times, our discontent takes the form of anxiously shielding ourselves from any and all suspected threats.

Ironically, sometimes it takes experiencing what we'd feared the most in order to stumble into real joy. Having experienced much of the worst life has to offer, Paul could testify firsthand to "the secret" of true contentment (vv. 11–12)—the mysterious reality that as we lift up to God our longings for wholeness, we experience unexplainable peace (vv. 6–8), carried ever deeper into the depths of Christ's power, beauty, and grace.

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By: Monica La Rose

Reflect & Pray

How have you experienced mysterious peace when you least expected it?

What desperate longings or fears might you need to lift up to God?

*Father, help me to surrender my attempts to secure my own happiness in exchange
for embracing the gift of each moment with You.*

People Forget

Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way.--Deuteronomy 8:2

Today's Scripture & Insight: Deuteronomy 8:2, 10–18

A woman complained to her pastor that she'd noticed a lot of repetition in his sermons. "Why do you do that?" she queried. The preacher replied, "*People forget.*"

There are lots of reasons we forget—the passage of time, growing older, or just being too busy. We forget passwords, names of people, or even where we parked our car. My husband says, "There's only so much I can fit in my brain. I have to delete something before I can remember something new."

The preacher was right. People forget. So we often need reminders to help us remember what God has done for us. The Israelites had a similar tendency. Even with the many miracles they'd seen, they still needed to be reminded of His care for them. In Deuteronomy 8, God reminded the Israelites that He'd allowed them to experience hunger in the wilderness, but then provided an amazing superfood for them every day—manna. He supplied clothing that never wore out. He led them through a wilderness of snakes and scorpions and provided water from a rock. They'd learned humility, as they realized how totally dependent they were on God's care and provision (vv. 2–4, 15–18).

God's faithfulness "continues through all generations" (Psalm 100:5). Whenever we find ourselves forgetting, we can think about the ways He's answered our prayers, and that reminds us of His goodness and faithful promises.

By: Cindy Hess Kasper

Reflect & Pray

In what areas do you struggle to trust God? What Bible verses help you to remember how much He cares for you?

Dear Father, thank You for always being faithful. Help me to trust You in whatever I face today.

The Approval of One

We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts.--1

Thessalonians 2:4

Today's Scripture & Insight: 1 Thessalonians 2:1–4

When the legendary composer Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901) was young, a hunger for approval drove him toward success. Warren Wiersbe wrote of him: “When Verdi produced his first opera in Florence, the composer stood by himself in the shadows and kept his eye on the face of one man in the audience—the great Rossini. It mattered not to Verdi whether the people in the hall were cheering him or jeering him; all he wanted was a smile of approval from the master musician.”

Whose approval do we seek? A parent’s? A boss’s? A love interest’s? For Paul, there was but one answer. He wrote, “We speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts” (1 Thessalonians 2:4).

What does it mean to seek God’s approval? At the very least, it involves two things: turning from the desire for the applause of others and allowing His Spirit to make us more like Christ—the One who loved us and gave Himself for us. As we yield to His perfect purposes in us and

through us, we can anticipate a day when we will experience the smile of His approval—the approval of the One who matters most.

By: Bill Crowder

Reflect & Pray

Whose approval do you find yourself seeking and why is their validation so important to you? How could God’s approval satisfy even more deeply?

Father, it’s far too easy to seek the applause of those around me and to desire their praise. Help me to lift my eyes to You, the One who knows me best and loves me most. For further study, read Living an Authentic Christian Life at discoveryseries.org/hp111.

