

Even though there's no formula for knowing all you need to know about God, There are a few things you can do that will help you get to know God more. This journal is all about 4 things you can do ~~today~~ (every day!) that will help you know God.

Here are the 4 ways to know God ...

HEAR

PRAY

TALK

LIVE

Hear:

If you want to get to know someone, what's one of the first things you do? You listen. That person is the only one who can tell you what he is thinking and feeling – what makes him laugh, what makes him angry. The same is true for God. If you want to know God, you have to learn how to listen. You have to get in the habit of hearing from Him.

***And when you listen to God, it helps you learn to trust Him more.**

Pray:

Have you ever had a friend that did ALL the talking?! That's lame. And guess what God thinks so too. He doesn't want a relationship with you where He's the only one talking. He wants you to talk back. He wants to hear from you – your frustrations, your worries, your fears, and your interests. So, if you want to know God, get in the habit of talking to Him.

***Because when you pray, it helps you connect with God.**

Talk:

Who is your closest friend? Do you talk about that person – even when they're not around? Sure, you do. You talk about what they did. You talk about what they said. You talk about what you plan to do with them tomorrow. You probably also like hanging around other people who know your friend and like to talk about your friend with them too. The same is true with God. As you get to know Him more, you will find that you want to talk about Him more. You want to be around other people who talk about Him too.

***And when you talk about Him and listen to others talk about Him, it will help you see God in new ways.**

Live:

Have you ever had someone give you a gift or do something for you that was so unbelievably, stinking amazing that you just had to find a way to thank them? You already know that God has done something amazing for you – He sent His Son to die so you could be forgiven – but as you get to know God more, you will find out new things about how awesome HE is. Don't be surprised if you find yourself suddenly wanting to sing or paint or play an instrument as a way to show God how amazing He is. Or maybe that's not your thing. Maybe you will want to run a mile or hike to the top of a mountain. You might start loving and serving others more.

***Regardless of how you do it, the more you spend time with God, the more you will want to honor God in big and small ways.**

So how do I get to know God?

Knowing God doesn't happen in a moment. It's not like you wake up one morning and BAM, you know God. All about God. Everything there is to know. No more questions. No more doubts. No more what ifs or how comes.

In fact, if you were to talk to some people who believe in God and have loved Him for a long time, they would tell you they're still learning new things about God. They probably still have a few questions. Go ahead – ask them. See what they say.

Knowing God is kind of like knowing anyone else –
You can learn a lot about them and still be surprised by them.

Knowing God isn't like solving a puzzle. It's a ...
Laugh-out-loud, frustrating, catch-you-off-guard, exciting relationship.

So beware: You can read every word in this journal, fill in every blank, follow every suggestion, and still NOT KNOW all there is to know about God.

But that's OK. This journal isn't about knowing all you need to know. It's about helping you start an adventure. It's an adventure to ...

- *Learn new things.
- *Unlearn what you thought you knew.
- *Connect with a God who already loves you more than you will ever understand.

But before you go any further – or turn another page – there is one thing you absolutely must know about God.

If you want to know God, you start with Jesus.

You may have guessed that was where you need to begin. But really, Jesus is the place to start. Why? Well, because Jesus is God. But Jesus was also a Man. He was born. He had a mother. He had birthdays. We don't know how He celebrated them, but He had them. He ate, slept, went to the bathroom. He was God, living on earth like you and me. So what He said, those are God's words. And what He did, that should give us a pretty good idea of what God is like.

So, if you really want to get to know God, you gotta get to know Jesus.

How do I get to know Jesus then?

That's the next logical question, right? Jesus promised to be with us all of the time, but we can't see Him like we see our friends. Jesus isn't exactly sending a text or uploading pictures to Instagram. So, how are we supposed to get to know Him?

If you want to know Jesus, read His Story.

In case you missed that, Jesus' story is the Bible. Maybe you have a Bible that someone gave you a long time ago, or maybe you have a fancy app on your

phone that lets you do a “search” so you can find a funny verse about donkeys. Other than looking up a verse or answering a question at church, what do you really know about the Bible?

You may not know this, but the Bible is not a book. Sure, it looks like a book. You can flip through it like a book. But it's really not just one book.

It's 66 books ... Written by over 40 authors ... Over 1,600 years. And it all comes together to tell ONE STORY.

It's not just any story. It's a story about:

A really BIG God who loved sinful people SO MUCH he became a human – Jesus. Jesus Lived, Died, And rose again ... So WE could be Forgiven, Redeemed, And live with Him forever.

This is the story that helps us get to know Jesus.

This is the story that helps us understand everything we know about God.

Here are a few things we know about God because of His story:

- *We know God is good because God created a beautiful Paradise.
- *We know bad things will happen because when people broke God's rule, the world was broken.
- *We know that God won't abandon us because we see how God pursued disobedient and sinful people over thousands of years.
- *We know we can trust God to keep His promises because He already kept the greatest promise by sending His Son, Jesus.
- *We know we can be forgiven because Jesus died for us and already took on all the punishment of our sin.
- *We know that one day we can live with God in heaven because Jesus defeated death once and for all.
- *We know that until we see God face-to-face, we are called to live a life that is characterized by love because that's what Jesus taught.

So, what's the BIG idea?

We want to make sure you are following along so far. You want to know God? Great!

Start by getting to know Jesus. And the best way to know Jesus is to read His Story – The Bible. Specifically, the part where He shows up on the scene.

In other words, start reading in the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John). There you can read all about what Jesus did and what He said.

But even before you read the Gospels, you might be interested to know there is one thing Jesus did that is more important than anything else. You can probably guess what it is. More than likely, it's the reason you have this journal.

You know: Jesus died for the sins of the world, and after 3 days He was raised from the dead.

That's the most important thing.

But did you also know there is one thing Jesus said that is more important than anything else He said? It's true. Of all the things Jesus said, there is one thing that's the key to understanding everything you will ever know about God. It's actually like the decoder to understanding all the rest.

Jesus said this one thing, on a day when a group of religious leaders – men who had spent their entire lives studying God – came up to Him. One of them asked Him this question:

“Which Is the most important commandment in the law?”

Check out what Jesus said:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and the Prophets hang on these 2 commandments.”
(Matthew 22:37-40)

That's it.
The most important commandment.
The BIGGEST idea.

Everything else that the Bible teaches about how you should live comes back to this. It's pretty simple. The most important thing you could ever do is to LOVE GOD.

And if you aren't sure how to love God, maybe the best test is to start by loving the people God loves. God loves you. God loves others.

You can know for sure that God loves others because He created you and He cared enough to show up on this planet to die for you so could be forgiven and be with Him forever.

And you can know for certain that God loves others because, guess what, He created them and died for them too. All of them.

It's like Jesus summed up everything you need to know by saying,
It's about 3 relationships: God. You. Others.

Or if you want to simplify it even more, it's about one idea:

LOVE. Love God.
Love yourself the way He loves you.
Love others the way He loves them.

That's pretty much the most important thing Jesus said. So on your adventure to know God, it's a good place to start.

WEEK 1: HEAR

If you want to know God, the first thing to do is hear from Him. But how do you hear from Someone who isn't likely to ...

...Walk onto your school campus.
...Sit next to you at the lunch table.
...Send you a text.
...Write you a note in science class.

How can you hear from Someone if you can't even see Him?

Actually, the Bible gives us a pretty good clue. It says:

"No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known." (John 1:18)

God's one and only Son. Jesus. There it is again – This idea that **If you want to know God, you should get to know Jesus.**

Jesus is the best way to know God because He spent some time living on the planet. He's not physically here now, but He was here. And while He was, He spent a lot of time with 12 guys who are sometimes called disciples and sometimes called apostles. Whatever you want to call them, they got to know Jesus pretty well.

They were there when Jesus taught.
They were there when Jesus worked miracles.
They were there when Jesus died...
...and they all saw Him alive again after He rose from the dead.

They were also there for another important event that happened after Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus ascended. That means that one minute He was standing on a hill outside of Jerusalem with His disciples saying goodbye, and the next minute He rose up into the sky and disappeared. Sounds pretty awesome, huh? But it's all there in the Bible. You can read more about it for yourself in Acts 1.

So, why does it matter that these 12 guys witnessed so much of Jesus' life and teachings? And what does that have to do with **Hearing from God?**

Right before Jesus ascended, He gave them the most important mission. He said: "GO." He wanted them to go tell people what they had seen and heard.

"You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

And guess what? They did.
They went.
They told.
Some of them even wrote about it.

Two of Jesus' disciples did something besides just talking about Jesus. They wrote down stories from the time they spent with Jesus. Remember, these guys knew Jesus. He was

their Friend. When they wrote about Jesus, they were writing about Someone they had traveled with, eaten with, and hung out with. They had seen Him in action.

They wrote about how He was born. They wrote about how His ministry got started. They wrote about what He did and what He said. You might recognize their names: Matthew and John.

Then, there were two other guys you might be interested to know. Their names were John Mark and Luke (John Mark is one guy – just 2 first names. We will call him Mark for short). Luke and Mark weren't in the group of 12 guys who hung out with Jesus, but they knew some of those guys. Mark was friends with Peter, and Luke interviewed just about everybody who encountered Jesus. And these two guys also wrote about Jesus based on what eye-witnesses told them.

Today, you can still read the words of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They are the first four books of the New Testament. We call them the Gospels, and each one gives us a unique look at the life of Jesus.

If you want to know God, read His Story. Think about who He is and what He says. **Hearing from God in this way will help you trust Him more.** So here's one thing to think about as you get started this week:

If you want to know God, remember His words.

Day 1:

FREEZE! Look around you. Where are you? Are you somewhere you can smell the fresh air, hear the wind in the trees, and feel the grass prickle your feet? No?! Well, grab your Bible, a pen and this journal, and find a quiet place to read today's devotion.

^ Now that you're settled. Let me ask you a couple questions. Who is your favorite music group? Who is your favorite author?

How did you decide on these favorites? Well, by listening to the music and reading the stories they made right?! Take a look outside. You are *surrounded* by what God has made. And just like you learn more about your favorite music group by listening to their songs they made, you can learn more about God by listening to what He has made.

But before you take a stethoscope to the nearest tree, let's talk about what it really means to listen to God's creation. Psalm 19:1 says:

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands."

In other words, when you look at the great big sky that God made with its bright blues, deep purples, and soft pinks, when you see bright rays of sun shooting through stark white clouds, it's almost as if the whole sky has come together to show you how massive, creative, beautiful and powerful God is.

And it's not just the sky! The humungous oak tree speaks of God's strength; the shade found beneath its branches tells of His shelter. The warm sun radiates His love to all corners of the earth while the cool moon shines His light in the darkness.

When you listen to what God has made, it helps you **trust** Him more. Everything God has made tells us something about who God is. So if you want to know God, start by **listening to what God has made**.

^ Look around you. Find 5 things that God has made. List those things here:

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 2. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 4. _____ |
| 5. _____ | |

^ What do you think some of those things might show you about God?

Day 2:

^Who is the bestest friend you've ever had? _____

^Write the story of how you met your best friend and what made you click ...

Whether your best friend is someone you met at school or your pet hamster, it's probably safe to say you clicked because you have something in common. Maybe you both love sports. Maybe you share a fear of spiders. Maybe you also enjoy frantically running on a giant wheel. Bottom line is you're best friends because you had conversations, spent time together, and got to know each other.

So how can you be friends with God when you can't see or hear Him? How can you get to know Someone who can't play soccer or squeal at spiders?

That's where Jesus comes in. Jesus IS God. He can play soccer. He can squeal at spiders. And most importantly, when Jesus was on earth, He spoke God's words, telling us what God is all about. In Matthew 7:24 and 26, Jesus says:

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock ... But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand."

If you want to get to know God, **listen to what Jesus said**. Put His words into practice, and just like a house built on rock will still be standing after a bad storm, you can stand strong no matter what is thrown your way. Jesus said some pretty amazing things – things that tell us how we should live. Find a big rock (or a few smaller ones) outside and rinse them off. Once they're dry, find a permanent marker and carefully write one of these Scriptures on each rock:

^Mark 10:43-45 ^Luke 12:22 ^Mark 12:30-31 ^Matthew 5:16 ^Matthew 6:19-21

Look up these 5 passages of Scripture in your Bible. These are all words Jesus actually spoke! Hint: If you have a Bible App or can find a Bible online, try reading them each in different versions. You might even ask your mom, or dad, or someone you trust to help you find a good translation to start with.

^What do these words straight from God's mouth mean to you? How could they help you avoid trouble?

^How could they help you become more like Jesus? What do they tell you about who God is?

^How do they help you trust God more? _____

Day 3:

Imagine this: You're flying in a small 2-person jet – just you and the pilot – when the pilot suddenly passes out. You've never flown a plane before, but somehow, you manage to grab the right gears and push the right buttons to land the plane. Unfortunately, the pilot doesn't survive the crash, and you find yourself alone on a deserted island with no contact with the rest of the world.

Okay, Okay, I just described the first chapter of the popular novel, Hatchet. You might not have read it yet, but let's just say you lived through the same experience. What 3 items would you have with you in order to be equipped to survive in this deserted island?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Now, hopefully you won't find yourself in that situation anytime soon, but I bet you've been faced with a scenario you didn't feel equipped to handle. Your friend says something mean about you. Your parents are fighting. You are moving. 2nd Timothy 3: 16:17 says:

“All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Basically, no matter the situation, Scripture – the Bible – can help. Every single word is meant to help you – someone who loves God and follows Jesus – be equipped for whatever life throws your way! That's why it's important to **Listen to God's Word**.

So what's the first step to listening to God's Word?

Get it.

No, really. GO out and get a Bible. And if you already have a Bible, make sure it's a version you can read and understand. Remember: you can ask someone to help you find a good version that will be easy for you to understand.

Start listening to God's Word so the next time you find yourself in a sticky situation, you're equipped with the Scripture to help you **trust** God.

Day 4:

Where is the darkest place in your house? A closet? A bathroom? Grab a flashlight and find your way to that room now ... You there?

Great! Now turn the lights off and the flashlight on for the rest of today's devotion. In July 2012, a massive power outage affected northern India leaving over 620 million people without electricity! We aren't talking about a flicker that makes you reset your clocks. We're talking 620 million people – one out of every 10 people in the world – with no light, no public transportation, no microwaves, fridges or stoves. And the blackout lasted for 3 days in some areas! That's a lot of people wandering around in the dark, unable to see where they're going! Whether you've seen a power outage or not, you can probably understand the feeling of not knowing where you're going. But Psalm 119:105 says:

“Your word is a lamp to my feet a light for my path.”

Now, that's not to say if more people carried Bibles in northern India that summer, 600 million stubbed toes and bruised shins would have been prevented. God's Word is a different kind of light entirely.

We're all on a path. The choices we make, the people we surround ourselves with, and how we react to life's obstacles all determine where that path leads. But if we **listen to God's Word**, we can see where our path will take us – as if we were holding a flashlight. The Bible can tell us if our choices are going to take us down an easy path or a difficult one. And when we find ourselves in the dark on a path we never meant to go down, God's word can lead us back to a better one if we listen and **trust** what it says.

So now that you have a Bible – one you can read and understand – start listening to what God's Word has to say. Think about your own path:

^Who are the people you hang out with each day?

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

^Are those people making wise choices? How do you know?

^What are some of the choices that you have to make every day that could affect what your life looks like in the future? (who you sit with at lunch, what you say about your teacher ...etc)

If you have an index in the back of your Bible or a Bible App, use it to look up certain topics and hear what God says about the things you're facing today.

Day 5:

Cross your arms ... Did you cross them right over left or left over right?

Interlace your fingers? ... Is your right thumb on top of your left or the other way?

Some habits – like crossing your arms – come so naturally that you don't even think about them. Others, like brushing your teeth or washing your hands, don't come so easily. And then there are the ones like picking your nose or biting your toenails that shouldn't come so easily...

But today isn't about *breaking* habits. It's about *making* habits.

In the Old Testament, the first psalm in the book of Psalms starts out with:

"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked ... But his delight is in the law of the Lord, on his law he meditates day and night." – Psalm 1:1-2

What do you think about all day and night? If you answered "God's Word," go ahead and skip to week 2! If you answered "video games," "pizza," "softball," "that new outfit you saw at the mall," or anything else, keep reading!

The author of this psalm knew something important: when you make it a habit to **listen to God's Word every day**, you start thinking about it all the time. And when you think about God's Word all the time, not only will you get excited about what His Word says, but you'll actually find it easier to **trust** God and live the way He tells you.

It will become second nature, like crossing your arms.

So how do you **make it a habit** to listen to God's Word every day?

^**Define it.** One verse a day. One chapter a day. One book of the Bible at a time. What do you want your habit to be?

^**Connect it.** Connect your new habit to an old one. What are some of your daily habits? (Read a little before you get out of bed in the morning or on the way to school.)

^**Protect it.** Protect your time reading God's Word with a plan B. What things are most likely to keep you from reading God's Word every day? When will you read God's Word if those things get in the way?

Day 5: Cont ...

^**Stick with it.** Making a habit takes time. Use this 30-day calendar to keep track. If you read your Bible that day, fill the box with a sticker, check mark or doodle. If you forgot, leave it blank.

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	

Day 6:

Fill in the following ...

Twinkle, Twinkle Little _____ How I wonder _____.

Row, Row, Row Your _____ Gently _____.

It's probably safe to say you were able to fill in those blanks. Not only that, you most likely could have written the next 4 or 5 lines of each verse from memory. Memorizing something is easier than you think. You probably never meant to memorize those verses above, but somehow you did. And it has come in very handy hasn't it? You've been hired to perform lullabies in the local hospital and are always there to satisfy your friends' sudden need to sing a song in the round. Wait, no? These verses haven't been that helpful? Well, there are more useful things to memorize.

Like God's Word. In Psalm 119:10-11, the psalm's author writes:

"I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."

When the psalmist says he has hidden God's Word in his heart, he is saying he has memorized portions of the Bible that helps him trust God so that when he finds himself in a bad situation, he will have the words of God with him and will know what to do. That's handy!

So, you have a Bible. You're making it a habit to read the Bible every day. Now it's time to **listen to God's Word** by memorizing it.

"Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" won't be very helpful when you have to sit alone at lunch, but Jesus' words in Matthew 28:20 may be comforting.

"Row, Row, Row your boat" won't do you much good when your friends are all making fun of the new kid, but if you have memorized Proverbs 13:20, you'll know what God's Word has to say about it.

Get to know God better by listening to His Word everyday. But don't just listen to it.

Memorize it.

Here's how:

1. Use the index of your Bible or search feature in your Bible App to find verses that apply to situations you may face.
2. Read each verse out loud four times.
3. Write them down on index cards.
4. Place them somewhere you will look each day and say them to yourself multiple times a day.

Day 7:

Write down a good idea and a bad idea for the situations below:

^Your friend is taking the same math test as you but at a different time. He asks you to copy the questions from the test and give them to him.

Good Idea: _____

Bad Idea: _____

^Your parents tell you to clean your room before you can go to your friends house.

Good Idea: _____

Bad Idea: _____

^You see a group of kids picking on someone in the hallway.

Good Idea: _____

Bad Idea: _____

We all know right from wrong. It's almost as if there is a small voice in our heads telling us the difference between the good ideas and the bad ideas. God's Word tells us this is His Spirit speaking to us. 2 Corinthians 1:22 says:

“He put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.”

A great way to get to know God is to listen to God's Spirit. He is in your heart, helping you make the wise choice and warning you against the bad ideas. And the more you listen to God's Spirit, the louder He becomes – the easier it is to feel and hear what He's saying, and trust that it's true.

Use the space below to tell about a time you were faced with a decision and remember feeling like you knew the right choice from the wrong choice – when you could feel God's Spirit in your heart telling you what to do. If you can't think of a time, ask someone you know who has loved and followed God a while – maybe a parent, a neighbor, a teacher or a coach.

The first step to getting to know God is listening:

... To what God has made ... To what Jesus said ... To God's Word ... To God's Spirit.

If you want to know God ... Remember His Words.

Here are verses in the Bible to get you started:

Hebrews 11:1 Ephesians 2:10 Proverbs 3:5-6 Psalm 19:14 John 3:16

Week 2: Pray

Have you ever been friends with someone who you never talked to? Didn't think so.

If you want to know someone, you talk to them. You say things and they listen. They say things and you listen. It's how you become friends.

The same is true when it comes to God. If you want to know God, pray to Him. And here's the really great news – because of Jesus, you aren't just praying to some far-off, mysterious, unknown God. You're praying to Someone who really understands.

Here's something you might not know:

Before Jesus came to earth, the Israelites – people who loved God - would connect to God through priests. The priests would regularly offer things like animals to God to cover over the sins of the Israelites. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would walk through a curtain in to a very holy place in the temple and offer a sacrifice to God to cover all the sins of the people.

On the day that Jesus died, actually at the exact moment Jesus died, that curtain – the one that separated the very holy place in the temple from the rest of the world – was torn. The separation between God and people was over. Jesus defeated sin and changed the way we connect with God from then on.

Now, Jesus is like our High Priest. The writer of Hebrews says it this way in Hebrews 4:15-16:

“We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

Isn't that incredible?! **You connect to God through prayer** because of Jesus. And Jesus understands what it's like to ...

^Live on this planet.
^Feel hurt.
^Be tempted.

He understands. Not only because He's God and he knows everything. He understands because He has walked on this planet and experienced life in a human body. But He did not sin. Instead, He defeated sin.

That means you can come to Him. Anytime. Anywhere. Boldly.

And because you know a little something about Jesus, you already know Who you are talking to. So, remember this: If you want to know God, pray to Him. Make it a habit. Still not sure how to start? That's okay. This week, let's spend a little time talking about how you can pray.

Day 2:

Who knows you best? A parent? A brother or sister? A friend? Think about it this way: Who knows ...

^Your favorite dessert? ^The last movie you saw? ^Your most embarrassing moments?

^Is there someone in your life who finishes your sentences before you do? He or she already knows what you're thinking before you say it. Write that person's name into this conversation:

YOU: "Man, I am so pumped about –"
_____ : "Tell me bout it! I wonder if –"

YOU: "I know! I would absolutely – "
_____ : "Freak Out!"

^Now, Find that person and ask them these questions:

1. Exactly how many hairs are growing on my head?
2. What is one secret I haven't told anyone – not even you?
3. What am I thinking right about now?

Okay, don't do that. But if you did, how do you think that conversation would go? Probably not well. There are things no one knows about you. No one except ... God.

That's right. God knows everything from your favorite dessert to the exact number of hairs on your head. He knows every thought, secret, and problem you have all the time. So why do we sometimes pray to Him as if He only pays attention to us between the words "Dear God" and "Amen"? In Matthew 6:7-8, Jesus tells His followers:

"When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

Quick question. Which prayer is God more likely to listen to?

^ "O dearest Heavenly Father, who art residing among the heavens, as of late I have found myself in dire need of assistance and wisdom as it pertains to the relations between myself and my mother."

^ "God, help me not to fight with my mom so much."

Trick question! He hears both prayers. (Of course, one of them might be a little more natural for you.) Either way, God already knows you're fighting with your mom. He knows you need help studying for your test. He knows your friend is sick. So when you pray, remember you aren't **connecting** with a far-off Someone in the sky. You're **connecting** with a Father who is closer to you than your own skin. So don't pray to a God you have to impress or put on a show for – **pray to a God who knows you.**

Day 3:

Imagine you walk into a room and see that your best friend has ...

Spinach in his teeth, gum in his hair or a giant spider on his face!

Would you start the conversation with:

“Lookout! There’s a spider on your face!” OR ... “Hey, I need you to do something for me.”

Hopefully, you’d warn your friend of the coming danger or embarrassment before jumping right into your thing. The same is true if your friend got a great haircut or a cool new jacket. When something is that noticeable, you have to point it out first before jumping into a conversation, right?

When Jesus taught His followers how to pray, He taught them to start by pointing out the most noticeable thing about God. In Matthew 6:9, He says:

“This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.’”

Which is just a fancy way of saying:

“God, first things first: You rock! You are better, cooler, and awesome-r than anyone else in the universe!”

God made everything from the vast galaxies to the tiniest ant. He walked around on earth healing the blind, raising the dead, and forever changing the way the world thought of Him. He paid the price for every sin ever committed – past, present, and future.

To start a conversation with Him *without* acknowledging all that He has done would be like having a conversation with your friend and never mentioning the fact that he has a large animal about to attack him.

God is great. Better than all others. Above anything on earth. Hallowed.

So when you **connect** to God through prayer, start by recognizing Him for who He is. **Pray with gratitude.** Start by thanking Him for all He has done – for being such a big and powerful God.

^There are countless reasons you have to be grateful to God. Take a minute to list the top 5 things you have seen God do in your life or in the lives of others that deserve gratitude.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Day 4:

Have you ever been so mad, frustrated, angry, or irritated that you just wanted to scream? Maybe something happened that seemed so unfair and flat-out wrong that you just couldn't handle it. Maybe whatever happened was actually very fair, but still something boiled inside of you ... Maybe you're feeling that way right now.

How about this? Put down this journal. Find a place where no one can hear you and let out a huge, long, lung-bursting scream.

Feel better?

We all have things we need to talk about. And sometimes letting out a good healthy scream into a pillow or away from others can help. But you know what else can help? Talking to God! That's right – praying isn't just about thanking God and asking for things. Just like a best friend, God is there to listen to your problems, too. The thing is sometimes we think we have to come off as perfect, put together, well-mannered Christians when we pray. But nothing could be further from the truth.

God wants you to be honest when you pray. He wants you to be honest about what you feel when it comes to ...

Green Peas ... Your Math Teacher ... Being Grounded ... Your Parents' Divorce

If there was ever a safe place to turn when nothing is going your way, it's to God. But god isn't just a pillow to scream in. He wants you to **pray with honesty**. He wants you to know that He is listening to you. And He wants you to know that He has a plan for you, and He can make good things come out of some of the worst situations. In Matthew 6:10, Jesus continues His example of how to pray by saying:

“Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

In other words, when you **pray with honesty**, you're handing your problems over to God. And by talking through your hatred of green peas with Him, you may just begin to understand His plan –His will- to feed your body the good food it needs to be healthy. Sometimes – probably most of the time – you won't understand God's plan right away, but when you **connect** with Him and ask that His “will be done” instead of your own plan. Your attitude can change. God has everything under control and all of a sudden, it won't seem to matter as much as it did before. A conversation with God can change your point of view completely – kind of like a good scream into your pillow does when you're feeling frustrated.

^Start being open and honest with God by completing these sentences and praying for His will to be done in these areas.

1. It makes me angry when: _____
2. I get sad when I think about: _____
3. It's unfair that: _____
4. I don't understand why: _____

Day 5:

Some things just go together. Cookies aren't the same without milk. What's a peanut butter sandwich with no jelly? And Kermit would be lost without his famous, karate-kicking, Miss. Piggy.

Just like each of those things needs the other, we all need God. He's our Heavenly Father. We depend on Him for everything from food to shelter to friendship. When Jesus talked to His followers about how they should pray, His prayer began by telling God how incredible He is. Next, He asked for God's plan to happen. Then, in Matthew 6:11, He asks God to:

"Give us today our daily bread." ... He asks God to give us the food we need.

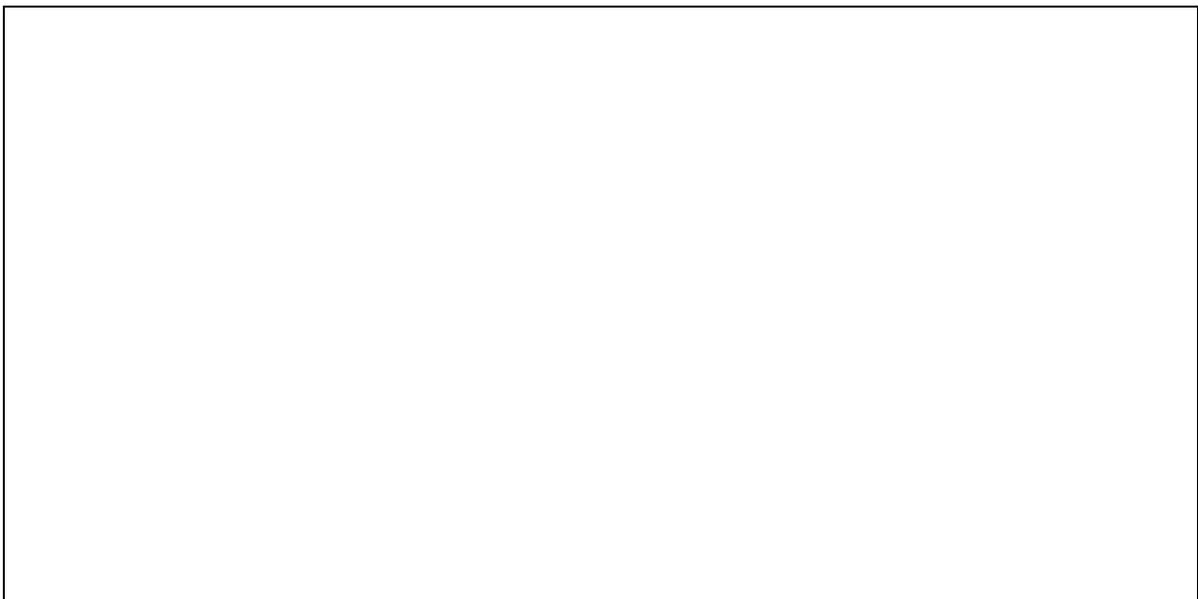
But what Jesus was teaching us to ask for is so much more than cereal and sandwiches. God provides us with all kinds of basic needs each day: love, wisdom, confidence – to name a few.

The problem is that it's easy to forget to ask God for stuff that's so basic. Instead we pray like we're rubbing a magic lamp. We ask God for a good grade on our test, a new video game, or for that certain someone to notice us in art class.

But Jesus made it a point to tell us to **pray for our needs** because something important happens when you ask God for what you need. No, it doesn't suddenly appear before your eyes – it reminds you just how much you depend on Him.

Chances are if you don't ask God to give you breakfast, lunch, and dinner today, you will probably still have something to eat. But you'll miss out on the awesome reminder of how great God is to provide those things for you each and every day.

^So take this time to recognize all the important things God provides for you everyday. Use the space below to draw a few of the basic needs He meets on a daily basis. When you're done, say a prayer for each item you drew – that God will continue to provide for you and that He will help you to be more aware of what He gives you.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for drawing basic needs provided by God.

Day 6:

In case you haven't heard it yet from your parents, teachers, and coaches:

Life. Isn't. Fair.

It just isn't. There will always be a bigger piece of cake, someone with a later curfew, a person who is first in line, and a person who is last.

But instead of groaning and rolling your eyes, you should be leaping for joy! Why?

We have all made some pretty bad choices. Maybe you have lied, cheated, gossiped, or gotten *really* angry. The Bible calls those sins. But not one of us has gotten a fair punishment for our bad choices. Sure, you might have gotten grounded, lost tv privileges, or stayed in at recess, but the Bible says that fair would be for you to be separated from God forever. God is perfect so sin separates us from Him. That's fair. But that's not what has happened, is it? That's why the next part of Jesus' prayer in Matthew 6 is so important. Verse 12 says:

"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors"

Forgive us just like we forgive each other.

Just a little while later, Jesus held up His end of the deal. He died on a cross and rose to life so that we would never have to be separated from God because of our sins. Jesus died on the cross 2,000 years ago which means that He forgave all our sins before we even made them – before we were even born!

Talk about unfair for Jesus.

But even though Jesus already forgave us, asking for forgiveness should still be a big part of our conversations with God. When we **connect** with God and **pray for forgiveness**, we're admitting to what we've done wrong. We're telling Him that we have messed up and we need His help, not only to clean up the mess our sins made, but to remind us to give others the same forgiveness He has given us. You might pray something like this:

"Forgive me for the bad choices I have made. Help me to forgive people who have hurt me. And keep me from doing those wrong things again!"

So when you pray, **pray for forgiveness**. Ask for God's help to make better choices tomorrow. Pray that life stays unfair.

^Have you ever made a really bad choice? What happened? Did you ever admit you were wrong? Tell about it here - or just tell it to God since He already knows it anyway:

Day 7:

Each day ... Your heart beats over 100,000 times.
... You take more than 20,000 breaths.
... You blink more than 15,000 times.

But all this is going on in the background while you concentrate on things like beating your best time on Mario Kart.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Paul says praying should be as constant as your heartbeat. It should come as naturally as blinking. He says: "**pray continually.**"

Now, that doesn't mean you're so busy praying you can't stop long enough to answer a question in history class. You don't have to be in a constant conversation with God 24/7, but you should be connected to God 24/7. You should always be aware that He is with you.

Why do you think that is? Is it because God only loves you when you pray? Because He only tunes in when you say the words "Dear God" and immediately shuts you out after "Amen"? NO WAY!

God's love for you never changes. If you pray 13 times a year or 13 times a minute, God loves you the same. God wants you to pray continually so you will feel as comfortable talking to Him as you do talking to your very best friend. But for that to be true prayer needs to be ...

... More than a memorized meal-time song.

... More than a last minute plea to remember the facts for your math test.

... More than a quick "thank-you" after a big win on the field.

It's all of those things combined and then some. Being **connected** to God and **praying continually** means knowing you can turn to God anytime, anywhere, 24/7. When you are ...

^Excited about your birthday party. ^Hurt by something someone said.

^Scared of not being picked for the best team in P.E.

Praying is not something you have to sit down, close your eyes, and fold your hands to do. You can also pray when you're walking from one class to another, when you're doing your homework, or picking your nose.

God is always there to listen. And the more you turn to God, the more you **connect** with God, the more you will know God.

Just like you have to get in habit of reading your Bible each day, you have to get in the habit of praying continually. Start by coming up with cues to pray throughout your day. Cues could be things like before a meal, whenever a clock chimes, or every time a phone buzzes.

If you want to know God ... **Pray to Him.** Pray with **gratitude.**
Pray **honestly.** Pray for **forgiveness.**

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Philippians 4:6

Week 3: Talk

Here are 2 facts about you:

1. You like to talk about what you like.
2. You like to hang out with other people who talk about what you like.

Isn't that true?

Name one thing that you like to talk about: _____

Name one person you like to talk to about that one thing: _____

Not only do you probably have a lot of fun talking about _____ with _____, but when you do you probably both discover more about whatever it is you both like. Peter and John were 2 people who both liked to talk about Jesus.

Maybe that seems strange to you. But these were guys who hung out with Jesus. In fact, they were in Jesus' inner circle. They knew Him well. And because they knew Jesus – they saw what Jesus did and heard what Jesus said - it made them want to talk about Him like crazy! In fact, the book of Acts tells about this one time Peter and John got into trouble for talking about Jesus. They were standing right outside the temple saying:

"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

Pretty cool, right? But some of the religious leaders didn't think so. They still weren't convinced that Jesus was really who He said He was. So, they threw Peter and John in jail for the night. The next day, the religious leaders told Peter and John they could go as long as they promised to stop talking about Jesus. What do you think they said?

Well, they didn't agree of course! Instead they said:

"We cannot help speaking about what we have seen or heard!" (Acts 4:20)

That's pretty amazing! You've probably felt that way before. Like you just can't stop talking about something even if you tried. That's how Peter and John felt. They had heard Jesus teach amazing things. They had seen Jesus work incredible miracles. And most of all, they were there when Jesus was crucified on the cross, and then they saw Him alive 3 days later! Who wouldn't talk about that?

Okay, it might be easier for them to talk about Jesus. They DID have the privilege of walking around with Him for a few years.

But you know something about Jesus, too. You know what He has done in your life and the way that He has used others to help you learn more about Him and His love for you. That's something about Jesus that no one else knows – unless you talk about it.

The same is true for other people. They know what Jesus had done in their lives. So when you talk about Him together, you both get to see something new about who He is. It's like God wants us to learn more about Him by talking with other people about what He's done. So here's the one thing to remember: If you want to know God, talk about Him with your friends.

Day 1:

Before you start reading today, find a ball and glove. Go outside and play catch by yourself. Not very fun, is it?

What would happen if you tried to play football alone? Or started a Ping-Pong match on your own?

Some things just don't work when you are the only one doing them. Knowing and following God is one of those things. If you want to keep getting to know God better, it's important to hang around other people who know God – to talk with other people who believe in Jesus.

“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another.” (Hebrews 10:25)

These words were written to some of the first people who believed in Jesus. Christianity was still a new idea, but meeting and talking with other people who followed and loved Jesus too helped them **see** ...

Jesus was God. God loved them. God wanted them to love everyone.

Now, this doesn't mean we only hang around other believers. It's important to talk with all kinds of people – Jesus certainly did. But it's also important to make sure you take time during your week to **talk with people who believe in Jesus**.

Just think, if you were training for a big Ping-Pong tournament but you couldn't find anyone to play Ping-Pong with, you wouldn't get any better, would you? But if a few of your friends were professional Ping-Pong players, I bet you'd get really good really fast!

The same is true about having a relationship with God. In order to know God better, you have to be around other people who know God.

King Solomon knew this truth. Just listen to these wise words from the book of Proverbs:

“He who walks with the wise grows, but a companion of fools suffers harm”
(Proverbs 13:20)

It just makes sense that you'll care about what your friends care about. When you hang around wise people and **talk with people who believe in Jesus**, you get to know God better.

^Use the space below to make a list of people you know who have a strong faith in God. Who do you look up to? Who is a good example of what it looks like to have a relationship with God? Next to each name, write a few traits that you admire in each of these people. (Maybe they're honest, kind, generous, or compassionate, etc.)

Day 2:

Who knows you best? Find these people and ask them the following questions about yourself:

1. What is one thing I am really good at?
2. What is my best subject in school?
3. What is my favorite book?
4. What is the best thing about my personality?
5. What is one thing I could work harder on?

When you know and care about someone, you're able to talk about what makes that person unique. The people who know you best probably talk about the things they know and love about you. In the same way, it's important to talk with people who know God about the things they know and love about Him. In Matthew 16, Jesus asked His disciples:

“Who do people say that I am?’ His friends shared what they had heard from people who didn't know Jesus very well. But what Jesus really wanted to know was what His friends thought about Him – the people who knew Him best. So, He asked them: ‘What about you? ... Who do you say I am?’”

Without hesitation, Peter said He was the Son of God. Peter and the disciples had been with Jesus, seen His miracles, and heard His teaching. Peter knew without a doubt He was who He said He was: God on earth.

So when you talk to other believers, **talk about who God is.**

Learn from those who know Him best by talking about ...

- How He might feel about what is going on in your life.
- What His plans are for you and the rest of the world.
- How He helps others.

Right now, you may only **see** God as Someone to go to when you really, really, *really* want that new Xbox or when you have looked everywhere for your library book – and if you don't find it soon, your mom is gonna be *mad!* You can definitely turn to God in those times, but He is so much more than that. That's why it's important to talk to other people who know and love God about how they **see** Him.

^Use the space below to write 5 words to describe who you think God is. Then, ask a few of the people from the list you made yesterday to describe who they think God is and write their answers next to yours.

Who I think God is:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Who other people think God is:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Day 3:

It's Saturday afternoon. The sun is high in the sky. There's not a cloud for a hundred miles. You have your red baseball uniform on, and you're standing over home plate holding your lucky bat. The championship game your team has worked so hard to play in is finally here, and the pressure is on. You're surrounded by players wearing the other team's colors: grey and black. The bleachers on the other side of the diamond are full of jeering fans waving black flags. Your eyes swing to the bleachers closest to you expecting to see them full of friends and family waving cheerful red flags. But they are completely empty. Not one single person showed up to cheer your team on to the championship. Not your parents. Not your friends. Not even Ricky's dad who shouts until his face matches the red flag in his hand.

You are all alone.

Sometimes being in a relationship with God can feel this way. You may feel like you are the only one who ... prays in the cafeteria before lunch.

... doesn't talk badly about the school bully.

... shows respect to your teachers.

That's why Hebrews 3:13 tells us: "encourage one another daily."

As Christians, it's important to encourage others believers. But how do you do that?

Talk about what God says.

While Jesus was here on earth, He said some incredible things. And when you talk with each other about those incredible words, it helps everyone **see** who God is and why it's important to keep following Him. When you see someone ...

... being nice to a bully ... taking care of someone in need ... giving away their last cupcake

... sharing about their relationship with God ... forgiving someone who hurt them

... keeping their promise ... getting help to break up a fight

You can encourage them by reminding them that Jesus says ...

... love your enemies (Matthew 5:44)

... whatever you do for others, you do for Him (Matthew 25:40)

... love God with all your heart, mind, and soul (Matthew 22:37)

... love others as much as you love yourself (Matthew 22:39)

... forgive others and God will forgive you (Matthew 6:14)

... those who make peace will be called sons of God (Matthew 5:9)

... do not break the promises you have made (Matthew 5:33)

Just like bleachers full of cheering fans go crazy when you hit a home run, we should be building each other up everyday by **talking about what God says**.

This next week, commit to encouraging one person each day with Jesus' words. Whether it's someone you see doing the right thing or a friend who is down, **talking about what God says** just might be the kind of cheering on they need.

^Read different versions of each verse above, choose the one you understand best and write them on cards. Then give those cards to friends and family as encouragement!

Day 4:

There are some things you just shouldn't say out loud.

"I really need to burp." "I like the way my boogers taste." "Who's SpongeBob?"

Then there are things you can only say to people you know and trust.

"Is there something in my teeth?" "I'm really scared of the dark."
"I feel like I don't have any friends." "Is God really good all the time?"

Everyone has doubts and questions about God's Story. It's a natural part of figuring out who God is. And if you want to really know God, the best thing to do is **talk about your doubts and questions** with people you know and trust. It can feel like everyone in your life expects you to have it all figured out, listen to this verse:

"Be merciful to those who doubt." (Jude 1:22)

A man named Jude wrote this letter to Christians all over the world in the years right after Jesus lived. He was telling the Christians that people would have questions and doubts about the story of God. And when those people asked their questions or had doubts, they were to show them mercy. What's mercy?

Mercy is compassion, kindness, sympathy, understanding.

This is how everyone who knows God should treat your doubts and questions. And this is how you should respond to the doubts and questions other people bring to you. As Christians, it's important to find safe people to talk with about what you think you can't say out loud.

If you keep your doubts and questions to yourself, you will always have something in the back of your mind keeping you from really getting to know God. But when you **talk about your doubts and questions** with other people who know and love God, you start to **see** a little more of who God is.

^This week, find someone who has a great relationship with God, and talk through the doubts and questions you have. What are some doubts and questions about God you have or have heard from others? Write them below:

Day 5:

^What are your 3 favorite memories?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

It's always fun to tell stories like this. Thinking back and sharing great memories can lift anyone's spirits, whether it's remembering when you won the championship, the day you found a \$50 bill in the parking lot, or that time your dad picked you up from school early just because.

The point is talking about cool memories is a great way to connect with other people. It's also a great way to **see** who God is. God has done some pretty incredible things. And when you **talk about what He's done**, it helps us all remember just how amazing God is.

In 1 Chronicles 16, King David sings a song to celebrate bringing something very important to God – the Ark of the Covenant - back to Jerusalem. In his song, David sings:

“Remember the wonders He has done.” (1 Chronicles 16:12)

Things hadn't always been easy for David. But when he felt discouraged, he often wrote songs. In these songs, David remembered the great things God had done for him. He tells us to do the same: to remember and **talk about what He's done**.

When you have doubts ... When you feel all alone ...
When it seems like God doesn't even care ... **talk about what He's done**.

He created the entire universe ... He parted the Red Sea
... He rescued the Israelites from slavery
... He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and calmed the storms
... He raised Jesus from the dead so we could be with Him forever

It's easy to get so focused on what's going on in our lives that we forget all the wonderful things God has done. But when it feels like God can't handle your problems, **talk about what He's done**. We worship an awesome and powerful God.

^Be sure to encourage others this week by talking about the amazing things God has done.

Day 6:

Imagine this: You walk into your friend's room to find he is using his brand new Xbox as a bookend. He has put his iPod to use as a paperweight. And the tablet he got for Christmas is serving as a coaster, soaked in large beads of water. You would think, "What is he doing?? Someone needs to tell him what those things are capable of!"

Our relationships with God can be the same way. Unless we talk with other people who know God and talk about what God is doing in their lives, we might completely miss out on knowing some of the incredible things He is capable of. And just like your friend who thinks a tablet is simply a coaster, you might think God is simply a wish-granter. But when you hear all that God is doing in the lives of the people around you, you'll see that God is so much bigger than you ever imagined! You'll begin to understand more of the radical, life-changing, world-rocking things He has in store for your life!

That's why it's important to hang around other people who know and love God. So you can **talk about what He's doing** in their lives. How do they **see** God? How has their relationship with God changed their lives? Romans 1:12 says that when people talk about what God has been doing in their lives, they can be:

"mutually encouraged by each other's faith."

The early Christians knew that when you share your faith or **talk about what He's doing**, you hear stories from real people who have felt and seen what God can do. Each of those stories allows you to **see** a bigger picture of who God is.

If you take the time to talk about what God is doing in the lives of your friends and family, you may learn that God ... Comforts you when you're scared ... Reminds you to say only kind words ... Gives you the determination you need to finish your tough homework.

When you hear how God is working in the lives of others,
you start to **see** ways God can work in your own life.

^Answer these questions as a reminder of the awesome things God is doing.

1. What is one new thing you have discovered in God's Story lately?

2. What is one thing you feel like God wants you to do or say this week?

3. How has God answered prayers for you lately?

One last thought ... What are you praying for God to do now?

Day 7:

What are the best gifts you have ever received? _____

When you got them, what did you do? _____

Believe it or not, things haven't changed in over 2,000 years. Jesus' disciple, Peter, told the first Christians what to do when they got the best gift anyone could ask for – the hope that comes with being a follower of Jesus.

How is that better than the gifts you listed above, you ask. It's better because you have the hope to make it through anything. You know that the God who made you and loves you is in control, and that He will work everything out in the end.

Peter told those who had just received this hope in their lives that the first thing they should do is keep Jesus first. Then he said to be ready to talk with anyone who asks about Jesus. 1 Peter 3:15 says:

“In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”

Check out those last 3 words: gentleness and respect.

We all know people who don't have the hope and joy that comes with knowing God. But do you think they will be more likely to want to know God if you talk about your faith with “gentleness and respect” or by saying: “You don't go to church?!”

When you have the hope and joy of knowing God, it will show. You will ...
Treat others with respect ... Make wiser choices ... Turn to God in all situations

People will want to **see** God the way you **see** God.
People will ask. Be ready to **talk with anyone who asks**.

^Take a minute to answer these questions with gentleness and respect:

“Why does your family go to church?” _____

“Why do you pray before you eat?” _____

“Why do you read your Bible?” _____

“Why do you believe in God?” _____

“Why are you so nice to people?” _____

Has someone already asked you a question? Write it and what your answer below:

It might help for you to take some time to think about what God has done in your life before you talk to other people about God. What is your story? How has God shown up in your life to show you more about who He is and how much He loves you?

^Write your story – The story of the ways God has shown up in your life below:

When and how did you first believe God's story?

How has God changed your life?

How has God answered prayers for you?

What has God taught you?

And you know what? These questions could be great to ask your friends and family, too! You never know what you might learn about God when you **talk about Him with your friends.**

You will be given a journal containing the final week of this devotional when you arrive at MX. Don't forget to keep yourself, your teammates, and the week in prayer as we prepare to minister to Bethany AG and its surrounding community.