

An Open Door

A Weekly Devotional for LGBT Christians

By David Sisco

Forward

*In dedication to all my LGBT sisters and brothers,
who seek to know themselves more fully through Christ.*

Ever since I can remember, my family had devotions after supper. My sister and I would fidget as my father read the scripture and message aloud. As a kid, devotions served more as a temporary escape from doing the dishes than a means of discovering my faith. Now that I'm older, however, I greatly appreciate my parents instilling in me the importance of reading the Bible as part of my Christian journey. I could never count the innumerable times I've read a scripture passage feeling as if it was written just for me, or felt God's presence while reading a devotional.

Yet something has always been missing. While I have tremendous appreciation for the different devotionals I've read over the years, they often don't speak to my human experience as a gay Christian. Many focus on marriage, kids and family as if these were universal truths. Unfortunately, many are still struggling to achieve the same basic rights that would make this a reality. Furthermore, I've yearned for a devotional that would help me connect to my heritage in a unique way; to honor those who dared to be themselves in this world and have allowed me greater freedom as a result.

I have decided to create my own devotional to meet what I consider to be a growing need in our community. As LGBT Christians we need to bridge the gap between scripture and our faith journeys to more fully connect to the work God continues to do in each of us.

Each devotional highlights an important event in gay history with a scripture reading and message for meditation. Also included is a quote from an LGBT person or supporter for further reflection throughout the week. I have used several different translations of the Bible throughout, both to add variety and to ensure this devotional is not pigeon-holed as pertaining to only one theological school of thought.

Preparing this manuscript has been a journey I never expected to take, but one for which I am eternally grateful. I pray you find this devotional spirit-filled and enriching. May we all continue to find new ways to make God's word a relevant and active part of our lives!

Praise God, from who all blessings flow...

To the Almighty, who has challenged and fed me as I developed this manuscript... to God alone be the glory; Rev. David Lewicki for his guidance and friendship; Sister Carol Perry, S.U. for her incredible knowledge and constant encouragement; Mark Glubke, for believing in this project; Chris Wesolowski for his generosity; Dr. Arthur Caliendo and the Marble Collegiate Church for helping me get in touch with my quiet center; GIFTS at Marble, a community of deep and joyful fellowship; Dr. Ronald Patterson, Dr. Rob Williams, Dr. Florence Pert, Rev. Leal Murphy, Rev. James W. Crawford for your inspiration; to all the couples I know who have shown me same-sex relationships are life-giving, especially: Dwight and Dieter, Elizabeth and Laura, Bob and Matthias, Mark and Mike, Marshall and Will, DeLyn and Sarah; to Danita Geltner and Thomas Gentile, two of the most delightful of God's creations; to Sam, who prayed me through this; to my family, for their unconditional love; to my agent Mitchell, who took a risk on me and this book in your hands; special thanks to Aaron, Angela, Cassondra, Diane, Earl, Elizabeth, John, Johnnie, Jennifer, Ken, Korland, Laura, Lorene, Marc Anthony, Mark, Melissa, Suzanne, Tami, Tom, Wesley and to all my friends who have, on more than one occasion, been Christ to me.

Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one can shut.

- Revelations 3:8

How to use this devotional

There are many ways to approach this devotional as a means of going deeper on your spiritual journey. Here are a couple suggestions.

Creating a sacred space

We live in a hectic world in which the boundaries of our personal and professional lives are often blurred. It is both difficult and necessary to invite God into our lives. You can do this by designating a space for prayer and meditation. This can be a particular place in your bedroom, your favorite chair, a nearby park bench, etc. Whatever locale you choose, be sure to make it a special, indeed, sacred place. During this quiet time you might want to light a candle, burn incense, or play some quiet background music. You can even create a small altar, including specific things that have meaning to you, or are symbols of peace and prosperity (i.e. sea shells, pictures, foreign coins...). The point is to create an experience tailored to you; to construct a sanctuary where you can be completely authentic in your relationship with God.

Being an active participant

This devotional is outlined in weekly segments. You may choose to set aside a half hour each week to reflect on the scripture reading and message. The prayer concluding each devotional is meant to lead you to the threshold to your own prayers of gratitude and concern. This will be a time of nurturing and empowerment when you allow God to meet you where you are.

If this is a new experience for you, do not be worried about how “to be” in the midst of God’s presence. God knows and loves you before, during and after everything. If you find yourself feeling anxious, pick a phrase like “do your will in my life” or a word such as “peace” to repeat over and over in the quiet of your mind. Gradually your own words will come to you, and you will start a dialogue with God.

Those seeking a deeper understanding of the Bible, themselves and their relationship with God are invited to daily meditate on each devotional. Some of the most transforming spiritual insights occur through repetition. In doing this you will more fully allow God’s message to permeate your life. There are additional resources listed at the bottom of each page (including other scripture, books, websites, movies, songs, etc.)

for further reflection. Choose to invest as little or as much time as you would like, depending on the work you feel God is calling you to do.

Consistency is the key

Make a conscious decision about the amount of time you’d like to commit to your spiritual growth. There’s no wrong answer, but be consistent with whatever you decide. Nurturing your spiritual growth is like going to the gym or practicing an instrument: what you put in is what you get out of it.

What to expect

The biggest gift you can give yourself is time apart. In the Gospels we regularly see Jesus retreating to a secluded area to be alone. By setting time aside, you automatically open yourself to the possibility of finding your quiet center. From this place God’s will becomes more accessible.

Expect to discover, reclaim or fortify your relationship with a benevolent God. Expect to reconcile yourself with the Bible. Expect to be challenged, pruned, molded and strengthened by the scriptures; this is the good work. Be daily reminded that you are passionately loved for who you are.

What next?

We become disciples of God by extending the peace we are given to others. We are called to be love in action; to soothe the hurt and hatred of this broken world with our many gifts. This call sometimes comes at great costs to our personal comfort, but it is a journey that can forever change the course of our lives and those around us.

I offer this devotional to you as a means of healing. I offer it to you in honor of those who have been persecuted for being whom God created them to be. I pray it will help you to connect to a deeper part of yourself, and that the light within you is perpetually freed for all to see.

We are all children of God. Let us come into our spiritual inheritance together.

Week One

January 1-7

January 1, 1972 - *Science* magazine publishes a report that suggests male homosexuality may be determined in the womb due to chemical and/or hormonal stress of the pregnant woman.

Read: Psalm 139: 1-14

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

Psalm 139: 13 (NIV)

Science has helped us understand ourselves and the universe in many ways, but is often fallible when delving into the mysteries of creation. Time continues to disprove scientific studies, but God knows every beginning and end. As the scripture tells us, God knew us before we were even a thought and has already recorded our days. It is reassuring to know that we are “fearfully and wonderfully made!”

In this New Year let us celebrate our daily lives with a God who created each of us with stunning complexities and a divine purpose. A God who knows our every thought and desire, at our best and worst, and loves us unconditionally.

Thought for the Week:

“Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am, stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, unitary, looks down, is erect, bends an arm on an impalpable certain rest, looks with its side-curved head curious what will come next...”
- Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*

Prayer

Lord, thank you for the amazing gift of life! There are so many things we can not comprehend, yet our spirit tells us you are the Light and the Way. Help us to be in awe of our own creation this week, embracing our talents and idiosyncrasies.

Week Two

January 8-14

January 13, 1983 - Zandra Rolon and Deborah Johnson are refused seating in a private booth by a posh Los Angeles restaurant. They are told that a city ordinance prohibits such seating, which is not true. They sue and win.

Read: Deuteronomy 16: 18-20

Let true justice prevail, so you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you.
Deuteronomy 16: 20 (NLT)

In Moses' address to the people of Israel, he outlines six precepts for Godly living. The most famous of these includes the Ten Commandments. But when reading further, Moses also underscores the importance of justice as they enter into the Promised Land. Not only was this a necessary part in developing a civil community, but it also served as a means of further separating themselves from their enslavement in Egypt.

As is evident by the above, God often intercedes to bring about justice in our society. We must remember, however, that God calls us to be an active part in this process. This means reaching out to all people whose basic rights are being slighted.

Thought for the Week

“Those of us in the U.S. who cry, ‘Justice! Justice!’ for lesbians and gay men need to take a hard look at what we have or have not done to secure justice... As we begin to make real headway in establishing our rights in the U.S., will we continue to seek justice for others who continue to be oppressed for other reasons?”
- Rev. Elizabeth M. Stedman

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for the examples of your mercy and justice throughout the Bible. Give our appointed judges the power of discernment, helping them make wise decisions regarding legal and civil issues. Also, Lord, call us to be just in our relationships with others, respecting those who do not expect the grace you so freely give.

Week Three

January 15-21

January 15, 1929 - Martin Luther King (1929-1968) was born in Atlanta, Georgia. As an African American civil rights leader he stressed nonviolent methods to achieve equality.

Read: Mathew 26: 47-54

“Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.”
Mathew 26: 52 (NIV)

In this scripture passage Peter (John 18:10) lifts his sword and cuts off the ear of the high priest’s servant. Although he was a recognized leader among the disciples, Peter brashly acted in fear of Jesus’ defeat. This speaks to our most human desire to lash out at those who would hurt us. Jesus, however, rebukes Peter and heals the servant’s ear.

On January 30, 1956 Dr. King’s home was bombed while his wife was inside. After surveying the wreckage and the angry crowd of supporters who wanted to retaliate, Dr. King urged them to use prayers rather than violence to overcome opposition. His example has been the founding principal of organizations like Soulforce, which focuses on healing spiritual violence against the LGBT community through non-violent resistance. Dr. King’s message also reminds us of our call to work against fear and hatred by being examples of God’s love and peace. The following is taken from his 1964 Nobel Peace Prize speech.

Thought for the Week

“Nonviolence is a powerful and just weapon. It is a weapon unique in history as it cuts without wounding and it enobles the person who weilds it. It is a sword that heals. I believe in this method because I think it is the only way to reestablish a broken community. It is the method which seeks to implement the just law by appealing to the conscience of the great decent majority who through blindness, fear, pride, and irrationality have allowed their consciences to sleep ”
- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for the life and ministry of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and for those organizations like Soulforce that continue to work toward equality using non-violent means. Help us to learn what we personally can do to secure peace and equality in this broken world.

Week Four

January 22-28

January 24, 76 - Roman Emperor Hadrian was born in Italica, Baetica. When his notoriously handsome lover Antinous mysteriously drowned in the Nile, Hadrian went into deep despair and spent the rest of his life building cities and minting coins in homage of him. Hadrian also posthumously made Antinous a god, building four temples in his name throughout the region for worship.

Read: 2 Kings 17: 1-15

They worshiped worthless idols and became worthless themselves.

– 2 Kings 17:15 (CEV)

It is our society’s custom to value beauty over truth; gay culture is often obsessed with it. Some gay publications feature a revolving door of scantily clad cover models, lengthy pictorials of the hottest trends and “candid shots” of fashionistas out and about. Does this constant focus on physical perfection define who we are as a community?

In this week’s scripture passage, we see the Israelites worshipping idols, despite God’s many commands through the prophets not to do so. Even after being thrown from their homes by Shalmeneser, the Israelites and their ancestors continue to erect shrines to foreign gods.

What foreign gods are we worshipping today? Are we like Hadrian, erecting temples in homage to false idols, such as beauty? What will it take for us to listen to God’s reminder that we must seek to know each other in spite of the cosmetic backdrop of our culture? When we connect to our inner light and see others as souls on a similar journey, it becomes easier to dismiss vanity and meaningless idolatry.

Thought for the Week

“Vanity is the quicksand of reason.” – George Sands

Prayer

Creator God, we seek your guidance as we try to cleanse ourselves of the idols we frequently worship. Tear down the shrines in our heart and enable us to turn to you as our one true God Almighty.

Week Five
January 29-February 4

February 1, 1902 – American poet, novelist and playwright Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri. Despite great adversity, he followed his dream to become a successful writer.

Read: Acts 2: 1-18

“...Your young men will see visions, your old men dream dreams.”

- Acts 2: 17 (MSG)

Langston Hughes faced several challenges in his youth. When he was a young boy his father divorced his mother and moved to Mexico to avoid racism. Often lonely, he was tossed about, alternately raised by his grandmother and mother. After spending a difficult year in Mexico following his high school graduation, Hughes attended Columbia University, where he was forced to study engineering at the insistence of his father. In spite of these trials, Hughes emerged as one of the great voices of the African American community. The key to his success: he refused to suspend his dreams.

We are far from Pentecost, the fifty days after Passover when the Holy Spirit swept through the town of Jerusalem and allowed believers to dream dreams and see visions. We should be daily reminded, however, of the importance dreams play in our lives. The good news is it's never too late to do this; the above passage is not age-specific. God has dreams to share with us far beyond our wildest expectations!

Below is selection from a poem by Hughes. While reading it, ask yourself: in what part of my life do I need the Holy Spirit to sweep through? Am I harboring dreams or visions I'm afraid to see come true?

Thought for the Week:

“Hold fast to dreams, For if dreams die, Life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly, Hold fast to dreams, For if dreams go, Life is a barren field, Frozen with snow”
- Langston Hughes

Prayer

Holy Advocate, grant me the freedom to connect to the dreams you have put in my heart. Help me to be a good steward of these visions, as I see to live in the midst of your love.

Week Seven
February 12-18

February 14, 1991 - San Francisco becomes the first city to register same-sex domestic partners.

Read: Song of Songs 8: 6-7

...For love is strong as death.

– Song of Songs 8:6 (KJV)

On Valentine's Day in 1991, 275 lesbian and gay couples went to San Francisco's city hall and registered themselves as domestic partners. While it carried little legal weight, many couples used it as an opportunity to make a renewed commitment to each other.

Sometimes the hardest thing to do is accept the love of another. Being in a partnership means allowing someone to witness your brokenness and love you anyway. This is just an earthly taste of the broadness of God's love: a love that cannot be bound by law or public opinion.

Although we are part of a society that is still torn on the subject of same-sex domestic partnerships and marriage, let's be liberated by knowing “Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.” (1 Corinthians 13:7). God honors that love. God *is* that love.

Thought for the Week

“Our most important and valuable and eternal struggle is to give and receive love.”
-Chris Glaser, *Coming Out to God*

Prayer

Almighty God, thank you for allowing us the capacity to share our love with others on this human journey. We are sometimes overwhelmed by the abundance of feeling, and can't comprehend coming into our full inheritance through your grace. Help us to develop a wider circle in which we can allow your perfect love to work through us.