

Learning to Pay Attention: 5-Day Devotional Guide

Day 1: God Is Already Here

Reading: Genesis 28:10-17 — Jacob stops for the night in an unremarkable place, dreams of heaven touching earth, and wakes to discover that God was present all along without his knowing it.

Devotional: We often assume that encountering God requires a special place, a formal setting, or a dramatic moment. Jacob's story dismantles that assumption. He was not worshiping, praying, or seeking anything sacred. He was simply tired and found a place to sleep. Yet God met him there, in the middle of an ordinary night, on ordinary ground. The gap in Jacob's story is not between him and God. It is between God's presence and Jacob's awareness. That same gap exists in most of our lives. God is not waiting for us to arrive at the right location or achieve the right spiritual state. God is already present in the kitchen, the commute, the difficult conversation, and the quiet moment before sleep. The invitation today is simply to slow down long enough to notice.

Reflection: Think back over the past week. Where might God have been present in a moment you dismissed as ordinary? What would it mean to approach tomorrow expecting that God is already there?

Day 2: Awake to the Sacred

Reading: Exodus 3:1-6 — Moses is going about his ordinary work as a shepherd when he notices a bush burning without being consumed. God speaks to him from within it and tells him he is standing on holy ground.

Devotional: Moses had likely walked past thornbushes hundreds of times. On this day, something prompted him to stop and look more closely. The text notes that God spoke to him only after Moses turned aside to see. Attention preceded the encounter. This is not to say that God's presence depends on our noticing it, but it does suggest that our experience of God's presence often depends on whether we are paying attention. Holy ground is not always marked with a sign. Sometimes it looks like a bush, a stone, a kitchen table, or a hospital room. The question is not whether sacred moments surround us. The question is whether we have cultivated the habit of turning aside to see them.

Reflection: Where in your daily routine do you move too quickly to notice what is happening around you? What might it look like to pause today and ask whether God is present in that very place?

Day 3: The God Who Stays

Reading: Psalm 139:1-12 — The psalmist reflects on the reality that there is nowhere a person can go to escape God's presence, whether in the heights, the depths, the darkness, or the light.

Devotional: The psalmist is not describing God as a surveillance system watching for failures. He is describing a God whose presence is inescapable because it is rooted in love. There is no corner of your life where God has not already been. There is no moment of grief, confusion, shame, or exhaustion when you have been truly alone, even when it felt that way. This truth is not meant to make us feel exposed. It is meant to make us feel held. When we practice paying attention to God throughout the day, we are not trying to summon a distant God into our presence. We are learning to recognize a God who has never left. Awareness of that presence does not change God's faithfulness. It changes ours.

Reflection: Is there an area of your life where you have assumed God is absent or disinterested? What would it mean to believe, even tentatively, that God is present there too?

Day 4: Seeing People the Way God Sees Them

Reading: Luke 10:30-37 — Jesus tells the story of a man left injured on the road. Two religious figures pass without stopping. A Samaritan, considered an outsider, stops, sees the man's need, and responds with compassion and practical care.

Devotional: The priest and the Levite were not necessarily cruel. They may simply have been distracted, hurrying toward something that felt more urgent, or too focused on their destination to notice what was beside them on the road. The Samaritan stopped because he saw. Paying attention to God and to people are not separate practices. The God revealed in Jesus is the God who moves toward those who are hurting, overlooked, and forgotten. When we train ourselves to notice God's presence in our ordinary lives, we should also become more attentive to the people around us. Spiritual attentiveness that does not eventually lead to compassion has not yet gone deep enough.

Reflection: Is there a person in your life, perhaps someone familiar, whom you have stopped truly seeing? What might it look like to slow down and pay attention to them today?

Day 5: Gratitude as a Way of Seeing

Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 — Paul instructs believers to rejoice continually, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in all circumstances, describing this as God's will for them in Christ.

Devotional: Paul's instruction to give thanks in all circumstances is not a command to pretend that everything is fine. It invites us to cultivate the kind of attention that can find evidence of grace even in difficult seasons. The Daily Examen, an ancient prayer practice inviting us to look back over each day and ask where God was present, rests on the same conviction. When we review our days with honest, grateful attention, we begin to notice what we routinely overlook: the kindness we almost missed, the beauty we walked past, the conversation that quietly steadied us, the moment of unexpected peace. Gratitude is not a feeling we manufacture. It naturally follows when we begin to notice the grace that was already there.

Reflection: Set aside five minutes this evening to walk back through your day. Ask yourself where you experienced something good, however small. Thank God for one specific thing you might otherwise have overlooked.