

MIKAL KEEFER

# GROWING SPIRITUAL GRIT

FOREWORD BY **RICK LAWRENCE**

52 PERSONAL DEVOTIONS

JESUS-CENTERED DEVOTIONS



# INTRODUCTION

You know those devotional books you read first thing in the morning, snuggled in a comfy chair with a mug of coffee steaming at your elbow?

This isn't one of those.

These are devotions you can't do in your pajamas—at least, not most of them.

They're not about making you comfortable.

If anything, they'll make you a bit *uncomfortable*—because they'll have you doing the very things Jesus had his first followers do. Hard things, but things that ultimately gave those disciples the fortitude to own their faith, stand strong, and follow Jesus no matter what.

These devotions will help you grow grit. *Spiritual* grit.

Grit is that elusive quality that enables people to persevere, to commit, and stay committed. It's what propels some people forward when they're too exhausted to take another step. It's dedication—but it's something more.

Grit picks up where dedication leaves off. It's what gives the very best athletes their edge, what pushes some people to hammer away at an injustice long after everyone else has walked away.

And *spiritual* grit is what keeps some people tightly focused on and abiding in Jesus, following him no matter how difficult the path. It's rare, powerful, and transformative.

And it's exactly what Jesus is looking to build in you.

Here's the catch: You develop spiritual grit much as you develop grit anywhere else in your life: by doing stuff.

Hard stuff.

Hard stuff that turns out to be good for you. That helps you rely on Jesus and see him working in and through you.



Hard = Good, at least in the kingdom of God.

We call these 52 grit-growing devotions “*do-votions*” because each asks you to *do* something.

To move just outside your comfort zone, out to where you can see Jesus more clearly. To have conversations you’ve not had before, to look at people through fresh eyes, to lean into challenging things.

To risk relying on Jesus.

You get two options in each devotion: to do something gritty and to do something even grittier. Feel free to do one or both. Ask Jesus what he recommends.

You’ll then reflect on what you’ve experienced and talk it over with Jesus. That’s a grit-builder, too.

And you’ll find brief accounts of how other people—people like you—have grown grit in their lives. It’s an opportunity to tag along as they discover the same lessons you’ll discover in your own life.

Because after all, we’re all in this grit thing together.

Don’t worry; there’s nothing here that will leave scars. But you *will* stretch—in a good way. In a spiritually gritty way.

So take a deep breath...and let’s get started.

Let’s grow a little grit.



# KEEP THE FAITH— AND TRUST JESUS

It's several years into Jesus' ministry, and the disciples can see the wheels are falling off.

The crowds have thinned. Religious leaders Jesus has offended along the way are circling around like wolves closing in for the kill.

And Jesus seems unable—or maybe unwilling—to do anything about it. Even after he's publicly criticized. Even after a crowd in the Temple courtyard tries to stone him to death.

Even as the disciples point out the obvious: Jerusalem is no place for Jesus—or them. They'll be walking into a lions' den the moment they cross back into Judea.

But Jesus isn't persuaded. He's going to Judea and on into Jerusalem with or without them.

So it's up to the disciples to decide: Do they trust Jesus enough to follow him when everything they see tells them to cut their losses and walk away?

There's no question that they believe in Jesus, that they have faith. The miracles they've seen, the teaching they've heard, the healings that made Jesus famous—all of that convinced them long ago that he is who he says he is.

But when their lives are on the line, do they trust him?



Thomas' response to the dilemma is classic. He draws in a long, deep breath and then sighs, "Let's go, too—and die with Jesus" (John 11:16).

Then this band of brothers, this dozen disciples, silently falls into step behind Jesus.\*

Jesus' first disciples don't just have faith in Jesus—they trust him. And faith and trust are less alike than they appear at first glance.

Having faith actually isn't all that hard.

You can easily have faith that an ancient elevator creaking open in front of you is safe. It's carried passengers for decades, it was installed back when things were built to last, and some inspector has signed off that the floor's solid and the cables aren't frayed.

But when you step into the elevator and punch a button for the 30th floor, that's when faith turns into trust.

Faith prompts a nod of agreement. Trust prompts action.

If that's true—if trust translates into something that can be seen, heard, touched—what can you point to in your life that indicates you trust Jesus?

*\*Read the entire account in John 11:1-16.*

## GRIT GROWER I: TRUST WALK

You may be more trusting than you think.

Not sure about that?

Do this: Walk around your house or apartment and briefly touch everything you trust, often without even being aware you trust it.

The medicine bottle on the kitchen sink: You trust that the pharmacist didn't accidentally substitute cyanide.

The electric outlet? You trust it will work when you plug in the vacuum cleaner.

The TV or tablet on which you watch news? You trust that what you see on it is the truth, nothing but the truth and...well, maybe you don't trust *everything* in your house.

And that's okay: It's wise to trust carefully.

See how many objects—or people—you touch in a five-minute trust walk.

## **And Even Grittier**

Take a virtual hike through the contact list on your phone. How much do you trust the people whose names scroll past?

Who's trustworthy? mostly trustworthy? less trustworthy?

And how do you decide where each name falls on your trust scale?

Now consider this: If Jesus did this same exercise and your name scrolled past, how do you think he'd rank your name on his list of trustworthiness? Why?

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What did you discover about yourself and trust?

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What did you discover about Jesus?

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What—if anything—would Jesus have to say or do to increase your trust in him?

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Where was the spiritual grit in these experiences? You've now grown as a result of what you've done. What's different about you now, and why?

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## GRIT GROWER 2: TRUSTING FOR THE RIGHT WORDS

There's a reason we love coming up with plans and then asking Jesus to put his stamp of approval on them: It means we're in control.

Which isn't all that trusting. Or grit-growing. Or God-honoring.

So do this: Pick up your phone. Ask Jesus who he'd have you call—and why.

It could be someone who needs to feel remembered. Or maybe it's someone whose relationship with you is strained. It could be someone you've never met.

Listen for Jesus' voice. Be open to a face floating into focus.

Trust that what comes to mind was prompted by Jesus...and make the call.

### And Even Grittier

It's time for a field trip.

If possible, take another Jesus-follower with you so you can talk about the experience afterward. But if that doesn't work, it's no problem.

You won't be alone.

Go to the nearest hospital emergency room, and when you get to the door, pray this: "Jesus, for the next hour, I'm at your disposal. You lead, and I'll follow."

Then walk in, find a seat in the waiting area, and trust that Jesus will tell you what's next.

Maybe he'll ask you to pray for that woman weeping in the corner. Or strike up a conversation with the angry man pacing the room.

Trust Jesus for direction. For the right words. For whatever's coming next.

What did you discover about yourself through these experiences?

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What did you discover about trusting Jesus?

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In what ways does putting yourself out there without a plan build your trust in Jesus?

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Where was the spiritual grit in these experiences? How are you different as a result of these experiences, and why?

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### GRIT GROWER 3: TELL A SECRET

And not just any secret.

Tell a *secret* secret—one that would complicate your life if it were whispered around. That would scuttle your ship if it were posted to social media.

The sort of secret you've walled off inside yourself. That you haven't shared with many people...maybe with anyone, ever.



A secret that's a weight, a chain around your heart.  
Find a place where you can speak out loud and not be heard.  
Then share that secret with Jesus. Hear yourself say it aloud.  
Picture his face as he listens to you. What's that you see in his eyes?

### **And Even Grittier**

Tell that same secret to a person—a person you trust.  
Who? That's up to you, but beware: You're putting your comfort, perhaps even your future, in that person's hands.  
So choose wisely.  
What's the secret? And who's the person?



What did you discover about yourself through these experiences?

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What did you discover about trusting others?

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How trusting would you say your relationship with Jesus is? Why do you answer as you do?

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Where was the spiritual grit in these experiences? What strength have you gained through them?

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## SPIRITUAL GRIT MEETS... A MEDICAL TRAGEDY

When Lynne met Chris, she couldn't believe her luck.

"We were a perfect fit," she says. "I loved being outdoors, and he felt the same. We worked in the same industry. We both loved God—and still do."

A quick courtship; a wedding crowded with friends and family; and then a honeymoon of lazy mornings, afternoon hikes in the mountains, and biking through some of the most spectacular scenery on the planet.

Where, on a remote trail, Chris' mountain bike caught a rock, flipping him over the handlebars.

And snapping his neck.

Chris survived, but as a quadriplegic. In a split second, Lynne's and Chris' lives changed forever. And in one way, they changed for the better.

"I discovered I was married to a prayer warrior," says Lynne. "There was so much he couldn't do any longer, but he could pray—so that's what he did. Constantly. For me, for other people, for the world at large.

"Chris and God became best friends."

Another unexpected outcome of Chris' situation was that both he and Lynne found they had no choice but to trust Jesus.

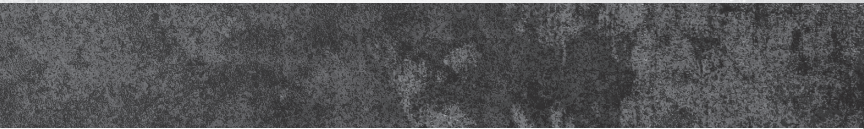
For income.

For Chris' ongoing health.

For their relationship to survive now that much of their physical intimacy was gone.

No, they're not living the life they imagined—and they'll be the first to tell you that. They've long ago tossed out the window any expectations and assumptions about how their life together would unfold.





There have been significant, profound losses. More than once they've looked at their lives and wondered what God had in mind when he placed them where they are. They've wondered when and how Chris will finally get comfortable with his view from a wheelchair.

From the outside, relying on their own understanding, this tragedy makes no sense.

But Lynne and Chris are thriving because they're also trusting.

Which means they're pretty sure the word *tragedy* doesn't really describe what happened.

If God's in it, it's not a tragedy. If Jesus is somehow expressing his love and drawing them closer to him through what's happened, no matter how painful it is, they'd be fools not to embrace him even in their discomfort.

"We aren't doing this on our own," says Lynne. "We lean on Jesus. We turn to him around the clock. We look for the Spirit in every situation.

"And above all, we trust that Jesus knows what he's doing."

Spiritual grit: to have a default setting of trust in Jesus when inexplicably hard things happen, to come to him for help rather than to lay blame at his feet.

What's your default setting when hard things happen?

Is it trust...or something else?



# DON'T WORRY

When Jesus tells a crowd—one that includes his disciples—not to worry, they wonder if he's forgotten who he's talking to. Because, from where they sit, they're dealing with a few worry-worthy issues in life.

For starters, most of them are poor.

That whole “Give us this day our daily bread” request Jesus tucks into his model prayer is real; many people shuffling around in Jesus’ audience are literally unsure where their next meal will come from.

Which explains one reason there's such excitement whenever Jesus multiplies fish and bread and provides an all-you-can-eat buffet.

Plus, there's this: Their future is shaky at best.

The Jewish people in Jesus’ audience are never sure what might set off the Roman soldiers patrolling their neighborhoods. One wrong look, one cross word, a misunderstanding of any sort—the Romans have no shortage of crosses they can pull out on a moment's notice.

Still, Jesus says this:

“You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money.

“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?

“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?

“Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?”  
(Matthew 6:24-27).



Great advice, Jesus...but it's hard not to think about money when you're worried about feeding your family. If Jesus would multiply some silver coins instead of bread, a great deal of worry would evaporate instantly.

Besides, worrying is what some of us do best.

Fast forward and Jesus is sending his 12 disciples out into the world to do ministry. And he's allowing them to take with them...nothing.

No money. No food. No clothes other than what's on their backs.

All they get is a walking stick—period.

Once again, it seems Jesus is deliberately allowing a worrisome situation to continue. What's he up to?

Perhaps this: Spiritual grit grows when his disciples find themselves forced to rely on him rather than themselves. As positive as self-reliance can be, it's not the point of spiritual grit. In fact, it can seriously undermine it.

Spiritually gritty people rely on Jesus, not themselves. The strength and character they develop serves them well, but it never pulls their eyes off Jesus.

Jesus' first disciples discovered that truth, and it's waiting for the rest of us Jesus-followers to discover, too. You included.

The ability to not worry doesn't come from being so strong that nothing can harm you. You'll never be that strong. Rather, it comes from following someone else who's so strong that you can never be separated from him and the eternal life he offers you.

When you're with Jesus, you never have to worry.

Because you're with Jesus.

*\*Read the entire account in Matthew 6:19-34.*

## **GRIT GROWER 42: TELL A FRIEND**

Tell a friend what you worry about most.

Is it money? health? relationships? What pegs your worry meter, and what do you think drives that worry?

Have the conversation, and then ask your friend to pray for you.

Right now, not later.

And out loud so you can hear what God's hearing. So you can soak up the encouragement that comes with knowing God is aware of what's worrying you.

### **And Even Grittier**

Get thee to a waiting room.

At the Department of Motor Vehicles, a pharmacy, or a hospital. Anywhere you're not required to sign in and can sit without being booted out.

Then...wait.

Wait for five minutes...then ten...wait an hour if you want. Nothing will happen. You won't be called to the counter; your number will never appear on the monitor.

And that's exactly what you're doing when you worry: You're waiting for something that may not happen.

While you're waiting, invite Jesus to sit with you.

Maybe there's something he wants to say to you about worry.

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What did you discover about yourself as you considered worry? as your friend prayed for you?

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What did you discover about Jesus?

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In what ways was this experience hard...and good?

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Where was the spiritual grit in these experiences?

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## GRIT GROWER 43: FIVE-MINUTE BAG

Use an old backpack or suitcase to create a five-minute bag.

That's the bag you'd grab if you got word you had five minutes to evacuate your house or apartment. If a fire was sweeping closer or a flood washing your way, it's the stuff that will help you reclaim your life later.

Medications. Insurance policies. Your birth certificate and passport. A thumb drive loaded with family photos, documents, and electronic records. Food and water for a couple of days. Spare batteries.

A Bible.

Whatever you'd take, bag it now.

Keeping that bag tucked behind a closet door, ready to grab and go, is one way to reduce worry. But it doesn't stop the fire or the flood from coming. It doesn't replace what will really tame your worry: *trusting Jesus*.

By the way, having a five-minute bag isn't a bad idea, so make one.

But ask Jesus about trusting him more, too. What does he suggest about trusting him more...so you can worry less?

### And Even Grittier

Poke a hole in the center of a piece of notebook paper.

Now take your newly created view blocker with you and meet a friend for coffee, preferably someplace where there's a lot going on.

Starbucks, maybe. Or a sidewalk café.

Hold the paper up so you can peer, one-eyed, through the hole as you talk.

Carry on a conversation for a few minutes before dropping the paper. Notice that, as you talked with your friend, you didn't notice the stares of other patrons who are clearly looking at you now.



Narrowing your focus to just your friend helped you not notice anything—or anyone—else.

Was that a good thing? Less than good?

And how's that like paying ridiculous attention to Jesus and not paying attention to those things that prompt you to worry?

By the way, you've got a *wonderfully* patient friend. You should definitely pick up the check. Definitely.

What did you discover about yourself as you considered worry in your life?

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What did you discover about Jesus?

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In what ways was this experience hard...and good?

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Where was the spiritual grit in these experiences? What are some things you do that unnecessarily contribute to your anxiety, and what can you do about them?

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## GRIT GROWER 44: BUBBLE WRAP

Do this: Use bubble wrap to encase the most important item in your home.

It can be anything, or anyone, as long as it's precious to you.

Step back to admire your work.

Invite Jesus to stand at your elbow and take a look, too.

A question: How much do you worry about harm coming to what's precious to you? Does that worry peg your emotional Richter scale, or doesn't it cross your mind?

And how much do you worry about harm coming to your relationships—especially your friendship with Jesus? What do you do to protect that friendship?

There's no need to worry about Jesus drifting away from your friendship. He's all-in—always.

So abide. Just abide.

Remain connected to Jesus, and he'll give you the grit to abide in him.

## **And Even Grittier**

Give something away—something you worry you might lose one day.

A family heirloom...that high school sports trophy you can't bear to throw out...a refinished piece of furniture that proves you're the undisputed DIY Champion of the Universe.

Whatever it is, however significant it is to you, hand it to a friend who's long admired it...or drop it into a Goodwill bin.

Hard to even contemplate, isn't it?

But the truth is, no amount of worry makes your treasure yours forever. Or protects it from all that can harm it. There's no true security other than the security you'll find in Jesus, and he's way more interested in people than he is in your coin collection.

So...will you do it?

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What did you discover about yourself as you pondered worry and trust?

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What did you discover about Jesus?

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In what ways was this experience hard...and good?

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Where was the spiritual grit in these experiences?

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## GRIT GROWER 45: WORRIES, DISSECTED

Dissect one worry that's keeping you up at night. Break it down into smaller pieces.

That lump you've felt? The one you fear might be the beginning of your end?

It needs to be checked out, so make a list:

- Call your doctor.
- Set an appointment.
- Get test results, and then decide on next steps.

Worries grow strong in the absence of action. And they grow stronger still when you don't invite Jesus into the situations that worry you.

Because look at each of those steps above.

Which one is bigger or more powerful than Jesus?

None. So don't face your worries alone. Take Jesus along.

He has the grit to stick with you and the power to fix what's broken.

### And Even Grittier

Light up a room.

*Really* light it—drag in lamps from all over the house. Open up the drapes and throw wide the shutters. Even flip on that flashlight you keep in the junk drawer.



Then jot on a sheet of paper the worry you told your friend about (Grit Grower 42). Lay that paper on the floor, and aim as much light as possible directly at it.

Ask Jesus to look at the worry you wrote down.

That should be easy because you've lit it well enough to be visible from space and he's considerably closer than that.

Then ask Jesus to flood your heart with peace, just as you've flooded the room with light. To remove worry from your heart and mind even if the situation prompting that worry isn't resolved.

To replace worry with trust.

And amen.

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What did you discover about yourself through these experiences?

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What did you discover about Jesus?

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In what ways were these experiences hard...and good?

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Where was the spiritual grit in these experiences?

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## SPIRITUAL GRIT MEETS... GRANDPA JACK

Back in the day, Grandpa Jack bought a new Buick every five years.

Buicks were perfect old-guy cars because they were the size of living rooms and floated over rough roads without a tremor.

And Grandpa Jack, who was Russ' grandfather, kept his Buick in showroom condition.

"He washed his car every Saturday morning even if he hadn't pulled it out of the garage all week," says Russ.

Russ tagged along once when Grandpa Jack went car shopping.

"He walked into the dealership with a description of the car he wanted in one hand and his checkbook in the other. He announced that he expected to buy the car—outright—that was described on his list.

"And he expected to pay the amount he'd filled out on a check. Whoever could make that happen would have a sale that day.

"No haggling. No delays. No upsells. Cash on the barrel—that was Grandpa Jack."

Because Jack had calculated a reasonable price, within an hour a shiny new Buick was sitting in front of the dealership, ready for him to drive away.

Russ, having just gotten his driver's license, was supposed to drive the old Buick home. But before he took off, Grandpa Jack asked him to retrieve a hammer from the trunk.



Russ did as he was asked and handed over the hammer.

“The salesman and I watched Grandpa Jack walk behind the new Buick and carefully smack the bumper—hard—on the temporary license plate. He then lifted the paper, examined the small dent he’d made, and nodded in satisfaction.”

Russ says he and the salesman thought Grandpa Jack had lost his mind and told him so.

“Grandpa Jack said that now he didn’t need to worry about who might put the first dent in his new car,” Russ says. “He knew who’d done it. It was him.”

When Russ got the old Buick home, he carefully lifted the metal license plate and sure enough: There was a small dent.

One about as big around as a hammer tap and as deep as a new car owner’s peace of mind.

That hard thing dreaded by most new car owners—the appearance of a first dent or ding—held no power over Grandpa Jack.

Knowing the secret under his license plate allowed Grandpa Jack to relax.

Knowing who you follow and who loves you—let that help you relax, too.



# IT'S TIME TO GET GRITTY

When life serves up challenges or draws you out of your comfort zone, it's time to get gritty. *Spiritually* gritty. Spiritual grit is what enables people to follow Jesus no matter how difficult the path. It's rare, powerful, and transformative. And it's exactly what Jesus is looking to build in you.

These 52 devotions will help. They'll propel you into the risk of relying on Jesus and encourage you with stories of how others have gotten gritty in their own lives.

Ditch the comfort zone, welcome challenge, and start growing your grit now.



**MIKAL KEEFERS** is a follower of Jesus who often discovers he's wandered off into the weeds. Jesus has used many of the activities in this book to get him back on track. Mikal is the author of numerous books, including the Jesus-Centered guides *Help! How Do I Read the Bible?*, *Help! How Do I Pray?*, and *Help! How Do I Know God's Will?*

MyLifetree.com | Printed in China



ISBN 978-1-4707-5338-2

USD \$14.99



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RELIGION/Christian Life/Devotional