



DEVO
FOR THE
REST OF US

**THE NEXT 40 DAYS ON YOUR
JOURNEY OF FAITH**

VINCE ANTONUCCI

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Devo for the Rest of Us: The Next 40 Days on Your Journey of Faith

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INTRODUCTION

She sold the tickets. I tore the tickets in half. It was a match made in movie-theater heaven.

My wife and I met while wearing polyester as coworkers in college. We were in charge of letting people enter the theater. And in that theater we began a journey together. We quickly became friends. (She was probably immediately attracted to me. My animal magnetism does that to the ladies. Or . . . it may have been the constant smell of hot, buttered popcorn.) Later we started to date, and we've now been married for more than twenty years. I love her more now than I ever have. (Though I don't know if she's as attracted to me as she used to be. The only animalistic trait I still have is the shape of a potbellied pig.)

How does that happen? How do you start and grow a relationship? Looking back, I realize there have been two critical factors:

Knowledge: You need to get to know a person to grow the relationship. And the more you know, the deeper the relationship goes.

Habits: At the beginning of a relationship, there's a newness that generates excitement. As the relationship continues, it's easy to get distracted and grow apart. My wife and I have routines that keep us connected. We go out on a date every week. We talk each

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night after work. We text each other to check in once or twice a day. We get out of town for a weekend away once or twice a year.

Thinking about it, I realize that increasing knowledge and repeating habits are the two critical factors in *all* my relationships. It looks a bit different, but these factors are how I've grown my relationships with my kids, friends, and coworkers.

And the same is true with God.

What God is looking to have with us is a relationship, not a religion. Although it may look a bit different, the way you grow a relationship with God is the same way you grow a relationship with anyone else.

Knowledge: You need to get to know God. The more you know God, the deeper the relationship can go.

Habits: At the beginning of a relationship with God, there's a newness that generates excitement. But there are *so many* factors that work to distract people from God and pull them away from him. In the classic devotional book *My Utmost for His Highest*, Oswald Chambers writes, "Routine is God's way of saving us between our times of inspiration."

This book is designed to increase your knowledge of God and help you establish habits that will keep you connected and growing in your love for him for the rest of your life.

If you're new to faith or coming back to God after some time away, this book will be a perfect fit for your spiritual needs. If your faith is more established, this book will be a challenging refresher that will deepen your love for God and your commitment to living the life he has for you.

The book is divided into forty days. Each day there's a short reading, a passage to look up in the Bible, something to pray about,

INTRODUCTION

and an assignment. The assignment might be something for you to think about or to try doing that day. Why divide this book up into forty days? Because we're establishing habits! My hope is that those habits will stay with you for a lifetime.

There are two ways you can use this book:

- You can read it on your own. That will work!
- You can use it in a group. In the back of the book are group-discussion questions. The people in your group can each do five readings a week and then talk through the discussion questions for that section at your weekly get-together.

However you use it, this book can help you as you start or continue on your journey.

As I move forward and stumble through my journey, I know I need hope, so I try to keep the end in mind; I think a lot about heaven. I have questions about heaven.

Will we receive a ticket and have it ripped in half to enter heaven? I don't know. (But if so, I am convinced the guy who does it will be wearing polyester.)

Will it smell like hot, buttered popcorn in heaven? I don't know. (But if so, I will *not* complain.)

One thing I feel sure of is that in heaven, the presence of God will be so real he will be impossible to ignore, and his love will be so tangible we won't be distracted by lesser things.

Until then, we will continue to struggle. Jesus promised that in this world we will have trouble.* It won't be easy. We need all the help we can get. I pray this book will be a big help to you in growing your relationship with God as you journey with him toward heaven.

* See John 16:33.



WEEK ONE

Hungry

*We sense that something is missing. We're
lacking something we know we need.*

But many of us struggle to name that longing.

*What if what we're hungry for is God
and what only God can give us?*

And what if we can have it if we just turn to him?

Day 1

LONGING FOR LOVE

Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again."

JOHN 6:35

"DADDEEEE, I'M HUNGEEEE."

Silence.

"Daddeeee, I'm hungeeee."

My then three-year-old son was entirely cute and a little annoying.* About twenty times a day he would call out from wherever he was in the house.

"Daddeeee, I'm hungeeee."

"Dawson, you're fine," I would respond. "You ate just a little bit ago. We'll be eating soon. You're fine."

Silence.

"No, Daddeeee. I'm weally hungeeee. I'm starving, Daddeeee."

My son was a bit melodramatic. But, on the other hand, maybe he was on to something.

* Am I allowed to say my son was annoying?

WEEK ONE

In fact, what I think he was on to is the human condition. We're hungry. We're all hungry. And I believe what we're hungry for is love. *Perfect* love.

Ted

Ted sat at the production meeting before our service. Before we talk through the elements of our service, we always recognize and cheer for any new volunteer. That day, Ted was doing a "first serve" running the sound board. He was an ex-hippie from San Francisco who used to run sound for the Grateful Dead.

We cheered for Ted. (Normal.)

He blushed. (Normal.)

He gave a little speech. (Not normal.)

"Thank you," he said. "I started coming a few weeks ago because my sister in Texas insisted I try this church. I'm not a church person, and didn't think I'd like it at all, but I did. I just want to be up front with you guys. I don't believe any of the stuff you believe. But I'm hoping maybe your faith rubs off on me."

I asked him why, if he didn't believe, he kept coming back.

"Well, I . . ." Ted paused. "I've never felt as loved as I do here."

Wookin' Pa Nub

Back in the eighties, Eddie Murphy used to do an impression of Buckwheat from the Little Rascals. If you remember the Little Rascals, you know Buckwheat never mastered the ability to pronounce certain words. One Eddie Murphy skit was a commercial for a fake "Buckwheat Sings" album featuring the hit "Wookin' pa nub in all da wong paces. Wookin' pa nub."

That's exactly the problem. People are looking for love, but in all the wrong places.

We long for love. A deeper love than we receive from other people. We long for a love that is truly unconditional and utterly

dependable. A love that draws us in and drives out our fear. A love that is pure enough to fit well in our hearts and big enough to fill the gaping hole we find in them. We yearn for perfect love.

And so we look. As children we look to our parents, later we look for our love need to be met in romantic relationships, and still later in our kids. Some of us try to substitute success or food or money or drugs or fame for love, but no matter how much we get, we still find ourselves longing.

The love we're looking for is too perfect for anything in this world to be able to satisfy us.

It's a love that only God can give us.

And he wants to. The Bible says God wants to lavish it on us* and pour it into our hearts.** And God's love is big enough to meet our love need. In fact, it's bigger than we can even understand.

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.***

I Finally Found What I've Been Looking For

Two weekends ago I preached a sermon challenging people to bet their lives on Jesus. (I'm in Vegas; people here understand gambling metaphors.) “We all bet our lives on something,” I said. “We seek our identity and meaning from something. We pour our lives into something. We're trusting something with our lives and for our eternity. Make Jesus your something. Bet your life on Jesus.”

I led people who wanted to make Jesus their Savior and Lord in

* See 1 John 3:1, NIV.

** See Romans 5:5, NIV.

*** Ephesians 3:17-19, NIV.

a prayer, then told them to sign up for the baptisms that would be happening the following week.

After the service Ted walked up and said, “Where do I sign up? I’m all in.”

It had been about four months since his first visit. Since then he had been reading the Bible every day. He dove into serving. He made some friends. One of our pastors shared the gospel with him over coffee. But mostly, he had felt loved, and he had learned about and experienced the love of God. And that’s what he had been wookin’ pa his entire life.

Last weekend Ted stood in front of a room full of people and shared his story. (He took fourteen minutes!) Ted said his whole life he’d had no interest in God because he had assumed God had no interest in him. But he had always longed for something he could never find. At our church he had found it. He said, “I just can’t believe God loves me. I can’t believe God wants a guy like me. I have something to wake up for every day now. I wake up with a smile. I can’t wait to read my Bible. The reading plan will say to read like James 1. But it’s so good I’ll just keep reading, like all the way to James 12. Well, I don’t know if there really is a James 12.” (There is no James 12. Ted will figure that out soon.)

He said, again, and again, and again, “I just can’t believe God loves me. I can’t believe God would want a guy like me. I finally found what I’ve been looking for.”

Call to Him

We’re hungeeee. And God is what we’re hungry for.

When my son would call, “Daddeeee, I’m hungeeee,” and I knew he really *was* hungry, you know what I would do? I would get him something to eat. Of course I would. How can you say no when your kid calls out to you like that?

You are God’s kid.

When you look up to him with big eyes and say, “Daddy, I’m hungry,” his heart melts.

And he will always respond to that cry.



Now What?

- ▶ Read Jeremiah 29:12-13.
- ▶ What would it look like for you to seek God with all your heart?
- ▶ Prayer is talking to God. Some people make it more complicated, and it intimidates them into not praying at all. But prayer is just talking to God. God invites us to talk to him from our hearts, to talk to him about anything and everything, and to feel free to speak casually to him. Prayer is a big part of how we grow in our relationship with him. Each day you’ll be given something to pray about. Hopefully, it will lead you each day into spending more time talking to God about other things, and over the forty days, into the habit of praying every day. Today, ask God to help you to be consistent doing all forty days of this book and for it to establish lifelong habits that will keep you connected to him.