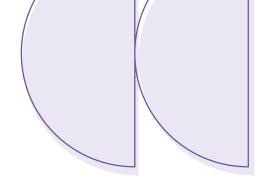
Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me-everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you. **Philippians 4:9 NLT**

In middle school, you've probably been stressed out at some point. Maybe in a fight with a friend, or having too much homework, or because your mom and stepdad have been arguing a lot at home. No matter why you're stressed, the more we experience it, the more we want to feel the complete opposite. We want to feel peace! The truth is that peace is always available to us. A real, lasting peace. The kind of peace that only comes from God. In fact, the more we get to know God, the more our faith—and the peace it brings-will grow.

The next time you find yourself stressed, ask God to remind you of what you know to be true: that peace is possible for all of us when we're growing in faith and relationship with God.



DAY 7

And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.

Colossians 2:6-7 NLT

One of the best ways we can connect the dots and grow in our faith is through memorizing God's Word. After all, we can't actually do what we've learned if we haven't learned it, right? So this week, commit to memorizing this verse as the first step in not just learning about God, but applying the truth you learn to your life.

To start, reach out to your small group leader. Text or DM this verse to them as a way to help you memorize it and talk about what stands out to you about it, too.

DAILY **DEVOTIONAL**

FOR AN everyday faith.

CONNECT THE DOTS / WEEK 1

MIDDLE SCHOOL

DAY 1

So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and use-

James 2:17 NLT

Have you ever planted a seed in a garden only to find that nothing grows? After a while, you probably figured out that something happened to stop the growth. No matter what caused it, it probably felt like the seed became pretty much useless after that. Why? Because it didn't do what it was supposed to do: grow. Just like a seed is supposed to produce a plant, God wants your faith to grow into something, too. God wants the faith you have to produce action—specifically things that are good! That is how others will see your faith in your life.

Today, talk with your small group, an adult you trust, or a friend about how you are going to put your faith in action this week.

DAY 2

In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. Matthew 5:16 NLT

Have you ever done something good hoping that you'd get recognized for it? If we're being honest, we'd all admit we've done a good thing or two hoping that someone else would notice, appreciate it, and maybe even thank us for it. But as followers of Jesus, we're encouraged to do good things for others for a different reason: so that the praise will be given to God. One of the quickest ways we can see both our faith and the faith of those around us grow is not to take credit for something good, but to instead, give God the credit. We don't do good things so people think we're good; we do good things to show the world that God is good.

Brainstorm ways you can do good this week as a way to show others more of who God is.

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and forever! Amen.

2 Peter 3:18 NIV

Part of becoming more like Jesus means that we should always be growing. We should always be growing in our faith and growing to be more like Jesus in our lives. But it's one thing to know all the right things we can do in order to grow; it's another to actually try and do them. The more we learn about Jesus as our Savior, the more we should be inspired to act like Him. And in acting like Jesus, we'll grow to become more like Him.

Pray this week that as you learn about Jesus' love toward you, you will be inspired to live more like Jesus did and grow deeper in your faith.



DAY 4

It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow.

1 Corinthians 3:7 NLT

It can be easy to think that growing our faith is completely up to us. If we just keep learning, and trying, and doing, then we'll finally get it right . . . right? As this verse reminds us, there's more to it than that. Of course, God wants us to do our part—to take what we've learned and apply it to our lives. But we can't forget that it's ultimately God who grows our faith. In other words, we can't do it on our own! When we trust God to help us grow, we'll develop a stronger faith as we go.

Take a walk this week and look for plants you see blooming to remind you that God is the One who helps you grow in your faith in the same way. If you have a phone, snap a picture and send it to your group!

DAY 5

But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves.

James 1:22 NLT

Written by Peyton, age 13 from Altoona, Iowa, USA

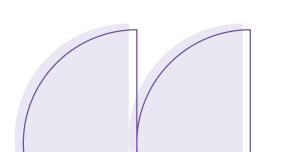
Have you ever read instructions that were so confusing that they offered you no help at all? Those are just the worst, aren't they!? Luckily for us, God gave the church a very clear and helpful instruction manual: God's Word, the Bible. It tells us exactly what we need to do in order to fully experience God and help others experience God. But what good is reading an instruction manual if you never bother to follow the instructions in it? God doesn't want us to know what we should do, God wants us to actually do it! Following God doesn't mean just sitting around all day, praying and reading the Bible (although those are important things to do). It means using what you learn about what God says in your own life! God wants us to show the rest of the world God's love through our actions.



Do you see someone sitting alone at lunch?
Invite them to sit with you and your friends!

Is there someone you are friends with who doesn't know Jesus yet? Invite them to your youth group!

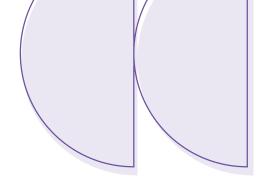
Challenge yourself today to show someone else God's love through your actions.



Let each generation tell its children of your mighty acts; let them proclaim your power. Psalm 145:4 NLT

Have you ever thought about the power of your words? Whether you've used them to encourage a friend who was hurting or to present a project in front of your class, your words can be really powerful, in both positive and negative ways. In the same way, when we share our faith with others, our words have power. This verse says that our faith has been passed down and shared for generations. It's been talked about and passed on through the power of other people's words. And that's something we can continue today! When we use our words to tell others about the good things that God has done, not only will it help the faith of someone else grow, but it can help our faith grow, too. And that's pretty cool!

So, what's one good thing that God has done that you want to tell someone about?



DAY 7

And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.

Colossians 2:6-7 NLT

God can use other people to grow our faith. And that's great news because it means we don't have to figure out any of this faith stuff all on our own. We can lean on and learn from others as we grow.

This week, involve your small group or a group of close friends in helping you memorize this verse. Work on it together and watch how your relationships grow, not just with each other, but with God, too.

DAILY **DEVOTIONAL**

FOR AN everyday faith.

CONNECT THE DOTS / WEEK 2

MIDDLE SCHOOL

DAY 1

Dear brothers and sisters, we can't help but thank God for you, because your faith is flourishing and your love for one another is growing.

2 Thessalonians 1:3 NLT

Who in your life can be hard to love? Maybe it's a brother or a sister, a step-parent, that difficult teammate, or that kid who sits next to you in math. Believe it or not, God can actually use that person to help grow your faith! Learning to love those people who feel difficult to love or even get along with can help us be more like Jesus. And when we make the effort to love even when it's hard, we're taking a step toward growing in faith and loving others—two things Jesus shows us how to do really well!

Today, talk with your small group about some of the ways Jesus showed love to those around Him. Then, think about how you can do the same with others in your life, even those who don't make it easy!

DAY 2

Let the whole earth sing to the Lord! Each day proclaim the good news that he saves.

1 Chronicles 16:23 NLT

Do you find it easy to talk about your faith? If you don't, you aren't alone! For many of us, telling others about Jesus and our relationship with Him can feel difficult. But remember, God can use us to grow the faith of others when we find the courage to speak up and talk about what God is doing in our life. And helping someone else connect the dots and grow closer to God? Well, that's pretty cool!

Think about who you can share what God is doing in your life with this week. Maybe in a short conversation, a note to encourage them, or even a simple text. Then, ask your small group leader to help you think through the best way to start that conversation and encourage you to take the step to do it.

Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Psalm 90:12 NIV

Who is someone wise in your life? Whoever it is for you, that wise person probably has a good point of view about life, and this verse gives us an idea of what that point of view might be. It encourages us to be wise with the way we live because we aren't going to live forever. We have to make the most of the time we have on this Earth, and that's exactly what wise people do! They understand that each and every day is an opportunity to grow in faith and connect with God, and they use their time to help others do that, too!

So today, thank the wise person in your life for the way they inspire and challenge you to grow in your faith.



DAY 4

Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better.

Colossians 1:10 NLT

Who is someone you know who really puts their faith into action? The reason you know what they believe is that they do more than just talk about it. You see them live their life in a way that shows their faith is real. Surrounding ourselves with people like that can help us develop a stronger faith of our own. They can encourage us to grow deeper in relationship with God. And when that happens, people will notice! Our faith will make an impact on others just like someone else's faith made an impact on us.

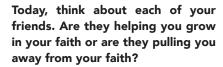
Think about someone in your life whose faith you look up to. Write down a list of things about the way they live that lets you know their faith is real. Then, try to practice just one of those characteristics in your own life this week.

DAY 5

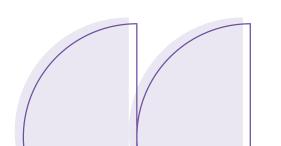
As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend.
Proverbs 27:17

Written by Audri, age 13 from Mount Pleasant, Michigan, USA

I remember when I was at a kids camp a couple of years ago and the message was about friends who can influence your life. During the talk, the guy stood up on a chair and their friend was on the ground. This represented the relationship between two friends. The friend standing on the chair was trying to pull his friend on the ground up onto the chair, too. This represented him trying to encourage his friend to become a Christian. Then, the friend who was on the ground tried to pull the guy standing on the chair down. It was much easier for him to pull the guy on the chair down, which represented pulling him away from his faith. This example really changed my perspective on friendship. I learned that your friends will influence your life and your faith in a lot of ways! It made me think about how your friends should help build you up and grow in your faith, instead of pulling you away from your faith.



Then, talk to a leader or your parent for help if you need to make a change in any of your friendships.

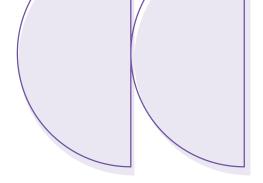


The greatest among you must be a servant.

Matthew 23:11 NLT

Do you have weekly chores at home? Maybe it's to clean your room, take out the trash, put away the dishes, or even do your laundry. No matter what chores you have, they probably involve serving others in your family and thinking of their needs before your own. In this week's verse, Matthew makes it clear: To be the greatest that you can be, you have to choose to put others first and meet their needs . . . first. Jesus' friends knew one big secret: We grow the most when we think of ourselves the least. And there aren't many better ways to grow in faith than to put others' needs before our own.

How can you serve someone else first today?



DAY 7

And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.

Colossians 2:6-7 NLT

Just like a tree has deep roots to keep it standing strong, we can choose to let our roots grow strong in God. To let our roots grow, we have to spend time growing our faith by having a relationship with God. And one of the best ways to do that is by reading, learning about, and even memorizing Scripture. The more we learn about God, the stronger our foundation will be to build our faith.

Today, say this verse out loud ten times in a row. Each time you say it, let the words sink in. Then, try to write it one time without looking to see how far you've gotten in committing it to memory.

DAILY **DEVOTIONAL**

FOR AN everyday faith. MIDDLE SCHOOL

CONNECT THE DOTS / WEEK 3

DAY 1

So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up. **Galatians 6:9 NLT**

When was the last time you did something for someone else even though you got nothing in return? If we're honest, it can be hard to want to serve others when we know there isn't much in it for us. Here, even Paul recognizes how easy it is to get tired of serving others or doing what is right. But he doesn't leave it there! He says that there actually is something in it for us. When we don't give up on serving others, we find a blessing that only God can give us. All we have to do is keep going and choosing to serve where we can.

Memorize this verse this week to help you remember that there is always good to come when we serve others.

DAY 2

Whatever you give is acceptable if you give it eagerly. And give according to what you have, not what you don't have. 2 Corinthians 8:12 NLT

Serving others often requires a sacrifice of some kind. It may mean giving up part of your allowance to a friend going on a mission trip, or using your time to mow your neighbor's lawn, or helping a sibling with homework instead of watching YouTube. No matter what, serving others can cost us something. But this verse reminds us that when we serve others, we should give what we have eagerly. That just means we should find a way to be truly happy to do it! And while that isn't always easy to do on our own, it's something we can ask God to help us do as we grow in faith.

So today, do just that. Pray that God would help you be happy and willing to give what you have to serve someone else.

For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you.

2 Corinthians 9:10 NLT

Most of us would probably say that there have been moments when being generous to someone else hasn't been easy. Truth be told, it can be hard to give away our time, energy, and resources to others. The great news is that we don't have to figure this out on our own! Part of growing in faith means growing closer to God, who will help you become more generous as you do. The more time you spend growing in your faith, the more you'll become aware of needs around you and the more generous you'll become with what you have.

Reach out to a friend or someone in your small group. Talk about ways you can encourage each other to be generous or even take a step to meet a need together.



DAY 4

When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality. Romans 12:13 NLT

Have you ever noticed someone in need? Maybe a kid who didn't have lunch money, or a person who was homeless in your community, or someone in another country that you learned about at school. When we see needs around us, big or small, it can be easy to think we don't have what it takes to help. But as Paul reminds us here, we do! All we have to do is be ready and willing to serve. When we have that attitude, God will lead us to do what we can to help those who need it.

Write down a few needs you know about in the world. Then, take a few minutes to think about how you can be ready and willing to let God use you to help!

DAY 5

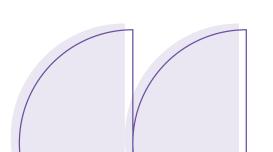
(Jesus) sat down, called the twelve disciples over to him, and said, "Whoever wants to be first must take last place and be the servant of everyone else. Mark 9:35 NLT

Written by Matthew, age 16 from Sanford, Florida, USA

Don't you love it when a drive-thru is fast at a restaurant AND they get your order right? Or when one of your siblings randomly does one of your chores for you? I know for me, I love when that happens! I was recently sick with a stomach bug, and while I was sick, my mother took great care of me. She was always asking if I needed something to drink or if there was anything she could do to help. During that time while I was sick, it was such a blessing to be served. The reason most of us love to be served is because, as humans, we want to be put first!

But Jesus actually says we should do the opposite. Jesus says, if we want to be first, we must be last and serve others. Just like Jesus did! Jesus calls us to serve everyone. Yes, even that kid that gets on your nerves at school or church. Or your sibling or friend that always seems to annoy you. Serving could mean many different things. You could serve in Sunday School at your church, or pick up your friends' trash at lunch, or you could do one of your sibling's chores around the house. And as you serve, you will see your faith grow in the process, too!

Today, I want to challenge you to choose to do just one thing to be like Jesus by putting someone else first and serving them!

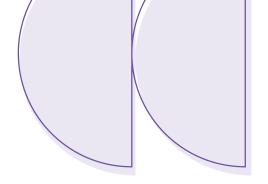


Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later.

Romans 8:18 NLT

Think about a recent tough time you experienced. Maybe it was the end of a friendship or not making a team. Or maybe it was losing a grandparent or someone close to you. Going through hard times is just that: hard. Yet, Paul reminds us in today's verse that God doesn't forget us in those moments. In fact, God promises that everything we go through today doesn't compare to all the good in store for us later. Know that God not only is with you in tough times now, but promises you a future more incredible than you can imagine later. Let that give you hope today, in even the toughest of times.

Spend some time in prayer, thanking God that hard times are not the end of the story when we're going through life with God and growing in our faith.



DAY 7

And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.

Colossians 2:6-7 NLT

Sometimes when we're dealing with tough times or difficult circumstances in life, it can be easy to feel like we're in it alone. That's where having God's Word in our hearts and minds can help! Memorizing a verse like this one not only reminds us of what's true, but it helps us feel less alone. It brings us closer to God, and that's the best place we can be when facing something hard in life.

So, take a step to memorize this verse today. Write each word on a separate note card or sticky note. Flip them upside down and try to say the whole verse by memory, only flipping the notecards up to reveal the words once you've memorized them.

DAILY **DEVOTIONAL**

FOR AN everyday faith.

CONNECT THE DOTS / WEEK 4

MIDDLE SCHOOL

DAY 1

Look straight ahead, and fix your eyes on what lies before you.

Proverbs 4:25 NLT

When going through hard times, it's easy to want to distract ourselves from our circumstances. We tune out by listening to music, or scrolling on Instagram, or binging a new series on Netflix. But when we're done? Well, the tough times and hard feelings are still there waiting for us. This Proverb helps us see that the best thing we can do for ourselves is to focus on God in the middle of our tough times. When we do, we might be surprised at how our faith changes or grows even in the most difficult of circumstances.

Write this verse where you can see it. When you're struggling with tough times, focus on this verse as a reminder to help you fix your eyes on God no matter what you're going through.

DAY 2

Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong.

Ephesians 3:17 NLT

The next time you are outside or at a park, take a look around you. Pay attention to the strongest trees you see standing. When the wind blows, or the rain comes, or the snow weighs them down, the trees stay strong because their roots hold them in the ground. In a similar way, when we choose to follow Jesus, He gives us strength. And because of that, no matter what we're going through, we can stand strong.

Take a walk this week and look for a strong tree in your neighborhood. You could even find a picture of one online or draw one for yourself. Let that tree remind you that because of Jesus, you can stand strong no matter what you're going through.

My health may fail, and my spirit will grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever.

Psalm 73:26 NLT

A lot of what God promises us as followers of Jesus has to do with strength. That's because God knows that as humans, we need it! Eventually, we'll all face something tough or difficult, and that will require more strength than we have inside of us. It will mean we need more strength to help us handle it. When that day comes, it's comforting to know that God promises to give us the strength we need not just to get through it, but to grow stronger in our faith as we do.

Think about someone you know who has shown strength in a tough time. Reach out to them to ask how God's strength helped them get through what they were facing and maybe even come out stronger because of it.



DAY 4

Have you never heard? Have you never understood? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth. He never grows weak or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding.

We all have ways of dealing with our feelings when things get tough. Maybe you try to pretend you aren't feeling what you're feeling, or you get mad at those around you, or you simply sit and cry. In today's verse, Isaiah reminds us that God wants to be who we run to in order to deal with life's challenges. We need God's help to get through all things, big or small. So why wouldn't we try running to God for help when we're dealing with something that's really tough?

The next time you find yourself in a tough time, spend time praying, reading your Bible, listening to worship music, or journaling as a way to connect to the God who loves you and wants to help you.

DAY 5

He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress where I will never be shaken.

Psalm 62:2 NLT

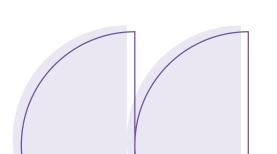
Written by Caroline, age 12 from Suwanee, Georgia, USA

As we get older, we can experience some tough situations. A tough time in my own life has been my grandma battling cancer. On a recent scan, the doctors didn't know what the problem was. She had new spots on her liver that they thought were caused by infection. After many months of treatment, the spots didn't budge, and later we were told that those spots were actually cancer. To me, that was a time of uncertainty. The only thing that stayed the same was God, and God's constant love for me. What I learned through this is that no matter what happens, knowing how much God loves us and is for us can help us through those tough times. God's love can give us strength to go through anything.

Today, pick up a random rock outside and put it in your pocket.

Every time you think about that tough thing you are going through, take a moment to pray and thank God for being your rock, and walking through this situation with you.

If you know someone else going through a tough time, pick up a rock and give it to them. Share what you are doing, so they also can be reminded that God is with them.

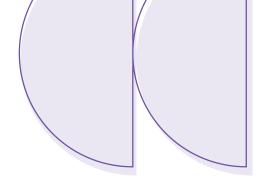


Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.

John 15:5 NLT

Think about the last time you played a sport or studied hard for a test. Over time, you got better and better at it with practice. But if you suddenly stopped practicing? For a time, you might still be good at it, but eventually, you'd be able to tell you haven't put much effort into it. The same is true when it comes to our relationship with Jesus. In order to grow in faith, we have to stay close to Jesus daily. Not to earn His love or become the best Christians around! No, Jesus wants our time and attention because He wants our faith to grow. And that's something that can't happen without Jesus!

Pray today that Jesus would help you become more like Him as you grow in your faith.



DAY 7

And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.

Colossians 2:6-7 NLT

One of the best habits we can develop to help grow our faith is memorizing God's Word. The more we read the Bible and know what God says, the more we'll find ourselves growing in knowledge and relationship with God. One way to do this is by using different translations of the Bible. The Bible has been translated into specific words that helps the reader to understand the meaning better. So, start by looking up today's verse in another translation. (You can ask your parents or small group leader for help!)

Read a few different translations of Colossians 2:6-7 to help you get a different understanding of what the verse might mean. Then, write down the one that you connect with most and try to memorize that this week.

DAILY **DEVOTIONAL**

FOR AN everyday faith.

CONNECT THE DOTS / WEEK 5

MIDDLE SCHOOL

DAY 1

Let me hear of your unfailing love each morning, for I am trusting you. Show me where to walk, for I give myself to you. Psalm 143:8 NLT

Do you have a morning routine? Or do you simply rush through with just enough time to brush your teeth and head to school? For most of us, it's hard to find any extra time each morning to do anything besides our routine! Yet, in today's verse, we are reminded that spending time with God each day is a habit that will make our lives better. Not only will it allow God to show us how to live that day, but it will help us focus right away on what's important and true: God's love for us!

Take some time each morning this week to make a habit out of reading a devotional (like this one!). When you do, thank God for starting the day with you!

DAY 2

And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth. John 17:3 NLT

One of the best ways we can grow in our faith is to develop daily habits that help us get to know God more. When we do things every single day like read the Bible, pray, worship, or talk to others about our faith, we're making steps to not just grow in faith, but to grow in our relationship with God, too. It's something that can impact our lives not just today, but forever and all of eternity as well.

So, what's one habit you want to work on to connect with God this week? Share it with your small group leader or a friend and ask for their help in encouraging you to stick with it each day.

Be still, and know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation. I will be honored throughout the world.

Psalm 46:10 NLT

Are you always on the go? From school to sports to activities to family commitments, your schedule is probably packed! Yet, when we are so busy living our lives, we often forget to give time to the One who makes our lives worth living: God.

This week, slow down and spend some time being still. Slow down and make a habit of connecting with God, even for five minutes each day. As you do, know that God will make the most of your time together to grow your faith and help you grow every single day.



DAY 4

May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

Ephesians 3:19 NLT

God loves us with an unconditional love. What does that mean? That there is nothing we can do to change the way God feels about us. This can be difficult to understand because no one else in life loves us this way. With other people, it can feel like we have to do something, or achieve something, or try to be like someone else in order to be loved. But God's love is different. And more than that, Paul reminds us in today's verse that it's always available. In fact, the more we experience God's love for us through Jesus, the more we'll feel complete.

So, make a daily habit of looking for God's unconditional love in your life. Create a list of ways you see God's love in your life and add to it each day this week.

DAY 5

We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.

1 John 4:16 NLT

Written by Emma, age 21 from West Palm Beach, Florida, USA

I don't know about you, but life can get busy! When that happens, sometimes I forget to spend time with God and I forget how much God loves me. Sometimes I forget who God is! But when I slow down and connect with God, I am reminded. I am reminded of who God says I am and who God is. I am reminded that God loves me so much! And we can do things every single day to help remind ourselves of this by connecting with God.

We can pray to God.

We can read God's Word.

We can listen to songs about God.

We can experience the things that God has created.

We can sit in the quiet.

We can talk to someone else about God.

There are so many different ways we can connect with God and be reminded of how much God loves us! Because it's so easy to forget, that's why it's important to do these things daily. And focusing on God's love makes every day better.

Today, find one way to connect with God. And as you do that, take a few moments to write down the things you learn about God in the process.

