

fullness of *life*

Bec Oates



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**A two-week devotional
for growing together**

fullness of *life*

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By Bec Oates
Baptist World Aid Australia
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About this Devotion series: Sometimes as much as we long for community and healthy relationships, we too often retreat from our neighbours and miss out on the fullness of life that God intends for us . . . together.

In her unique and honest voice, Bec Oates explores the challenges and realities we all face in responding to God's call to care for others. Her two-week devotional will have readers laughing, relating and considering anew what fullness of life means for every contemporary follower of Jesus.

About the Author: After a long and successful career running her own business, Bec Oates took her family to India to serve a Christian organisation. God then called her to Baptist World Aid Australia, where she now serves as the Director of Marketing and Communication. She and her husband live in Sydney with their four lovely children and an old dog.



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Day 1:

Moving into Love

"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling."

(1 Peter 4: 8-9)

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Reflection

Who does NOT love to move house? Me.

But we did, a few months ago, and this meant new neighbours.

Because I see myself as a *kind, thoughtful and generous follower of Jesus*, my first thought was, ‘I do hope our new neighbours aren’t too intrusive’. Like, sure, it would be great if they took our bin out when we go away on holidays. But, really, I don’t want them to be dropping in unexpectedly when I haven’t had time to create the facade of domestic perfection required to sell the story of my award-winning life.

Because for some reason, at the same time as I have a yearning to be known and to be loved, I also want to be independent, self-reliant and isolated.

In other words, I’m happy to *know* you, but I’m not sure I want to need you.

As for loving deeply and offering hospitality without grumbling, as Peter wrote, let’s just call that a work in progress! Thankfully, Peter—who had his fair share of grumbles and mishaps—was also a work in progress himself as he followed Jesus to the cross. Where the Lord died for him. And for me. And for all of us.

I’m glad God is patient with me as I try to learn how to love him and my neighbours as myself. Because, if I don’t know you, and you don’t know me, I think it’s hard to know God. After all, he created us for community.

So, let’s know each other. Let’s live in the fullness of life that God intends.

Prayer

Father, thank you for the gift of community and hospitality. Thank you for Peter’s letter which reminds us to show hospitality to others because of Christ’s invitation to each of us. Teach us to be friends to the neighbours you put in our path and please show us who we can offer hospitality to today. For your glory, Amen.

Next step

In what ways might God be leading you to care for your neighbours?

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Day 2:

A Love More Real than the Internet

"My command is this: Love each
other as I have loved you."

(John 15: 12)

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Reflection

I have to admit that I can only handle this chapter of John in bite size pieces. I mean this verse alone is enough to make me tune into Netflix and pretend that life on the Internet is real.

Firstly, this chapter in John's gospel is full of warmth and insight. But then Jesus gives us a **command**. It's not so much a bunch of suggestions or an announcement of: 'Hey, everybody! Here are my top tips for winning at life'. It's a command. And it's not just any old command that shows his power or authority. No, his command is to **love each other**.

Not a mention of loving yourself.

Not that there's anything wrong with loving yourself. I'm good

at that. But Jesus gives us a higher standard: **as I have loved you**. A command to lay down one's life for one's friends. A command that I just can't see making a popular Instagram post.

So, Jesus doesn't say, "If you want to win at life, love yourself and put yourself first." Instead, Jesus shows us his sacrificial love—that will send him to the cross—but first utters this command so that our joy may be complete. A command to love each other so that we may remain in his love.

And to love you, I need to know you.

Let's know each other. Let's live in the fullness of life that God intends.

Prayer

Give us the courage, Lord, to consider how we may lay down our lives for our friends. Teach us to love others as you have loved us. Thank you that only through the love you showed on the cross can we love one another. Amen.

Next step

What simple act of love could you do today for your neighbour or colleague?

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Day 3:

That Neighbour Question

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. “Look after him,” he said, “and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.”

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

(Luke 10: 25-37)

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Reflection

If this parable tells us anything, it's that defining your neighbour is, well, awkward. And that moment when you realise your neighbour isn't just the person who lives next door can be tricky. It can raise a lot of issues.

Like the day I realized the outfit I was wearing was made by my neighbour in Bangladesh. Her hands had woven threads together to produce the garment I appraised at the shops and deemed worthy to be included in my collection of fashion *must-haves*. Her hands—which I'm sure would have preferred to caress her daughter's face—had instead toiled for 14 hours a day in hot, oppressive conditions. Day in, day out. For a day's pay that might not even buy me a coffee.

Her hands, gifted with creativity yet sentenced to repetition without agency, ached from making the outfit I had on. And I realized, *she* is my neighbour.

My hands may never touch hers, to thank her for her work, but I can care about her circumstance. About her daily grind. I can have mercy on her and pray for her and think of her. I can love her as I love myself. And I can love her in the same way I try to love my neighbour who lives in the house next to me.

Because my choices impact hers. Everyday. In Australia and in Bangladesh.

Let's know each other. Let's live in the fullness of life that God intends.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for the neighbours we don't know personally but whose work around the world affects our daily lives here. Please show us practical and loving ways to restore our relationships with those neighbours whom our choices affect daily, because of the great love you showed the world through your Son. Amen.

Next step

How can you learn more about your neighbours in other countries, particularly those in Bangladesh who work in the garment industry?

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Day 4:

Not My Coat, too?

"But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you."

(Luke 6: 27-31)

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Reflection

Sorry, I can't hear you. Did you say tolerate your enemies? Isolate yourself from your enemies? Unfriend them on Facebook?

Because the idea of walking towards those who have taken *from* me seems crazy and hard, let alone giving them the shirt off my back. And especially my coat. I really like my coat.

When I was growing up, my parents had to ban Monopoly in our house because I couldn't stand having all my money and houses and that prized Park Lane hotel stripped away from me. I wish I could say so much has changed for me now as an adult. But if I'm honest, I'd still rather retreat and resent and hold on to *my* things

than pray for those who have mistreated me.

I'm happy to do to others as I would have them do to me when it comes, for instance, to letting someone have my car park at the shops. But I suspect responding to the deeper pain, the deeper mistreatment with love, generosity and prayer is where the real freedom lives. And I can't do that. But Jesus can. Only Jesus can provide that freedom because he gave up his for my sake.

Loving my enemies requires knowing them—and letting Jesus work through me.

Let's know each other. Let's live in the fullness of life that God intends.

Prayer

Lord, please give us the willingness to love our enemies because of how Jesus loved his. Show us today who we can pray for and work in us that which pleases you as we give to others out of your grace. Amen.

Next step

How can you show kindness today to someone who has not treated you well?

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Day 5:

The Right Clothes

"Therefore, as God's chosen people,
holy and dearly loved, clothe
yourselves with compassion, kindness,
humility, gentleness and patience.
Bear with each other and forgive one
another if any of you has a grievance
against someone. Forgive as the Lord
forgave you. And over all these virtues
put on love, which binds them all
together in perfect unity."

(Colossians 3: 12-14)

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Reflection

Clothe yourself. Clothe yourself with compassion, kindness and humility, gentleness and patience. Sounds like a fully immersive approach. Couldn't I just carry kindness and humility around as a handy accessory ready to whip them out at the appropriate occasion?

Bear with each other. Sounds like an effort. Couldn't other people just bear with me? I'm pretty nice, most of the time.

Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Sounds hard. Did you have to set the bar so high? Couldn't I just forgive insignificant misdemeanours and continue to harbour resentment for the big grievances?

Put on love. Sounds like an ensemble and quite the fashion statement. Wrap this all together with love.

I'm so glad that as I look in the mirror at my attempts to clothe myself, I see you, Lord, and your perfect love and forgiveness. I'm so glad I can ask you to clothe me with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. I can ask you to give me the willingness to forgive. I can ask you teach me to love.

For I am chosen, holy and dearly loved . . . and so are my neighbours.

God knows us and loves us. Let's know each other. Let's live in the fullness of life that God intends.

Prayer

Thank you, Father, for choosing us, for loving us and for showing us how to live with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience towards each other. Fill us with your Holy Spirit so that we might reflect your character. In Jesus name, Amen.

Next step

Which character attribute do you need to wear today?

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Day 6:

After christmas

"If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."

(1 John 3: 17,18)

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Reflection

How many people do I know who genuinely lack material possessions?

Not how many people do I **know about** that lack material possessions, but how many do I **know**?

I often think about this at Christmas. At Christmas we like to be generous. Sometimes we wrap up a gift to give to a stranger in our community. Sometimes we wrap up boxes of gifts and send them to people in other countries. Sometimes we deliver hampers to people who might live on the fringe of our social sphere.

But how often do we get past

the seasonal act of gift giving, handing neatly wrapped boxes from a distance and yet enter into a caring conversation with our brothers and sisters in material need?

And how can we not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth if we stand at arm's length? How can we be generous, to express the love of God that is within us if we hide away from those who we are called to take pity on?

We need to connect with and know our neighbours in need.

Let's know each other. Let's live in the fullness of life that God intends.

Prayer

Help us, Father, not to retreat into comfortable circles but to reach out with intention to know those who are vulnerable so that we might really know them. Help us to be generous with the many gifts you've given us—long after the Christmas season. Because of Jesus, Amen.

Next step

How can you gather some friends from your church to get to know those in need in your area?

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Day 7:

Cheering for You

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

(**Hebrews 10: 24,25**)

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Reflection

If I could follow Jesus without you I would. No offense.

Honestly, I'd prefer it be just Jesus and me, nailing life on *my* terms without the inconvenience of other people.

But I know that God has other ideas—and thankfully, they're much better than my preferences! He wants us to meet together, spur one another on toward love and good deeds. He even wants us to encourage one another. And not just spur one another on but *consider how we may* spur one another on! Give it some thought! Throw in some creativity!

So, let me spur you on. Imagine me as a nimble cheerleader, a

shouty coach at the side of the mat, a sports fan leaning over the barricade screaming at you . . . whatever takes your fancy. And then hear this:

You are known. You are precious. You are loved.

You are invited to the party. You are invited into God's story.

I need you, because without you I cannot flourish. You belong. You were masterfully created.

Give all of your life to God. He's got this.

Let's know each other. Let's live in the fullness of life that God intends.

Rock on.

Bec

Prayer

Thank you, Father, for the gift of community. Show us today who we can encourage because of all the ways you have encouraged us through the grace you gave us in Jesus. Amen.

Next step

What are some crazy and creative ways you can cheer someone on today?

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Day 8:

Nope. Can't do it

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."

(Philippians 2: 3,4)

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Reflection

Could this verse be more challenging?

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.

Nothing? Not even a few things?

Value others above yourself.

Send me straight to jail. Do not pass go. Do not collect \$200 because I'm a complete failure at this point.

Don't look to your own interests but to the interests of others.

Don't you mean consider the interests of others once I have all I need?

Who wrote this? How hard is it? Does the marketing department know about this?

If you can muster the courage to read through Philippians 2 to

verse 12 you will note the timely exhortation to do everything without grumbling. I'm not surprised Paul considered this an important inclusion given all the challenges he tossed in along the way.

But you will also—thankfully—see that it is *God who works in us* to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. We *can't* fulfill this tall order to love others. But Jesus can—through us. So let's be glad and rejoice as we are united with Christ!

Let's experience the freedom of valuing others above ourselves.

Let's know each other. Let's live in the fullness of life that God intends.

Prayer

We admit, God, that it's hard to love others on our own. But we know that you can through us. Show us, Lord, how to look to the interest of others above our own, receiving from you the gift of freedom we have in you as we value others above ourselves. In Christ alone, Amen.

Next step

How can you turn your grumbling today into gladness and praise to Jesus?

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Day 9:

Famous for Jesus?

"By this everyone will know that
you are my disciples, if you love
one another."

(John 13:35)

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Reflection

Wait. I thought people would know that I am a disciple of Jesus because of how awesome I am at life. They'd see how I don't break the 'rules'. They know I don't use rude words. And I don't wear the wrong thing (most days).

So everyone knows I'm your disciple by these things, right, Jesus?

No? Oh, I get it. People will know that I am your disciple because of what I *don't* do. People will know what I'm against. People will know I'm right.

'Oh, dear one', Jesus says. 'Not quite.'

No, Jesus is saying that the shining light, the beacon on

the hill, the evidence of me being your disciple is my love for others? *Our* love for each other? You and me and all the church? That is what we are to be famous for?

How are we doing so far?

Wait. Maybe don't answer that.

But what could life be like if we *did* love one another the way you love us and the way you call us to love each other? What if we put others before ourselves? What could life be like if we truly knew each other? Wouldn't that be a glimpse of God's Kingdom come?

Let's know each other. Let's live in the fullness of life that God intends.

Prayer

May your Kingdom come. May your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Next step

What if you gathered some Christian friends to consider all the ways you could love one another so that others might know you're disciples of Jesus?

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Day 10:

Warts and All

"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."

(Proverbs 27:17)

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Reflection

No joke! I'm so sharp I want to poke a few eyes out!

If I'm honest, I'd rather have some nice cosy friendships and leave the iron sharpening for others for now. Give me nice round bouncy people who don't rub me up the wrong way. That's what I'm looking for.

I'd like to dismiss those people who have any chance of sharpening me, thanks very much.

I mean, I guess there's a chance that there might be more wisdom 'in the whole than in one part' idea, that together we can know and do more than in isolation, that perhaps we were created to be sharpened not sedated.

But it's uncomfortable.

It's not easy to invest in relationships that challenge me. It's not easy for me to trust that God provides a safe haven for me to be vulnerable. It's not easy to live in the honest realisation that I need others and that they need me.

But God in his wisdom created me to live in community, warts and all. He created me to love and be loved, to serve and be served. And he has made it abundantly clear that his body needs all of its parts to function as he intended.

This is his command: Love each other.

Let's know each other. Let's live in the fullness of life that God intends.

Prayer

Dear Lord, teach us to love each other as you have loved us. Give us the willingness to invest in challenging relationships and to grow in unity so that you might be glorified. In Jesus name. Amen.

Next step

How can you be intentional today in asking a trusted Christian friend to 'sharpen' you?

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Day 11:

God Moments

"For where two or three
gather in my name, there am
I with them."

(Matthew 18:20)

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Reflection

I often have half an idea. You know, the beginning of a concept or a half a plan.

The other day one of my half-baked ideas turned into something magical, because it wasn't about me. In a meeting I voiced the beginnings of an idea. It was weak and incomplete, but I voiced it anyway. Then my friend added some wisdom to the idea. And another friend added a dash of creativity and clarity, and before you knew, it we were sitting back smugly admiring our genius, drinking in the masterpiece.

But really, we knew, it was a God moment. God had spoken through the group, through us being together, and created

something we could not create on our own.

God's clever like that, I've noticed. Weaving his purposes through our relationships. Giving us the gift of needing each other. Assigning various talents and gifts to each part of his body.

And how amazing is it that the almighty creator of the universe is with us when we gather in his name!

So, let's gather! Let's gather in his name and know that he leads us and shapes our half-baked ideas to glorious gifts that reflect his genius!

Let's know each other. Let's live in the fullness of life that God intends.

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for being with us as we gather. Teach us to listen to you and to wait patiently for your guidance. Thank you for making us uniquely and wonderfully for your purposes. Amen.

Next step

Can you recall a time you knew God was at work in a group of friends? Share it with someone!

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Day 12:

The Gift of Confession

"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."

(James 5:16)

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Reflection

In my youth I was a hairdresser. And let me tell you, I heard things.

I'm not sure if it was the relaxing shampoo or the undivided attention and listening ear every six weeks that did it, but people shared their lives with me with a breathtaking honesty. It made me realise that we are created to be known, warts and all, and that sharing our weakness, confessing our sins to another human being can bring healing.

It's not easy though. It feels vulnerable to admit our defects. Perhaps that's why people choose their hairdresser to be vulnerable with, because they can keep their honest confessions hidden from the

people who love them. But that seems sad to me.

Because while I might have been able to offer a listening ear and a fancy haircut, we didn't pray for each other. We didn't confess our sins to each other or find healing together.

But we, as followers of Jesus, can do that with each other. We can know each other and confess our sins to each other. We can know healing, because our Lord took our sins on the cross and gave us his word and his people to bring us into the wholeness he desires for each of us.

Let's know each other. Let's live in the fullness of life that God intends.

Prayer

Help us, Lord, to trust each other with our truth, to know healing as we pray together. Give us opportunities, we pray, for confession and wholeness. Thank you for your cleansing work on the cross. Amen.

Next step

Find a mature Christian friend you can trust and consider how confession might be a way toward wholeness.

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Day 13:

Quirky Body Parts

"For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

(Romans 12: 4,5)

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Reflection

I'm not sure I got past the giggles about body parts when I learned this verse as a child, and so it wasn't until recently that I gained an appreciation for the phrase each member belongs to all the others.

Sure, I heard teaching about the functioning body needing all the parts, but I sat there wondering if I was an armpit, hoping I would be the neck. Because while the head seemed important, it was the neck that turned the head. Needless to say, I was missing the point.

God in his wisdom has created us with different gifts, and he has also created us as members of one amazing body. We need

each other. We need each other to be active participants, to work with each other, to share our gifts, just like our physical body needs each quirky part to function throughout the day.

That's why we need to know each other, intimately, as the body of Christ, the beautiful and physical extension of Jesus on earth.

We need to know each other's gifts, each other's strengths, each other's failings.

Because if Christ is our head, we belong to each other.

Let's know each other. Let's live in the fullness of life that God intends.

Prayer

Father, please teach us to work together as one. Teach us to belong to each other and to care for each part as you care for us. In Jesus name. Amen.

Next step

Which part of Christ's body are you most like and how can you help serve and love the whole body?

Day 14:

The Fellowship of the Believers

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

(Acts 2: 42-47)

Reflection

I'm pretty comfortable with the breaking of bread, to be honest. I think I've nailed that. As for devoting myself to teaching and fellowship, I mean, I consume delicious teaching and selective fellowship on Sundays. That's the same thing, right?

I'm going to skip over the 'selling of possessions to give to anyone in need' part and make some adequate justification about that in my head.

And sure, let's eat more bread at home. I'm happy to throw in some praise to God if I can soak up some favour.

And so there you have it. Fellowship 101, the Be-
paraphrased version.

Because for some reason, even though I deeply desire the kind of fellowship described in Acts, I constantly settle for an imitation version that doesn't require much

of me. Perhaps that's part of our Australian culture, where we settle for less than the best.

But I do wonder. I wonder what could be if I embraced true fellowship—like I've often seen in places like India and Bangladesh. And I do wonder how many would be added to our fellowship daily as they were saved if I embraced the authentic fellowship of believers around the country and across the globe.

Because it seems that Acts calls us to exactly that. It's what I am called to as a follower of Jesus. We are all called to love one another—remember?—so that everyone will know that we are his disciples.

We are to know each other. To know and worship God, and to live in the fullness of life that God has always intended for each of us in every part of the world he created.

Prayer

Lord, there is much we can do to love you and love your world. Please teach us to enjoy true fellowship with one another so that together we may serve the world as those who love our Lord and Saviour, Jesus. Amen.

Next step

How can your fellowship with other Christians help build a better world for all?

Better world *for all*

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