

# Pre-Trip Devotions

## Relentless

It's almost time for your Group Mission Trip! Woohoo! Most likely, your bags are almost packed, you've got a duffle bag full of Goldfish Crackers and Mountain Dew and all your favorite snacks.

Some of you are super excited to spend a week serving people in need this summer. Some of you are terrified, maybe even asking yourself, *What did I get myself into? What if I spend the week feeling alone and rejected? What if I don't pack enough underwear?* Some of you have been planning on going on this trip for months, others of you had no idea this is how you would spend a week of your summer.

I want to let you in a little secret: Jesus isn't surprised by you being here. He's had a plan for you, for this week, with these people, since before you were born (Psalm 139).

Literally thousands of students have walked the road you're about to walk. Most students have described their Group Mission Trip as one of the best weeks of their lives; some even point to this week as a turning point in their lives. But if we're honest, some students didn't experience any of those things. What makes the difference between a great and not-so-great experience has much to do with how you go into it.

What you experience on your mission trip is directly proportional to your effort to tune in to Jesus' voice. In simpler terms, *You'll get out of it what you put into it.* If you head into your trip *looking* for Jesus, *listening* for his voice, and *expecting* him to move in your life, I can guarantee you that you'll see Him, hear Him, and experience Him in pretty amazing ways. If you cross your arms, put on a frown, and say, "harrumph" all week, you'll most likely go home unchanged.

How do you want to remember your week of camp? As a life-changing experience, or just another week to fill time until school restarts? The time you take *now* to look and listen for Jesus will shape how you experience him *during* your mission trip.

Our team has provided five devotions from Matthew 6:19-33 for you to read each day as you get ready to leave for camp. Maybe you've never spent personal time with Jesus. Maybe you've been doing this for years. We challenge you to use this time with Jesus to prepare your heart for the week He has in store for you. The best thing you can do to nurture your relationship with Jesus is to spend time with Him daily.



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# Introduction

## Before you start, keep these tips in mind...

- ▶ These devotional dialogues are not just another task on your mission-trip to-do list. You won't get "extra credit" or a "suitable-for-framing" certificate for completing them. Our intention is for you to create some space in your life so that you can listen to and interact with the One who is already very present and active on the road with you —Jesus.
- ▶ Remember this: With Jesus, everything won't be precisely as you imagined or expected it might be, as it has been described to you, or what you think you deserve. You'll need learn to trust his heart for you. It's a wild ride—but worth every moment!
- ▶ Grab your Bible (the Bible passages are also included in the devotion in case you don't have a Bible handy) and a pen and paper to journal your thoughts. Use these devotions any way that works for you—by yourself or with a friend or two. The important thing is that you take the time to consider the amazing life Jesus wants to craft in you when you're with him.

## Relentless

This year's theme, "Relentless", describes someone who is...Unstoppable. Energized. Enduring. Never giving up. Always "on". Relentless also can describe someone who is overbearing, punishing, harsh pressuring.

This world places relentless demands on you to be better, do more, get stronger, increase your GPA, surround yourself with more and better friends, create more beauty, be more exciting. These relentless demands can leave you feeling pressured and empty, like you're not enough.

God's relentless love for you is unshakeable. Like water flowing downhill to the lowest places, God is always for you, pursuing you fondly, covering you with mercy and grace. He is relentless in the best of ways.

In the Old Testament King David's relentless faith transformed his life. Israel's King David was relentless in a different way. He threw himself into life with great passion, sometimes suffering painful consequences. Despite huge successes and devastating failures, David relentlessly pursued God. He recognized God's relentless love and mercy and responded with relentless faith, trusting God to guide and shape his life. Through faith, David became a "man after God's own heart" (Acts 13:22).

This summer we will be diving deeper into this story, but for now, we want you to start with Matthew 6.



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# Matthew 6:19-33 (NIV)

**We recommend you read this passage before each devotion.**

9 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

22 “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

24 “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.

29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.



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# Devotion #1

When I was a kid, I really wanted a Stretch Armstrong action hero (Google it) for Christmas. I must have been good that year because all my Christmas wishes came true when I opened that box and soaked in the greatness that was now mine. My family traveled to my grandma's house for Christmas dinner. I brought my new treasure, hoping to dazzle my cousins with the best toy in the history of the whole world. My cousin, Keith, was obviously jealous, because as he was showing me his new pocket knife, he "accidentally" stabbed Stretch Armstrong, and his insides came out.

I was furious, and I wanted to "accidentally" stab Keith. But if I were honest, part of me was curious to see what made Mr. Armstrong stretch. (The insides were made of some weird, thick, cornstarch-y slime-stuff... it was cool.) After the frenzy of the moment wore off, Keith didn't get in any trouble because his mom thought he was a perfect Christmas angel, and I no longer had a Stretch Armstrong.

Stretch Armstrong was the number one item on my Christmas list. Driving home from grandma's house, *I remember thinking, I didn't even have Stretch for a day, and he's gone forever.*

- ▶ Have you ever treasured something, finally got it, and then lost it, broke it, or realized it wasn't as good as you thought it would be? Consider Jesus' words in the Gospel of Matthew:

*19 "Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. 21 Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.* (Matthew 6:19-21)

Jesus was encouraging his followers to rethink their understanding of what matters. Instead of investing in things that only have temporary value, relentlessly pursue things in life that last forever.

- ▶ What are five things the average teenager relentlessly pursues in life that won't last very long? (Ex: popularity, materials things, etc.)
- ▶ How have you seen teenagers respond when these things they are pursuing don't last? Which of these five things you listed above are the biggest struggles in your own life?

I'm pretty sure Jesus wasn't thinking about Stretch Armstrong, but the principle in the Bible passage above applies: Whatever you relentlessly pursue, make sure it's something that will last - something that really matters.

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When I think about my years in middle and high school, I wish I had spent more time chasing after things that mattered. I wish I would have focused more on growing in my faith and sharing my faith with my friends who didn't understand what it meant to follow Jesus. I wish I would have spent more time investing in people who were true friends, even if they weren't the most popular. I wish I had been more honest with my parents about my struggles so our relationship would have continued to deepen after I graduated from high school. I wish I had spent more time standing up for people at school who were picked on for being different. I wish I had paid better attention in Spanish class so I could have connected more with the kids on my last mission trip.

## Prayer

- ▶ Take a few minutes and write a list of things in life that you are relentlessly pursuing. Be honest ... Jesus delights in our humility and vulnerability.
- ▶ Look back at your list. Are there more things of temporary value or eternal value?
- ▶ What do you want to add to your list of things you relentlessly pursue? What is one change that you could make to your life today to start moving in that direction?
- ▶ Spend a few minutes in prayer, asking Jesus to help reframe your understanding of what's really important and give you the courage to start relentlessly pursuing things that really matter.



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## Devotion #2

Do you know what it means to “window shop?” To walk around a mall and just look at stuff you know you can’t afford to buy. I hate window shopping. What’s the point of shopping if you can’t buy anything? Before going to the mall I didn’t even know those shoes I saw in the store window existed, but now that I’ve seen them, new shoes are all I can think about. I’m kinda like Dug, the dog in the movie Up ... SQUIRREL! When I see something, I want it! And if I can’t have it, it’s torture. And I didn’t even want it until I saw it. What we see affects what we pursue, just like Jesus said:

*22 Your eye is like a lamp that provides light for your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is filled with light. 23 But when your eye is unhealthy, your whole body is filled with darkness. And if the light you think you have is actually darkness, how deep that darkness is! (Matthew 6:22-23)*

At your mission trip you might see things you’ve never seen before. Poverty, sickness, loneliness ... these things can be startling. Even if you’re going back to a town where you’ve already served, you will see new things: new campers, new residents, new leaders, new variations of mystery meat. Some things will be familiar, but lots of other things will be new. You also have the opportunity to see Jesus through new and fresh experiences. Even if you’ve been a Christ-follower for years, Jesus connects with our lives in startlingly relevant ways. But you’ve got to put yourself in a position to see Him. Regardless if this is your first or your 50th mission trip, whatever gets your focus will determine what you get out of camp.

- ▶ What will be your focus during your mission trip? Frustration that last year’s mission trip accommodations were nicer than this year’s? That cute guy or girl whose attention you can’t seem to get? Aggravation that your work project isn’t going as planned? Irritation that the person sleeping next to you refuses to shower? Or the reality that Jesus is pursuing you with relentless love and grace?

Your mission trip experience will be shaped by whatever you choose to make the focus of your attention - the things you choose to see. Don’t be like Dug, distracted by squirrels all week. Embrace Jesus’ relentless love for you. Lean into Jesus’ relentless pursuit of you. Look for Jesus to speak and guide and change you. Start today.

### Prayer

*Jesus, help me see you today. Help me choose to make you the focus of my attention. Help me see your love for all people: the people I don’t know or like or understand, the people who like me or who don’t. Help me see you when life is great and when life is difficult. And help others see you in me. Help me love and pursue you as relentlessly as you love and pursue me.*



# Devotion #3

Let's play "Would You Rather?":

- ▶ Would you rather eat no candy at Easter or no turkey at Thanksgiving?
- ▶ Would you rather be invisible for a day or be able to fly for a day?

Let's make them a little more challenging:

- ▶ Would you rather have feet for hands or hands for feet?
- ▶ Would you rather always have to say what's on your mind or never be able to talk again?
- ▶ Would you rather smell like eggs when you burp or have a green cloud when you fart?

Some people are super indecisive ... they hate making choices. To be honest, I like keeping my options open as well. I'm afraid if I lock in on a decision, I may miss out on something better! I don't think I'm indecisive, I just don't like it when I have to choose one thing or another. That's why I don't love Jesus' words in Matthew 6:24:

*No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money. (Matthew 6:24)*

Sometimes understanding the Bible takes a little work, but in this passage, Jesus' words are simple and clear. Splitting your loyalty is impossible; you have to make a choice. This statement seems so harsh. To me, it seems like I can serve Jesus and live into the values of the Kingdom of God, and still fit into the culture around me. But Jesus knows following him is so countercultural that if I tried to keep one foot in each world I'd drive myself crazy. And if I'm really honest, that's exactly what happens.

Can I date the same way as everyone else and be faithful to God's word? Can I do all the same things all the popular people do and remain committed to Jesus? Can my social media accounts have all the same stuff as other students at my school and still point to Jesus as the Lord of my life? We all know the answer to these questions ... no, I can't. I have to make a choice. Even though it feels like I'll be missing out on ... something.

What Jesus knows but doesn't say (until Matthew 6:33) is that when I do choose to commit my life to him, to the exclusion of the values of popular culture, I actually don't miss out on anything. As I live into the principles of the Kingdom of God, Jesus gives me an even better version of anything I'm afraid I'll miss. Peace, joy, passion, purpose, love. Jesus tells me to choose, because He knows that's the best way for me to live, and he wants what's best for me. Because His love for me is relentless.

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## Prayer

Spend a few minutes in prayer, asking Jesus to help you understand the areas of your life where you need to make a choice - make a list in your phone. Then ask Jesus to give you the courage to live in obedience. As you begin to make the difficult choices, update your list so you can see how Jesus is faithful to you as you deepen your trust in him.

### **Bonus: Top Ten “Would You Rather” questions for your ride to camp:**

- ▶ Would you rather have a unicorn horn or a squirrel tail?
- ▶ Would you rather always have the same song stuck in your head or always have the same dream at night?
- ▶ Would you rather lose your sense of taste or your sense of smell?
- ▶ Would you rather win an Academy Award or an Olympic Gold Medal?
- ▶ Would you rather fight 100 duck-sized horses or 1 horse sized duck?
- ▶ Would you rather be the clown who distracts the bull or the cowboy who rides the bull?
- ▶ Would you rather have to go to the bathroom in a giant litter box in your house or anywhere you want, but only outside?
- ▶ Would you rather find true love or 10 billion dollars?
- ▶ Would you rather meet an alien visitor or travel to outer space?
- ▶ Would you rather give up your phone or your pet?



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# Devotion #4

As you reread the whole bible passage for these devotions, you can probably see that Jesus' words aren't warm and fuzzy. They wouldn't make a good t-shirt slogan or bumper sticker. In fact, Jesus is saying some pretty heavy, provocative stuff. And truthfully, that's one of the things I love about Jesus - he's not afraid to say the tough stuff we all need to hear.

We've talked all throughout these devotions about Jesus' relentless love for us, his relentless pursuit of us, and his relentless grace towards us. We're forgetful people who are prone to wander, so it's important that we're constantly reminded that Jesus is for us. Throughout the Bible, any time Jesus says something particularly challenging to us, he wants us to remember that he's got our back. Consider his words in today's passage:

*25 "That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? 27 Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? 28 "And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, 29 yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. 30 And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith? 31 "So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' 32 These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Matthew 6:25-32*

Jesus knows he's just laid out a surprising, outrageous, super difficult challenge. And he knows the people listening (and those of us reading it 2000+ years later) would be struggling. So he launches into a peace-laden, comfort-giving reminder that he is for us. Here's what Jesus is saying:

"Look, friends, I know what I'm asking you to do is hard. It stresses you out, it scares you, and you're wondering what will happen to you if you go 'all in.' I'm telling you, 'I've got your back.' Look at the plants and animals. They don't worry, because they know I'm taking care of them. And I want you to know that I'll take care of you. Always. Following me may not always be easy, but it's always worth it. So don't worry, don't fear, and don't stress. I've got this."

## Prayer

Start your prayer sharing with Jesus all the things that stress you out about following him. (Be honest, he's God, so he already knows. It's just good for you to say them out loud to him.) Once you've shared a good, long list, ask Jesus to remind you of how he'll take care of you. Then spend some time in silence, listening to the voice of your Savior that is relentlessly for you.



# Devotion #5

Have you ever lost something? Your phone, tomorrow's homework, a favorite shirt, your car keys? How do you feel when you've lost something? Yuck! And have you ever asked someone for help, only to have them respond with the least helpful question ever invented, "Where did you last see it?" On behalf of everyone who has ever said that to you, I'm sorry. They probably mean well, they're just dumb. And you've just got to keep on looking until you find it.

Sin has a cost. It causes us to lose the things that matter most, even if we don't realize it. In all of our lives, we're pursuing something - looking for the things that we lost because of our sin: acceptance, peace, influence, purpose, love, joy, etc. Meanwhile, Jesus is (and for all of our lives has been) pursuing us with relentless love. Because he wants to give us back all the things we've lost. Oh, the irony. If we allow Jesus' relentless pursuit of us to break through our fears, insecurities, and discomfort, we will actually find the acceptance, friendship, influence, purpose, love, peace, etc., - the things that we've been looking for all along!

What does it mean to allow Jesus' relentless love to change us? It means you dance even if you don't like to dance, trusting that your courage on the dance floor may lead to courage in places where it really counts. It means you lean into Jesus' relentless pursuit of you and step into new roles as the Holy Spirit nudges you, trusting you'll impact others as Jesus impacts you. It means you write everyone in your group (yes, everyone) a Care Card, trusting that your words might bring life to someone struggling to believe they're even noticed. Being open to Jesus' relentless grace means you take the risk to be vulnerable with others, trusting that you'll experience healing as the Holy Spirit connects your heart with the heart of Jesus. It means instead of vegging out and watching Netflix, you go "all in" and "play hard" in life, trusting that Jesus has dreams for you that are bigger than anything you can ask, hope, or imagine. (NOTE: If you don't know what a "Care Card" is, you will by the end of the first night at camp.)

*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*  
(Matthew 6:33)

- ▶ What have you lost while trying to chase after things you think will make you happy? Maybe your sense of self? Peace? Joy? ... Aren't you tired from the search?

Embrace Jesus' relentless love for you. Lean into his relentless pursuit of you. Stop pretending and start really living. Expect Jesus to speak and guide and change you. And tell your story of what he has done in your life. Jesus' relentless grace extends to everyone in your life, and your story might be what Jesus uses to help someone be open to his relentless love for them. Everything we're really looking for in life we find in our pursuit of the Kingdom of God. So go after it.

## Prayer

"Jesus, help me find the parts of me that I've lost along the way. Help me reimagine my life chasing after you, seeking you and only you. Give me the strength to trust you when life is hard, and help me know that everything I want in life I find in you. Protect me from fear, anxiety, and unhealthy doubt. Fill me with your Holy Spirit, so when others see me living a Kingdom-of-God-life, they'll want it too."

