

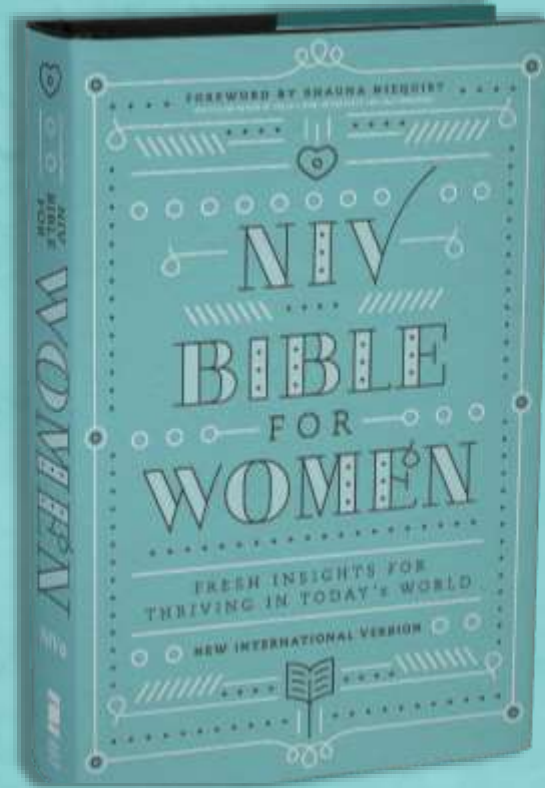
6-Day Plan



DEVOTIONS FOR WOMEN

From the NIV Bible for Women





This 6-day reading plan features devotions for women excerpted from the *NIV Bible for Women*. Devotions will help you reflect on God's Word as it relates to our lives as women and the many and varied roles we play.

Table of Contents

Day 1: The God Who Sees

Day 2: Your Money: Yours to Manage

Day 3: Following God's Plan

Day 4: No Matter the Circumstances, the Calling is the Same

Day 5: Worth the Wait

Day 6: Come, Holy Spirit. Draw Near to Me

Day 1: The God Who Sees

Even when we're alone or in despair, God knows, understands, and is with us right in the middle of it.

Sitting at the bustling, communal lunch table, I introduced myself to the kind face across from me. We exchanged the usual pleasantries and inquiries: Where are you from? What kind of work do you do? What brings you to this retreat?

Rather quickly we discovered we both had sons about the same ages. At one point in our get-to-know-you conversation, my lunch buddy shared the smallest of mothering details that made my ears perk up and a lump form in my throat. Could she have this in her life too?

I dared to ask a follow-up question. She smiled and revealed just a bit more about her family. I mustered all the courage I had to offer a similar scenario from my life. She affirmed she was familiar with the struggle.

All of a sudden, I was overwhelmed with emotion. Just a few moments earlier, I had felt completely alone, like the only mom on the planet experiencing this parenting heartache. And yet, directly across from me at a small retreat center in the middle of nowhere sat a woman who was intimately acquainted with my hopes, my fears, my heart.

Of course she was the one I met that day. Out of all the people in attendance, all the lunch seats available, all the words she could have chosen, this exact woman chose to sit across from me and share a detail that only I would notice.

In my new friend's kind eyes, I saw my loving God looking back at me. I heard him saying, "I see you. I know what's breaking your heart. You are not alone in this. I love you."

In Genesis 16, Hagar, Sarah's servant, gives God the descriptive name The God Who Sees. The angel of the Lord had found her in the desert after fleeing mistreatment. God found her alone and in despair and spoke to her right in the middle of it.

I realized that I could trust God to lead me where he wanted me when my heart was seeking his. The God Who Sees you. He knows your heart. He is with you in the middle of it. And he loves you.

Reflect

Where have you seen evidence of God's presence today?

Day 1: Scripture

She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me."

– Genesis 16:13 NIV

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. ³⁰ And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

Matthew 10:29-31 NIV

You have searched me, LORD,
and you know me.

² You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.

³ You discern my going out and my lying
down;

you are familiar with all my ways.

⁴ Before a word is on my tongue
you, LORD, know it completely.

⁵ You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.

⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.

⁷ Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are
there.

⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.

¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"

¹² even the darkness will not be dark to
you;

the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

¹³ For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's
womb.

¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and
wonderfully made;

when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the
depths of the earth.

¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were

written in your book

before one of them came to be.

¹⁷ How precious to me are your
thoughts, God!

How vast is the sum of them!

¹⁸ Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of
sand—

when I awake, I am still with you.

¹⁹ If only you, God, would slay the wicked!
Away from me, you who are
bloodthirsty!

²⁰ They speak of you with evil intent;
your adversaries misuse your name.

²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, LORD,
and abhor those who are in rebellion
against you?

²² I have nothing but hatred for them;
I count them my enemies.

²³ Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.

²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

- Psalm 139 NIV

Day 2: Your Money: Yours to Manage

The financially confident woman knows that money is for managing first and spending second.

This isn't just another reminder that "it's all God's money." Of course, money does originate from God's hand. However, practically speaking, he has put you in charge of a certain amount of it. In that sense, your money is your money to manage. And God expects you to use it well and not to abuse your responsibilities.

The Old Testament tells how the Israelites gave offerings to God out of the abundance he'd given them. Approximately two-thirds of Jesus' parables are about money and financial management.

In one of Jesus' parables in the New Testament, he likened spiritual faithfulness to being a responsible manager or steward of funds (see Matthew 25:14-30). In this story, only two of three managers graduated from God's Business School with their MBAs. (The other flunked out.)

One of the prerequisite "courses" in this prestigious university underlines the principle that money is for managing first and spending second. The difference between the two is the difference between the financially foolish and financially confident woman.

The foolish woman imagines having her own money means fine living and gratifying her indulgences.

- So she lives beyond her means.
- She confuses desires with needs.
- She loses sleep over unpaid debts.
- She wonders where all the fun associated with having her own money has gone.

In contrast, the financially confident woman recognizes God as the source of her money.

- She has a sound plan for the amount divinely allotted to her.
- She knows she cannot afford to keep all her money, so she gives generously.
- Out of what is left, she pays herself first, saving aggressively.
- Then, she is free to spend her money within the boundaries she has established.
- She knows the secret to enjoying life's pleasures is not living on credit, paycheck to paycheck. Rather, she is in control of her money, not the other way around. The financially confident woman forgoes temptations to spend her money today, and by doing so she manages to be good to herself tomorrow.

When we graduate from God's Business School, we will have our MBA in Biblical financial principles -- rules to live by that honor us as intelligent women who are respected managers of God's money.

Reflect

Would you describe yourself as a financially confident woman?

Day 2: Scripture

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. ¹¹ Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. ¹² Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, ¹⁴ then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ¹⁵ He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. ¹⁶ He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you. ¹⁷ You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." ¹⁸ But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

– Deuteronomy 8:10-18

David's Prayer

¹⁰ David praised the LORD in the presence of the whole assembly, saying,

"Praise be to you, LORD,
the God of our father Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting.

¹¹ Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power
and the glory and the majesty and the splendor,
for everything in heaven and earth is yours.

Yours, LORD, is the kingdom;
you are exalted as head over all.

¹² Wealth and honor come from you;
you are the ruler of all things.

In your hands are strength and power
to exalt and give strength to all.

¹³ Now, our God, we give you thanks,
and praise your glorious name.

¹⁴ "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.

- 1 Chronicles 29:10-14

¹² So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

- Romans 14:12

"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

¹⁹ "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.'

²¹ "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

²² "The man with two bags of gold also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.'

²³ "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

²⁴ "Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

²⁶ "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

²⁸ "So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹ For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

- Matthew 25:14-30

Day 3: Following God's Plan

We may not feel ready or certain about making a move, but God lovingly gives us a chance to flex our faith and trust him for the outcome.

Scripture has this to say about following God's plan, "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see . . . By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going" (Hebrews 11:1, 8, emphasis added). Are you in the middle of one of life's surprises right now? Are you at a place you never expected to be? Are you unsure of what will happen next?

Welcome to reality.

While the myth that we should "know" God's plan for our lives still floats around Christian circles, the truth is quite different.

We live by faith and not by sight (see 2 Corinthians 5:7). If you knew every aspect of God's plan for your life, clearly labeled in triplicate form, why would you need faith?

The moment of absolute certainty rarely comes. Consider Abraham. He didn't have a clue where he was going. But he went anyway. Think of Samuel, whom God called as a child. Do you think a young boy understood the scope of God's plan for his life? Certainly not. But these people moved forward in faith, as did all the spiritual heroes.

We must move forward. In preparation, we pray and seek godly counsel. We search the Scriptures and meditate on God's truths. And then it comes time to decide. To make a move. We may not feel ready or certain, but God lovingly gives us a chance to flex our faith and trust him for the outcome.

The Bible is about people in a fluid, dynamic relationship with God. It's not a treasure map. It's not a blueprint spelling out Steps A, B and C for God's plan for you. Instead of outlining methods to find God's plan, it teaches the principles of finding God's heart. The living God leads through relationship. When we understand this, we start to seek his face, not his hand. We stop wanting to find God's plan so that we might find God instead. No longer capriciously wanting the "answer," we want the one who knows the answer.

Reflect

When was the last time you stepped out in faith and trusted God for the outcome? Do you need to do that today?

Day 3: Scripture

You will seek me and find me
when you seek me with all
your heart.

- Jeremiah 29:13

Now faith is confidence in what we hope
for and assurance about what we do not
see.

- Hebrews 11:1

For we live by faith, not by sight.

- 2 Corinthians 5:7

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a
place he would later receive as his
inheritance, obeyed and went, even
though he did not know where he was
going.

- Hebrews 11:8

Day 4: No Matter the Circumstances, the Calling is the Same

Though our nine-to-five jobs change over the years, our calling is always to love God and serve him in whatever position he places us.

A few days after graduating from college -- broke and ready to change the world -- I stumbled upon a dream job. The office was technically a converted garage, and the health insurance was technically nonexistent, but everything else was perfect. I'd be working as a marketing coordinator for a speakers bureau. While I knew very little about marketing, I loved public speaking. Maybe this wouldn't be just a job, I thought. Maybe this would be the start of a career.

On my first day it became apparent that my marketing coordinator title was simply that -- a title. I was doing a boring administrative job that didn't even require a college degree. This couldn't be what God wanted for my life, right? Wasn't I made for something bigger and better?

Over the next two years I asked myself those questions over and over again. I began asking God to call me somewhere else -- somewhere I could use my education and make a huge impact on my community and world. I have so much more to offer, God.

In Matthew 4:18-22 we read about Jesus calling two sets of brothers to leave their day jobs as fishermen and "fish" for people instead.

In ancient times fishing was an ordinary job commonly held -- the work was hard, and it certainly wasn't flashy. But Jesus comes to these ordinary men, doing ordinary jobs, and basically says, "I want to use your skills to further my kingdom."

I spent two years in my "marketing coordinator" position, and while I eventually picked up bits and pieces of actual marketing experience, I learned a lot more about hard work, patience, service and humility. My first job -- and all my subsequent jobs -- haven't been glamorous, but I'm not sure why I thought they should be. Along the way I've learned the difference between my vocation and my calling. As a new college grad, I believed God's calling on my life meant he'd reveal an exciting career that perfectly used my talents and gifts. What I came to understand is that my nine-to-five job would likely change over the years, but my calling would always remain the same: to love God and serve him in whatever position he places me.

Reflect

Are you willing to be used by God in your current vocation?

Day 4: Scripture

As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” ²⁰At once they left their nets and followed him.

²¹Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, ²²and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

- Matthew 4:18-22

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. ²He saw at the water’s edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. ³He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

⁴When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.”

⁵Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”

⁶When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

⁸When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” ⁹For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon’s partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.” ¹¹So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

- Luke 5: 1-11

Day 5: Worth the Wait

A commitment you can walk away from isn't really a commitment.

You know there are some things you don't have to "road test" -- drugs, pornography and prostitution, just to name a few. Some things are just givens -- you know they're wrong or right, based on the Bible and on the consequences you see in people's lives. But before making long-term decisions where the stakes are high, many people want to stick a toe in the water to test the outcome. Marriage is one of those long-term decisions many people fear. Can you relate?

Statistically, more couples are living together before marriage than ever before. The high divorce rate has turned more people away from thoughts of "I do" to thoughts of "I want to, but I need to try it out first." They believe divorce is to be avoided at all costs, even at the cost of compromising what they may know to be the best way.

The problem with the living-together option is that it's commitment "lite" -- a promise of commitment with a backdoor to it. All of the pleasures of intimacy without the messy aftermath -- or so people think. But a commitment you can walk away from isn't really a commitment. And contrary to what the movies and TV programs show, it comes with a hidden emotional and spiritual cost.

So how can you really know that you'll stay together if you don't live together beforehand? What are some alternatives to living together?

- Get premarital counseling. Counseling can help you explore your fears or unrealistic fantasies about marriage. See if your church can give you some names of reputable counselors.
- Find "marriage mentors." Get to know an older couple, one with whom you can feel comfortable discussing the hard realities of marriage. Learn what has kept them together through good times and bad.
- Dump the divorce option. The only guarantee that you'll stay together is to decide beforehand that divorce is not an option.
- Know God's Word. Don't just rely on the advice of your friends. Know what the Bible says.

Living together before marriage isn't a guarantee that you'll avoid divorce later. Nor is living together a guarantee that you will eventually marry. Many couples wind up separating before they reach the altar.

Want God's absolute best for you? Wait for the wedding. You're worth waiting for.

Reflect

What steps do you take when you need to make an important decision?

Day 5: Scripture

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

-Genesis 2:24

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

³⁸ Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” ⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

- Acts 2:37-41

Day 6: Come, Holy Spirit. Draw Near to Me

The Bible makes it clear that there is no way we can live our Christian faith without the Holy Spirit as our guide.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is like turning on a light bulb. It's powerful. Sudden. When the disciples first experienced the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they were forever changed, and people around them noticed this change. According to Acts 4:13, "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished."

Imagine going from ordinary fishermen to seminary grads to pastors in an instant. Also note in Acts 2:6-12 that the disciples spoke different languages -- actual languages. Talk about amazing! It was so amazing that the people thought they were drunk. So how do you and I know if we have been filled with the Holy Spirit?

The Bible says the Holy Spirit is like an advocate. He speaks truth to us. He guides our path. He also prays for us and intercedes on our behalf. I don't know about you, but none of that sounds spooky or scary about this Holy Spirit. It sounds exciting. Necessary.

What I appreciate most about the Holy Spirit is the transformation that takes place when God chooses ordinary people to do extraordinary tasks. No matter what you believe about the Holy Spirit, the Bible makes it clear: there is no way we can live our Christian faith without the Holy Spirit as our guide.

That's why Jesus knew his physical presence on earth wasn't enough. He told the apostle Peter that the cross was necessary. Peter, the leader of the disciples, was the kind of guy who was full of courage, and yet he kept sticking his foot in his mouth. One minute he was thinking like Christ, and the next minute Jesus was rebuking him, saying he was full of Satan.

And yet. God still used Peter as a disciple for his glory. When Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome went to visit Jesus' tomb, the angel specifically mentioned Peter by name (see Mark 16:7). As if to remind Peter that his faith, in fact, hadn't failed.

No matter how weak, strong or courageous your faith is today, the Holy Spirit is waiting for you. Come. Draw near to his presence.

Reflect

Have you ever felt like your actions discount you from relying on the Holy Spirit's help?

Day 6: Scripture

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.
- Acts 4:13

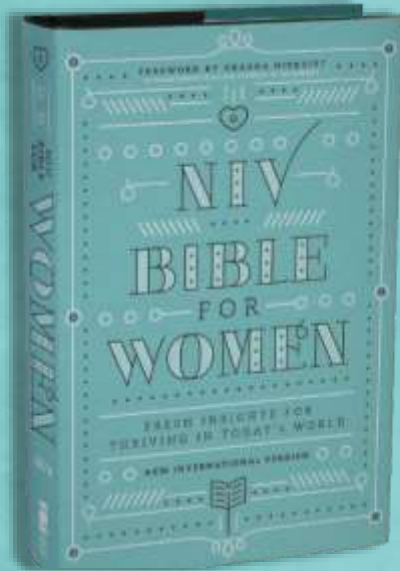
And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.
- John 14:16-17

And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.
- Romans 8:27

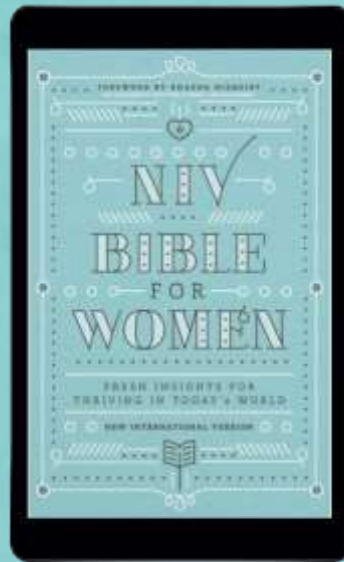
When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken.⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans?”⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”
- Acts 2:6-12

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