

Be the Message



DEVOTIONAL

A 30-Day Adventure in
Changing the World Around You

Kerry & Chris
SHOOK

Authors of the *New York Times* Bestseller *One Month to Live*



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BOOKS BY KERRY AND CHRIS SHOOK

One Month to Live

One Month to Love

Be the Message

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Day 1

Open Yourself *to a dynamic encounter with God*

Are you ready to receive God's message? Take a moment to settle down. Breathe. Try to put today's distractions out of your mind. In your own words ask God to meet you in this devotional time.

Open God's Word *to hear God's message*

You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me.

—JOHN 5:39

Open Your Mind *to understand God's message then and now*

On nearly every page of the Gospels, Jesus has some sort of run-in with the religious leaders of His culture. This is astonishing when you think about it. These scribes and Pharisees committed themselves to the careful study of God's Word. They meticulously followed the rules they found there, and they urged others to do the same. But somehow they missed the point.

In this passage from John 5, Jesus gets to the crux of the matter. While the leaders were indeed experts in scriptural content—they would ace any Bible quiz—they were ignorant about the essence of God's message. It was ultimately about Jesus.

Were the “experts” right about finding eternal life in the Scriptures? Well, sort of. We do find life in the Scriptures, but not because we earn points for completing our reading assignments. We find life in God’s message because we meet Jesus there.

Bible knowledge itself can’t earn a spot in heaven, in the first century or the twenty-first. Sure, it’s great to memorize verses and gather theological ideas, but the key is to encounter Jesus as we read and ponder.

Open Your Heart to the divine whisper

Sit in silence for a few minutes. Imagine Jesus sitting with you. Enjoy His presence. Thank Him for meeting you in this quiet time.

Use this space to write down a simple prayer of welcome, thanks, and love.

Open Your Life to God’s transforming power

Continue this conversation with Jesus by listening to what He has to say. Ask Him how you could please Him more. What changes does He want to make in your life?

Ask Him about today's Scripture passage. How would He apply it to your life? We often write off the scribes and Pharisees as judgmental hypocrites, and they were, but here Jesus says their problem was that they missed the point. They missed Jesus.

In our quest for biblical expertise, we can easily make the same mistake. In fact, sometimes our Bible knowledge can shield us from a genuine encounter with the living Christ. We explain things and categorize them instead of receiving a true challenge from the Lord. Ask Jesus what He thinks about that. What does He suggest you do to transform your Bible study?

Use this space to jot down what He seems to be telling you.

Open Your Arms

to a world that needs to receive God's incarnate message through you

In His earthly ministry Jesus was always raising people's vision. "Lift up your eyes!" He *saw* the lepers and beggars who were routinely ignored by others, and He urged His followers to see them too. In His closing comments, just before He ascended, He even challenged the geographical myopia of His disciples, sending them outward to Samaria and "the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Your life-changing

interaction with Jesus may start in a small, quiet room, but it moves out to a world that desperately needs to connect with Him.

Today in your conversation with Jesus, name a half-dozen friends or associates whom you care about. Be sure to include some who, as far as you know, don't know Jesus yet. Include some who need help or healing.

Write down their names and any additional notes about their needs.

Bring these names to Jesus. Ask for His truth to challenge them, His love to embrace them, and His healing touch to restore them. Don't be surprised if He asks for your help in some of this. Sometimes He invites us to participate in the answers to our own prayers.



Day 2

Open Yourself to a dynamic encounter with God

May the words of my mouth
and the meditation of my heart
be pleasing to you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.
—Psalm 19:14, NLT

Open God's Word to hear God's message

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.

—MATTHEW 6:5

Open Your Mind to understand God's message then and now

Apparently, in Jesus's day, prayer had become a spectator sport. He criticized the “hypocrites” who tried to impress others with their public show of devotion. The word *hypocrite* was actually used for actors, who in that time wore masks. Some masks had megaphones built in so the actors' words would not be muffled. And often the same actor

would play several roles, using a different mask for each. Clearly Jesus saw through the acts of these pious posers.

For many people today religious devotion is still a show. They're trying to impress others with their piety rather than authentically bowing before the Lord. Note that Jesus didn't waste words in putting down such playacting. He simply said it was what it was. It was a show, a sham—a work of art, even—but it wasn't true prayer. Those hypocrites got the applause they sought and nothing more.

True prayer is an honest encounter with the living God. You're not performing—for Him or anyone else. You're just talking . . . and listening.

Open Your Heart to the divine whisper

Sit in silence for several minutes, focusing on God, not on yourself. Yes, it's hard to be quiet, but this is not about how good you are at meditation. You are not trying to succeed at devotions. You are just opening your heart to God. If it helps, you might let certain phrases or images of God fill your thoughts. *God, You are loving . . . holy . . . faithful . . . a Rock . . . the Creator . . . a fountain of life . . . a feast of delight.*

Use this space to record some of these phrases.

Open Your Life to God's transforming power

Ask God to shine His spotlight on your life, not as a performer, but as a lab specimen. God is continuing His good work in you, growing you, transforming you, helping you conform to the image of Jesus. So let Him point out the falsehoods. Do you pretend to be more godly than you are? Are you satisfied with a public image of religious devotion rather than actually being devoted to the Lord of life?

A word of caution: Sometimes we Christians pride ourselves on being humble. We try to outdo each other by finding nitpicky aspects of life to improve. That can be just as much of an act as public oratory.

Bare yourself before God. Put down your mask. Let God see the real you, and let Him change you in the way He wants.

Listen for His guidance. Respond to His nudging. In the space below jot down what you hear Him saying about getting real with Him. And keep in mind that He might be saying, "Relax. Just *be* with Me for a while."

*Open Your Arms
to a world that needs to receive God's incarnate message
through you*

The Bible tells us that our good lives can be a beacon to others. But of course we are still sinners, and our lives are not always good. As a result, some of us make a terrible choice: we *pretend*. We assume we can still be a good testimony to others if we cover up our faults and pretend to be more righteous than we are. That is dangerously bad thinking.

We live in a world of strugglers. People grapple with guilt, doubt, disappointment, fear, and frustration. You live and work with people like this. They don't need to see a carefully manicured *portrayal* of a Christian life. They need to see a fellow struggler who authentically interacts with a very real God.

Take this time to talk with God about those people in your life. Is there anyone you need to be more honest with? How can you share the realities of your up-and-down life with such a person and be truly helpful?

Write down the names God brings to mind and what you can say or do.



Day 3

Open Yourself *to a dynamic encounter with God*

Come away from the noise of life. Turn off the phone, the computer, the music . . . even if it's Christian music. Get quiet and listen for God's whisper.

Open God's Word *to hear God's message*

The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by."

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

—1 KINGS 19:11–12

Open Your Mind *to understand God's message then and now*

Elijah showed all the signs of a deep depression. He had just won the greatest victory of his life—literally a mountaintop experience—calling down fire from heaven to embarrass the false prophets. But that just made the evil queen more determined to kill him, and he ran for his life. To the desert. Where he sat. And slept. And sat.



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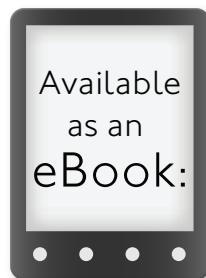
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