

Five Days to
Refresh Your Soul

BY WELL-WATERED WOMEN

Dear Sister,

On a rare 87-degree day in September in Minnesota, my sons and I stopped at their grandparents' pool. As each one jumped in, he screamed in sudden horror—"It's so cold!" The busy week hadn't allowed for another pool trip, and the heat of the unexpectedly warm last few days had sunk into them. They'd become used to the dry, the heat, the sweat, and the cooler water was shocking.

We all know that there is only one solution when you're shocked by the temperature of a pool—stay submerged for as long as possible to get acclimated to the cool refreshment of the water. I'm convinced that we all know the one solution to spiritually dry seasons too—stick with spiritual disciplines consistently. When the heat of circumstances or sin causes our souls to begin to shrivel, we know that plunging deep into living water will refresh us.

That's my hope for you as you start this devotional. I hope you don't just start, but that you stick with it. Ultimately, if you are spiritually dry, you will only be refreshed by drawing near to your Savior. May you find him here.

Immersed in the water,

Maggie Combs

General Editor of 5 Days to Refresh Your Soul

What to Expect from Five Days to Refresh Your Soul

- Five days of devotionals to encourage and refresh you in the midst of spiritually dry seasons
- Daily Scripture readings in the **Living Water** section, encouraging you to spend time in God's Word before diving into the wisdom shared in the **Drink Deeply** portion of the devotion
- A **Water Your Soul** section with daily application questions and suggested ways to practice spiritual disciplines

At the end of five days, we hope you'll find yourself encouraged and you will continue your journey of finding refreshment in God's Word.

Day 1 | I am refreshed by meditating on God's Word

BY MAGGIE COMBS

LIVING WATER | PSALM 1:2-3

But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

DRINK DEEPLY

Spiritual dryness happened when I was young, last year, last week, and even a few hours ago. It creeps in during seasons of suffering or celebration, seasons momentous or mundane, seasons of transition or waiting.

I'm ashamed of my dryness. I want to bury it in the sands of normalcy, smoothing it over until there's no ripple in my perfect spiritual veneer. I cover it up at church Bible study as I hastily flip past the day of study I couldn't bring myself to finish. I don't even mention it when a friend asks me how I'm doing. Just as my pastor begins to preach, I let my mind run to my to-do list instead of opening itself to God's Word. The shame lingers when I tell a friend I'll pray for her, knowing in the depths of my heart that I'll never actually pause to do so. I avoid it by mouthing worship songs from memory without ever really worshipping.

I hate when I'm in that place, yet I feel helpless to avoid it and find myself back there again so often that I struggle to believe living water really can quench my thirst (John 4:14). That's the problem in a nutshell. Spiritual dryness has many causes, but my dryness usually comes from doubting both the truth and value of God's Word. Why would I read what my soul doubts is true?

So I avoid the relational nature of God's Word—sleeping too late for personal devotions, doing my work-related Bible reading for comprehension but not transformation, and neglecting prayer completely. As I bypass my Bible again and again, the soil of my soul cracks with thirst.

Because reading God's Word isn't the same as drinking it. Reading can be completely academic or in one ear and out the other. *Drinking* is meditation. *Drinking* is delighting. It's slowly filling the mouth, enjoying a refreshing swish around the tongue, then gulping down with a smack of the lips and a punctuated "Ah!" Regular Bible study can lead to meditation, but it's not meditation in and of itself.

Read Psalm 1:2-3 again. Skimming God's Word doesn't quench our thirst. Academic dissection doesn't quench our thirst. We can't experience the delight of God's law without lingering. Meditation takes us from simply consuming the truth to seeing the God who wrote the truth,

made the promise, remained faithful, sacrificed himself, intercedes for us, and transforms us. Meditation is entering into relationship with God, and that relationship makes his Word sweet and refreshing.

Theologian Tim Keller suggests asking these questions of the Scripture you're meditating on: *Am I living in light of this? What difference does this make? Am I taking this seriously? If I believed and held to this, how would that change things? When I forget this, how does that affect me and all my relationships?*¹ These questions help you meditate on a text that you've previously studied. They incline your heart to God's Word after your head has already engaged with it.

Notice the benefits of meditating on God's Word noted in Psalm 1. Not only is meditation a means to delight, but it also makes us firmly planted trees, no matter our circumstances. Even if we are in a season of intense heat that could lead to dryness, we remain well-watered when we meditate on God's Word. So our leaf does not wither, although we only see spiritual fruit in its season.

So I ask myself, *Why do I find myself so regularly battling spiritual dryness when I know the cure?* It pains me to admit it, but it's my pride. It holds tightly to doubts that I know would be dispelled if I immersed myself in God's truth. My pride tells me sleep is more necessary than private fellowship with God in his Word. It chooses quick delights and easy escapes instead of the patient labor of meditation that leads to lasting joy. My pride values my own ability to discern truth instead of dependency on God's truth. It avoids the conviction of the Holy Spirit that comes through deep meditation. My pride flat out refuses to drink the water.

Every morning I wake up bursting with my own value and importance. So every morning, I must kill my pride using this prayer, adapted from biblical counselor Paul Tripp: *Lord, I need your help today. Humble my heart to receive your Word. Help me look beyond myself and my circumstances to my Savior. Amen.*² Only when I humbly entreat God for help do I begin to value his Word and make time not only for study but for meditation that leads to worship. Then and only then is my soul refreshed.

WATER YOUR SOUL

What lies or thought patterns do you discern in your heart when you're experiencing spiritual dryness? How do you think pride plays a role in your spiritual dryness?

Psalm 1 is considered a meditation on meditation. Take time to read it today, choosing a verse or two to meditate on. Ask yourself the questions Tim Keller recommends that are listed in today's devotion.

¹Keller, T. (2014). *Prayer: experiencing awe and intimacy with God*. New York, Dutton, Penguin Group USA.

²Tripp, P.D. "In Need of Help", accessed November 8, 2024, <https://www.paultripp.com/articles/posts/in-need-of-help>.

Day 2 | I am refreshed by dying to self

BY LAUREN WEIR

LIVING WATER | 2 CORINTHIANS 4:10-11

...always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

DRINK DEEPLY

You're dry because you refuse to die. The whispered words pierced into the dark room where I stood bitterly bouncing my little one. I didn't believe life could be found right here in this lonely room. I was sure it was out there, out where the rest of the grown-ups were enjoying the light of day, the ease of conversation, the choice of doing exactly what they wanted to do on our family vacation. With every extra bounce, I spiritually folded my arms, poked out my lip, and whimpered like a victim.

As I whined to the Lord, his rebuke was a sharp scalpel to my self-focus. I whimpered with pain and relief as he brought his Word to soften my heart and bend it to his will and way. Rather than carrying my agenda, my will, my vision of where life is found, I am to be "always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor. 4:10-11).

My refusal to die to myself inhibited the pathway to life. My desire to escape for ease rather than to serve for good came to light, and along with it, the futility of living for self. My attempts to preserve my life through control and bitterness actually left me lifeless.

That Christian call to die to self appeals to no one's flesh, and too often, we view this call as a victim rather than as a martyr. A victim suffers and dies at the merciless use of power. A martyr offers herself for the cause, willing to suffer for what she believes. A martyr leaves behind claims to her own life and gives up her life to bear witness to a greater hope.

How worthy is the cause for which we surrender our lives again and again! The creator God, who formed us and breathed life into our beings, made us for relationship with himself. While our sin causes separation in that relationship, he left the ceaseless praise of heaven to be spat upon and killed to rescue his death-bent creatures. He rose from that grave, securing hope for all who believe in him for the forgiveness of sins, forever sealing togetherness with himself. So we are called to live differently, dying readily, declaring, "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died

for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor. 5:14–15).

Jesus Christ defeated death by entering it himself, swinging wide the door to life on the other side. In his wisdom, he patterned the Christian life to follow suit. Access to more of the life of Christ comes by way of the cross, through dying to self-importance, self-pity, self-preservation, self-centered everything. This self-focus keeps us from the wellspring of resurrection. We can lay down the losses of this world because we carry the death of Christ. His sacrifice weighs on us, offering us the power to follow his humility. His fellowship in suffering comforts us in even the smallest and simplest kinds of suffering.

Dying to self is painful, yet it isn’t lonely. The call to deny self and pick up our cross is bookended with Christ’s invitation to his disciples: “Follow me” (Mark 8:34). Jesus knows our little deaths will never achieve a resurrection in and of themselves. We must be crucified with Christ for life to come out of this grave.

I received his rebuke through his Word and cried out for the fellowship I thirsted for. I submitted my will to the place where God had planted my feet and accepted how the limitation of that place squeezed out my selfish desires. I chose to sacrifice my desires, to die with Christ rather than defend my own fleeting cause, and as I did, his grace proved sufficient, and my hope strengthened—this death was not in vain.

As we bear witness to this profound hope by laying down our lives, God rewards us with more of himself, the source of life. He uses what once separated us from him—death—to be the place we receive living water and nourishing life.

WATER YOUR SOUL

Where are you convinced life is found? What evidence of life do you see there?

Make a plan to fast from the place you wrote above. Depending on what it is, you could fast once a week, on the weekends, in the evenings, etc. In the place of fasting, choose to feast on God’s life—through memorization of or meditation on his Word.

Day 3 | I am refreshed by eternal hope

BY TAYLOR CAGE

LIVING WATER | 2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-18

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

DRINK DEEPLY

When the flowers finally arrived, I cried. “They’re the wrong color!” I found myself repeating as my mom attempted to keep my mascara from running. It was my wedding day, and for a brief moment, I felt as though the day had been ruined. Thankfully, the feeling didn’t last long as my mom and maid of honor quickly snapped me out of my panic by reminding me of the big picture. I’d been praying for this day for far too long to allow flowers to steal my joy. The beautiful, long-awaited day couldn’t be ruined by something so small. Looking back now, it’s laughable because I see it so clearly. The flowers only lasted a few days, but our marriage has endured much longer. *One was temporary, but the other was forever.*

When you’re feeling overwhelmed and emptied by all the worries crowding your heart and all the tasks filling up your to-do list, ask yourself this question: Are the things I’m spending all my mental energy on going to last?

Unfortunately, most of us spend the majority of our days thinking about the things that are seen, the temporary. Whether it’s the flower delivery gone wrong, an overwhelming to-do list of errands and chores, a demanding job, or what to wear before heading out the door each day, our minds get nearsighted, focusing only on what’s right in front of us and missing the big picture. Sadly, this spiritual nearsightedness usually leaves our souls feeling tired and unsatisfied. It leaves us thirsty for something more and in need of refreshment that can only come from the things that are unseen—our eternal hope.

When we focus on that which is seen but temporary, we are dried up by the ceaseless striving for something more. When we fix our eyes on the unseen, we are refreshed by the eternal hope found in Jesus Christ alone.

Maybe your suffering today is a minor inconvenience, or maybe it’s a loss so deep you can’t even speak the words, but in light of eternity, all such pain is temporary.

When suffering comes—as it always does—it’s this same unseen, eternal hope that renews our strength. By focusing on the eternal, we see past our temporary current afflictions, whether large or small, to remember the hope that awaits us in heaven. Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we have eternal hope that our earthly suffering will never have the last word. Even while some hurts may never be healed here on earth, there is no brokenness that eternity in God’s presence can’t restore.

Scripture refers to our afflictions as “light” and “momentary” because it views our circumstances with eternal perspective. While the burdens of your heart may seem heavy and everlasting today, the weight of your pain will soon pale in comparison to the glory of eternity. That’s the good news that can refresh, renew, and restore even the driest of hearts.

So if you find yourself worn out, weary, overwhelmed, or worried, take a moment to look up today and seek the things that are above rather than the things of this world (Col. 3:1). Philippians 4:8 describes the things we should fill our minds with this way: “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” By choosing to dwell on these things, we can water our parched souls with the hope of Christ.

While it may not be easy to focus on what is unseen rather than the circumstances we’re currently facing, the Lord has graciously provided us with his Word and his church to point us toward the refreshing truth when our eyes wander. Through spending time in Scripture and being encouraged by our fellow citizens of heaven, we are reminded of our eternal home and refreshed by our eternal hope. So don’t lose heart, sister. Everything that feels heavy today will one day feel light.

WATER YOUR SOUL

Consider the things that fill your mind daily. Do you spend most of your time thinking about things that are seen or unseen?

What practical steps can you take to fix your eyes on the things above rather than on the things of this world?

Day 4 | I am refreshed by fellowship

BY GRETCHEN SAFFLES

LIVING WATER | ROMANS 15:32

So that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.

DRINK DEEPLY

We meet under towering oak trees, blankets sprawled across the grass, babies babbling, and toddlers playing in the sandbox nearby. I'm makeup-free with a hat on to hide my unkempt hair, and there's a good chance I ran out of time to brush my teeth as I scrambled to make it in time. But I'm here.

Here in the middle of my neighborhood with fellow sisters in Christ, showing up just as we are, to seek Jesus together. *Here* in the middle of my week, breaking the steady flow of busyness to be still alongside friends who also stopped to study the Word. *Here* in the middle of my story—the in-process, in-between, uncomfortable, and sanctifying pages that are being scribbled each moment.

There's no denying it. I am refreshed in Christ by fellowship with other believers—even when my prideful soul balks at showing up, when my schedule tries to convince me I'm too busy, when my shame chides me and tells me to hide my faults from others. My stubborn pride makes me try to live independently, as if I don't need the help or encouragement of others. I have excuses piled high as to why I don't have time for fellowship, but my experience has proven time and time again that joy comes not from doing life alone but from depending on God as I am refreshed by fellow believers. I've learned the hard way that we aren't made to journey the twists and turns of life on our own. We are made for gospel-centered fellowship.

My relentless pursuit of independence started when my family made a cross-country move when I was in third grade. The upending of our roots to a new state, new home, and new school exacerbated the loneliness I felt during those formative years. I eventually found my footing after several school changes, but it wasn't until my family became invested in a local church that my roots began to deepen. At the end of every Sunday morning service, our pastor encouraged us to stretch across the aisles and hold hands with our neighbors as we sang a final worship song as a congregation, a melodic sending out of the body of Christ. Weathered palms grasped youthful hands in agreement that we are better together.

More moves were to come in my life, transitions that would transplant my roots once more, luring me back into the comfortable safety of independence. But this shelter is an illusion, a

false protection—it only shields my soul from joy, encouragement, and refreshment. Which brings me back to the picnic blanket I find myself sitting on with my baby cooing and kicking on my lap, my Bible laid open as I fellowship with friends. It was only a few months ago that I stepped out of my false shelter of independence and texted a few friends in my neighborhood, *Will you study the Bible with me?* When their eager replies started pouring in, my roots deepened a little bit more.

The apostle Paul knew the pangs of isolation and the joys of fellowship. After his miraculous conversion to Christianity, Paul became a missionary, traveling from place to place to share the gospel. As he wrote to the churches he ministered to, he always made a point to greet, thank, and bless fellow Christ followers.

In Romans 15, Paul urges believers to “welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (v. 7). A nomad of sorts, Paul knew the importance of Christian fellowship. As he poured out his life and faced persecution while traveling and preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, he refreshed his soul in the Lord by enjoying the company of the local church (vv. 20, 32). The Greek word for *refreshed* in Romans 15:32 signifies rest received not in solitude but in the company of others. We gather strength and regain stamina to keep living on mission by resting, or *refreshing*, with believers.

The simple act of meeting together, whether seated on a patch of shaded grass, in a church pew, on your friend’s couch, or in a local coffee shop, is, by God’s design, a means of refreshing our souls. As we listen to each other’s stories, weeping tears of grief when sorrow befalls our friends and rejoicing in laughter with hugs of gratitude when prayers are answered, we experience the grace and mercy of Jesus—his hands and feet made evident in the body of Christ. Our gathering together becomes a form of linking arms through lives shared because we know that in Christ, we truly are better together.

WATER YOUR SOUL

Who in your life refreshes your soul when you spend time with them? What qualities about this person or the time you spend together refresh you?

Make it a priority to fellowship with other believers through gathering with your local church for worship. Take your fellowship a step further by inviting friends to study the Bible with you or asking an older woman to meet with you so you can hear her story and encourage one another. Write down how you will pursue fellowship with believers this month.

Day 5 | I am refreshed by remembering God's faithfulness

BY SARAH VALENTOUR

LIVING WATER | PSALM 77:11-12

I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.

DRINK DEEPLY

When I was younger, I thought I had the superpower of remembrance. I learned a fun fact, and I retained it. I was given a task for a later date and time, and I would complete it. I decided that I never needed to write anything down. Claiming this superpower as my own, I resolved to be responsible for everything that I ever learned or was told. I don't know if it was age or if my powers just faded, but over time, I became forgetful. Little by little, things fell by the wayside. We are a forgetful people. The invention of planners, organizers, and calendars is a testament to that. We crave new ways to organize our hectic lives because our brains simply can't hold it all.

Life often gets away from us. Our schedules fill up quickly and our brains fill up even quicker. We scramble so much to remember that vet appointment, project, or phone call that we forget to remember the Lord. Life is busy; the Lord can wait.

But our spiritual lives crave remembrance just as much as our daily lives—crave and require it. Throughout Scripture, we are called by the Lord to acts of remembrance. During the exile, God commanded the Israelites to remember that he is their God, the One who rescued them from slavery in Egypt and provided for them endlessly in the wilderness (Deut. 6:12). We are to memorize Scriptures, bringing them to mind to fuel our walk, just as Jesus did (Matt. 4:1-11). Christ lifted the cup and the bread and commanded his disciples to do so “in remembrance of [him]” (Luke 22:19).

Remembrance is a living and breathing action intended to fuel our faith. Many of the psalms are examples of leaning on the memory of God's mighty works and faithfulness. In Psalm 77, when the psalmist is in distress and doubting the sweetness of the Lord, he dedicates himself to looking back at what the Lord has done in order to look forward to what he knows the Lord will do.

Much like the author of Psalm 77, God's faithfulness feels distant and foreign to me when I walk through seasons of dryness. My tear-stained pillow is proof that I don't believe God has shown up for me. In the dark corners of my heart, I believe my life is stagnant and lacking. But God is faithful even when we don't see a physical result. He is constant even if he isn't acting in the

present moments of our lives. My doubt is a testament to my lack of faithfulness, not his, so I am thankful that his faithfulness isn't reliant upon my own. When I look at the track record of my walk with God, there are more steps drifting away from him than drifting toward him. But my drifting isn't novel to the Lord. More often than not, I drift and doubt him because I forget who he is. I forget that the one I'm drifting from is the God of creation. He has proven since the dawn of this world that he is forever faithful.

In his loving-kindness, God proves that his faithfulness to his people outweighs our rebellion every time. He chose a people who could never love him as he ought to be loved. He chose a people who would wander, still going above and beyond to show us who he truly is and who we are in him. The mighty acts of God are not flamboyant gestures made by a puffed-up egomaniac. Rather, they are intricate and purposeful displays of power and faithfulness to remind the Israelites and the world that Yahweh is God Almighty, the one and only God of the universe. His actions tell the world who he is and who we are in relationship to him. He chose us. He set us apart. He claimed us and repeatedly demonstrates for us his faithfulness, love, grace, justice, kindness, and patience.

When the world feels in disarray and the walls of our lives are closing around us, stealing breath from our lungs and joy from our hearts, God's past faithfulness becomes a grounding point. Let us look to the Lord, remembering who he is and who he has always been, and praise him for the mighty works of his hands.

To the God who created the world with his words (Gen. 1); to the God who parted the sea (Ex. 14); to the God who appeared on the mountain (Ex. 19), split the ground apart (Num. 16), stopped the sun in the sky (Josh. 10), trembled the earth (Judges 5), and shut the mouths of lions (Dan. 6).

To the God who healed the sick (Mark 5), accepted the lowly (John 4), raised the dead (John 11), and fulfilled his promises with the death of his one and only Son, Jesus Christ (John 19:28–30).

To the God of the ages, the Ancient of Days, the God of eternity, be all honor and glory and praise forever and ever.

WATER YOUR SOUL

In what areas of your life are you forgetting what the Lord has done for you? What do you need to hand over to him in prayer, knowing that he is always faithful?

Make a list of the faithful acts of God, both in Scripture and in your own life, pausing to praise him for what he has already done. Keep your list in a prominent place so you can look back on it throughout the day.