

MATTHEW WEST



A DEVOTIONAL

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*This book is dedicated to all the people
who have shared their stories with me
over the past several years.*

*I have been inspired by witnessing how
God is at work in the lives of so many,
and I hope this book will be a daily reminder
that His redeeming work in our lives
is far from over.*

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The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-23

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Introduction

The phone rang in the back room of a tiny pizza restaurant in the tiny town of Worthington, Minnesota.

“Thank you for calling Pizza Ranch,” the young man answered. “How can I help you?”

“May I please speak to the manager?” I asked.

“Sure, hold on just a minute.” The employee turned from the receiver and shouted, “Josh, it’s for you!”

At first, I pretended I was calling to complain about my pizza, but then I told him the real reason for my call. “Josh, this is Matthew West. A while back you wrote your testimony and sent it to my website. Do you remember that?”

I could tell Josh was a little stunned when he answered, “Are you punking me?”

I laughed and told him that this was not a prank and that I was calling to tell him I had read his story.

He responded, “Oh, man, this is unbelievable! I think I need to sit down so I don’t faint.”

The story Josh sent me told of his difficult childhood. He grew up in the roughest area of a small town. The son of a single parent, he never met his mother. In his early teen years he got heavily involved in drugs, which soon turned to drug dealing...and trouble. At age 16, Josh’s story took a drastic and devastating turn when he was arrested and sentenced to ten

years in prison. From juvenile incarceration all the way to maximum-security prison, the next decade of his life had been laid out for him with the judge's verdict. In his letter to me, he wrote that he initially engaged in the typical prison lifestyle and did what he needed to do to survive. But then he began to feel that there was something more that his life could be, somebody new that he could become.

Behind bars, Josh began a personal relationship with Jesus, and his faith grew with every passing day. When someone gets “saved” in prison, other inmates often refer to that as “jailhouse religion”—a term intended to mean that a rock-bottom conversion wouldn't last once someone like Josh was released from prison and reintroduced to the free world. But after serving his ten years, Josh walked out of that prison determined to prove to himself and everyone else that he was indeed a changed man. He began applying for jobs...and that's when discouragement set in. No one was willing to take a chance on an ex-convict with tattoos on his knuckles and a troubled past.

Still, Josh kept the faith and got involved in a local church that continued to encourage him. A married couple from the church heard that Josh was in need of a helping hand and a new start. They operated a pizza restaurant and decided to take a chance on Josh, giving him a part-time job working in the back. What Josh wrote to me next was a beautiful illustration of how a second chance and the determination to change can turn a life around: “Matthew, I took that part-time job and ran with it. I worked my way up, and now I'm the manager of the Pizza Ranch in my hometown. If God can turn my life around, he can turn anyone's life around.”

Josh's story is a powerful reminder that it's never too late to change your life. Of course, there are some things we can't change. No one can erase

the past. As much as we wish there was a do-over, we all know there isn't. But we do have a daily chance to start over.

We read in Lamentations 3:23, “The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning.” That verse gives me fresh hope every morning. And I find myself in need of a daily reminder that God isn't done with me—that there's hope for this fresh, new day. I have a feeling I'm not the only one who feels that way. I bet you do too. In fact, I wrote this book in the hope that it might help to provide just that—a daily reminder that God's mercies are new every morning.

The best way to combat our tendencies to beat ourselves up for being less than perfect is to daily fill our hearts and minds with the truth and the hope of God's Word, which reminds us how deeply and endlessly we are loved by our Creator regardless of where we've been, what we've done, or how many times we've fallen short of perfection.

Meanwhile, back at the Pizza Ranch, my conversation with Josh continued. “Josh, have you by chance heard my new song ‘Day One’ on the radio lately?”

“Oh yeah, man! I actually told my wife when I heard it for the first time that I felt those lyrics were written just for me!” he said.

“Well, Josh,” I said, “those lyrics *were* written for you. That's why I'm calling—to let you know that your testimony inspired me to write that song.”

Josh got quiet for a few seconds, so I spoke up again. “Are you okay? You didn't drop a pizza, did you?”

We laughed, and then I heard him say, “I'm just blown away. Thank you so much! I just want my story to help people know they can change too.”

For Josh, a new beginning in life came in the shape of a pizza. He went from being known as a drug addict and a lost cause in that small town of Worthington, Minnesota, to being the manager of a restaurant. His hometown newspaper even printed an article about a hometown boy making good.

What could a new beginning look like for you? Your today can be different from yesterday. And your tomorrow can be better than today. It's time to start over, starting now.

Today is Day One.



Be an Original, Not an Imitation

You, O Lord, are my hope,
my trust, O LORD, from my youth.

PSALM 71:5

Sometimes after a concert someone will tell me they envy me. They wish God would use them the same way He uses me. I'm glad people have dreams of being used by God. The problem is, when they have it all figured out how God should use them, they're boxing God in. God doesn't use everybody the same way.

With their focus on me or Jeremy Camp or Casting Crowns or Mandisa, they don't have eyes to see God's unique place for them. And they do have a place. *You* have a place. God won't allow any life that's surrendered to Him to go to waste. Just the opposite. When you're truly surrendered, God pours into you the abilities you need to walk out His will for the rest of your life. But it's one day at a time. One step forward into God's will every new morning.

Here's my advice to people who want to be used by God: Pray, wait, do the next thing you know to do, and trust God to open doors. The one thing *not* to do is to compare your usefulness to others. Don't settle for becoming just the next Billy Graham, Beth Moore, or Matthew West. God has a much better plan for you. By trusting Him on each Day One, you'll be moving one step closer to His plan.

Pray today, do what you know to do today, and leave the rest to God. Then repeat that formula again on tomorrow's new day. You will move yourself day by day into God's plan for you.



Are We There Yet?

Wait for the LORD;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the LORD!

PSALM 27:14

Are we there yet?” I’m pretty sure that’s one of the oldest and most frequently asked questions in history. Can you picture the early settlers traveling by covered wagon in the 1800s? I’m sure plenty of kids were in the back of those wagons whining, “Are we there yet?”

Fast-forward from wagons on the Oregon Trail to minivans on the interstate. It still takes only a grand total of 30 seconds before I hear that same question shouted from the backseat—“Dad, are we there yet?”

Truthfully, this question isn’t exclusive to the children. I’ve asked God the same question many times in my own journey of faith. I’m always waiting for that breakthrough. I’m waiting to see God do a miracle in my life. I’m waiting for my prayer to be answered. I’m waiting to see His plan for my life become a reality.

I’m anxious to arrive at my destination, and I don’t enjoy feeling like a kid in the backseat of a minivan. My impatience often tempts me to hop in the front seat, take control of the wheel, and will my way to where I want to be—as if I knew better than God where I should be and when I should arrive. Yet when I turn to Scripture, I’m reminded that God’s timing is perfect.

Sometimes strength means being able *not* to take control, but to wait on the Lord and trust that He will come through. And He will.



Drop the Potatoes

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

COLOSSIANS 3:13 NIV

What do you do when someone says something that hurts? Do you carry it around like a sack of potatoes day after day, week after week? Sometimes when we do that, the sack gets heavier with each passing day.

God's way to deal with that sort of pain is to lay it down. That's it. Just lay the thing down. "But that's hard," you say. Yeah, sometimes it's hard, but remember this:

- It's harder to keep on carrying it. The difficulty in laying it down is momentary.
- Carrying the weight of your hurt will accomplish nothing.
- Nursing a grudge can become an addiction. You get used to the feeling of resentment and miss it when it's not there.
- If you're willing to carry one sack of potatoes, the enemy will eventually load you down with another sack. You develop the bad habit of taking offense when no offense was intended. The more sacks you carry, the slower you travel toward God's will.

Do you have a hurt you haven't let go of yet? Don't wait another day. Drop the sack of potatoes on this Day One.



Be Bold

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.

JOSHUA 1:9 NIV

Do something bold and courageous today. And by bold and courageous, I don't mean you should sign up for a chili dog eating contest—I would actually advise against that. (And don't ask me how I know!)

I'm talking about being bold and courageous for Christ. God is calling you to big things. Perhaps that big thing popped into your head just as you read that last sentence. Or maybe you've sensed God calling you to something big, but you just aren't sure yet what that is. Sometimes we do know what big thing God is calling us to, but fear creeps up inside us and prevents us from stepping out in faith. Fear comes against us and asks, *What if I try and fail? What if I'm not really hearing from the Lord? What if it doesn't work out?*

It is not your job today to concern yourself with whether God's plan is going to work out. You are simply called to step out in faith.

In Joshua 1:9, the command "Do not be afraid" is followed by the reason why we don't have to fear: "God will be with you."

As you talk to God today, listen for His leading. Ask Him to show you the big plans He has for you. Then cast aside the fear and do something bold and courageous, knowing that God will be with you wherever you go.



No Condemnation

I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.

ROMANS 7:18-19 NIV

You blew it again, didn't you? You did, said, or thought something you said you never would again. And this isn't the first time. In fact, you've fallen into this trap many, many times. You vow not to let your mind go there, and within five minutes (or less!), off it goes. Wrong thoughts, wrong actions, wrong words—they'll get you every time.

Hey, you're not alone. Even the apostle Paul knew what it was like to want to do right and not be able to do it. That's clear from Romans 7—a chapter that could be the autobiography of just about any Christian.

The problem is, some Christians get stuck in Romans 7. They don't keep reading...

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1-2 NIV).

If you're a believer in Christ, you have been placed "in Christ Jesus" and have the power to be free from the condemning cycle of sin and death.

Day One should always include a fresh realization that in Christ there is *no* condemnation. And there *is* power over sin. That's a great fact that will energize any new day.