

DIGGING DEEPER

A 5-Day Devotional

Youth Takeover

Hebrews 12:29 | 1 Corinthians 12 | Psalm 145:4

Youth Sunday

Rise City Church | risecitychurch.com

How to Use This Devotional

This devotional comes from Youth Sunday, where students shared their stories, a student preached, and our youth pastor talked about what the church is supposed to look like across generations. It is written for everyone, students and adults alike, because almost nothing that was said applies only to teenagers. Each day focuses on one thread from the service. Read it when you have a few quiet minutes. Sit with the reflection questions honestly, and be specific, not general. Use the prayer prompt to talk to God, not just think about him.

All Scripture is from the New Living Translation.

Day 1: Expect Him to Move

"My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts, says the Lord. And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts." Isaiah 55:8-9 (NLT)

One of the leaders shared something on Sunday that is worth carrying all week. In the weeks leading up to camp, the students were taught this: expect God to move, but do not predict how God will move.

That distinction matters more than it might sound. Her girls came into camp having heard all the stories from previous years, and their expectations had quietly turned into predictions. Someone is going to get healed. It is going to look like this specific thing. And when we predict, we hand God a script and then evaluate him on whether he followed it.

What she said happened instead is that the girls went in with full surrender, not knowing what would happen, just open. And every single one of them experienced God. Another student said almost the same thing from the other direction. She went into camp with no expectations at all, just excited for a summer camp, and she left having made a decision she never saw coming.

There is a posture here that has nothing to do with being a teenager at camp. It is the posture of coming to God open rather than scripted. Predicting how God will move is a subtle way of staying in control. Expecting him to move without dictating the terms is trust. And trust is what actually leaves room for him to do something you would never have written into the plan yourself.

"Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think." Ephesians 3:20 (NLT)

REFLECT

1. Where have your expectations of God quietly turned into predictions? What script have you handed him that you are now waiting for him to follow?

2. One student said she went in with no expectations and left with a decision she never expected to make. When was the last time God did something in your life you would not have written into the plan?

3. What would it look like this week to come to God expectant but not scripted? What would you have to release for that to be true?

PRAY

Come to God today without an agenda. Do not bring him your list of what you want him to do or how you want him to do it. Just tell him you are open, and then sit quietly for a few minutes without filling the space. Practice expecting without predicting.

Day 2 God Is the Fire

"For our God is a devouring fire." Hebrews 12:29 (NLT)

A student preached on Sunday, and he built the whole message around a text conversation. His youth pastor had asked him a question: how do you keep students motivated in their relationship with Jesus after camp? And he did not have an answer. It shook him for a second, because he had been wrestling with the same thing himself before camp even started.

So he asked a question back. What is fire? What does it actually mean to keep your fire for Jesus? And the answer that came back was one word. God. God is the fire.

That reframes everything. Camp makes a relationship with Jesus feel easy because a whole week has been engineered for it. No phone. No distractions. Solo prayer time built into the schedule. A memory verse every day. Worship every night. Then you come down the mountain into school and work and old habits, and the feeling fades, and you wonder how you lost it.

But here is what he landed on: the goal is not to spend your life trying to recreate a feeling. If God himself is the fire, and God does not end, then the fire does not end either. You do not have to manufacture it. You could not manufacture it if you tried. The question was never how do I keep my fire. The question is whether you have given him all of you.

"The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning." Lamentations 3:22-23 (NLT)

REFLECT

1. Have you ever felt very close to God and then, weeks later, wondered how you lost it? What happened in between?
2. The student said the goal is not to recreate a feeling but to surrender to the God who is already the fire. What is the difference between chasing a feeling and surrendering to a person?
3. If God is the fire and he does not run out, what does that change about how you approach the days when you do not feel anything?

PRAY

Be honest with God about the gap between how you felt at your most alive spiritually and how you feel right now. Do not apologize for it. Just name it. Then ask him to help you stop trying to manufacture something only he can be.

Day 3 The Thing You Are Holding Tightest

"Then he said to the crowd, If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it." Luke 9:23-24 (NLT)

A consuming fire does not take part of something. That was the point the student kept coming back to. A fire can consume the smallest bush or the largest forest, and either way it consumes all of it. Which means God either has all of you or he has none of you.

He said he wrestled with that constantly. Does God actually have all of me, or does he have a part of me? And then he named why it is so hard: giving up control is difficult, whether you are a student or an adult. I like to control my own life. I like to control what I take in and what I put out. And I think we all do.

There is a version of following Jesus where we say we want him to be the leader of our life, and then quietly add: but I want you to be the leader of this part. Not that part. We keep a section for ourselves. And he made the point directly. God does not want the 30 percent. He does not want the 60 percent. He does not even want the 99 percent. He wants all of it.

Then he said the line that people were still thinking about after the service ended: you are holding on to the tightest thing that God is asking you to surrender. Not a general call to be more surrendered. A specific one. Something came to mind when you read that sentence. That is the thing.

"And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice, the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him." Romans 12:1 (NLT)

REFLECT

1. What came to mind when you read the line about holding on to the tightest thing God is asking you to surrender? Name it specifically rather than in general terms.
2. Is there an area of your life where you have made Jesus the leader of everything except one particular part? What has kept that section walled off?
3. The student said God does not want the Sunday version of you, he wants Sunday through Saturday. Where is the biggest gap between your Sunday self and your Tuesday self?

PRAY

Name the specific thing out loud to God. Not the category. The actual thing. You do not have to have a plan for how to let it go yet. Start by telling him what it is and asking him for the willingness to open your hand.

Day 4 One Body, Every Generation

"Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. The eye can never say to the hand, I don't need you. The head can't say to the feet, I don't need you... If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad." 1 Corinthians 12:20-21, 26 (NLT)

Pastor Anthony told two stories about himself that land in opposite directions. As a new believer at Bible college, the people who got under his skin most were the older, experienced folks at church who weren't shy about correcting him. One of them told him not to stand in the middle of the doorway when he held the door open, because nobody could actually get through. His reaction at the time was: you do not know me.

A few years later, he was a youth pastor at twenty-one, and the frustration reversed. Now he was getting emails from adults asking what a twenty-one-year-old could possibly offer them. He went to his pastor ready to confront them. His pastor did not send him to confront anyone. He pointed him to 1 Corinthians 12 and handed him five names, older and wiser men in the church, and told him to take each of them to lunch. Three of those five became the men who shaped him.

There is a detail in that story worth sitting with. At one of those first lunches, he dominated the entire conversation. He talked about himself, then about ministry, and by the end the older man had barely spoken. He only found out later, when the man told him gently, and he drove home convicted. Once he started doing most of the listening, his life started changing for the better.

The point of 1 Corinthians 12 is not just that everyone has a gift and should go use it. Plenty of first-century writers used the body metaphor to say exactly that: do your part and mind your own business. Paul says something different. You are unique, and it is bigger than just you. If one part suffers, the whole body suffers. If one part is honored, everyone is glad. We are connected whether we like it or not.

"Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity." 1 Timothy 4:12 (NLT)

REFLECT

1. Which frustration is more familiar to you: being annoyed by people older than you who think they can speak into your life, or being dismissive of people younger than you? Be honest about which direction it runs.
2. He said influence is not determined by age, it is determined by spiritual maturity and how open you actually are to God using you. Where does that leave you right now, regardless of how old you are?
3. Who is in a different generation than you that God might be asking you to actually listen to? Not admire from a distance. Sit down with.

PRAY

Ask God to bring one name to mind from a different generation than yours. Older or younger. Then ask him what he wants from that relationship, and whether you have been dismissing something he wants to use. Sit with it long enough to get an answer.

Day 5 You Are Not Just a Recipient

"Let each generation tell its children of your mighty acts; let them proclaim your power."

Psalm 145:4 (NLT)

The plan for that night at high school camp was simple. Worship for about an hour, leaders at the front for anyone who needed prayer, then everyone back to their cabins. Our youth pastor walked to the front of the room to announce it, and mid-walk he felt God redirect him. Not you. Students are supposed to pray for students.

His first reaction was not amen. It was: God, are you sure? He was nervous and uncomfortable and second-guessing whether he had heard right. He did it anyway. He told the room that if you are new and nervous, pray quietly; if you have been around church longer than this week, pray out loud, then find one person to pray for. And do not worry about what you say.

It went for an hour and a half. Nearly every student in that room was prayed for. Roughly ninety percent of them prayed for someone else. Most of them prayed once, realized they were not going to burst into flames, and then kept going and prayed for more people. Students came up afterward saying they had no idea what to say, they just walked over and started praying, and the person they prayed for started crying and asked how they knew to pray about their parents' divorce, or their mental health. They did not know. They just went.

Then he turned it toward the adults with a question worth sitting with. When is the last time you received ministry? Not gave it. Received it. He pointed out that students are not afraid to say I am struggling and I need help, while adults tend to wait until the ship is already sinking. His challenge was to get ahead of it rather than waiting for rock bottom, because receiving ministry is not just for students, and giving it is not just for adults.

"Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results." **James 5:16 (NLT)**

REFLECT

1. When is the last time you actually received ministry? Not gave it. Let someone pray over you or told someone you needed help. What has kept you from asking?
2. He described adults waiting until the ship is sinking before seeking help, while students are quick to say they are struggling. Which pattern is yours? What would getting ahead of it look like right now?
3. Psalm 145:4 says let each generation tell of God's mighty acts. Has God moved in your life? Who has not heard that story yet, and what is keeping you from telling it?

PRAY

Do two things today. First, ask God who you should tell your story to, and then actually tell it this week. Second, and this one may be harder, ask him who you should let pray for you. Then go ask that person. Do not wait until you are desperate.