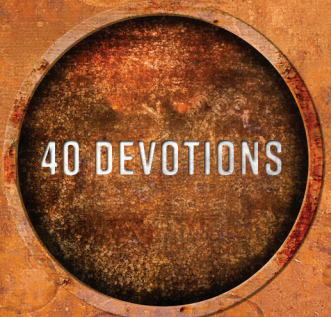
MIKAL KEEFER

FOREWORD BY **RICK LAWRENCE**

GROWING SPIRITUAL GRIT

FOR TEENAGERS



JESUS-CENTERED DEVOTIONS

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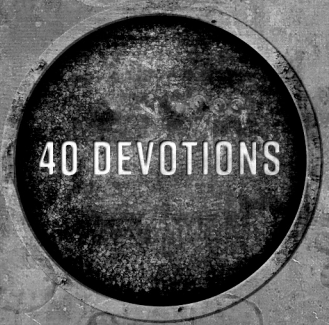

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Growing Spiritual Grit for Teenagers

40 Devotions

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Finals. Dating weirdness. Family meltdowns.

Life is full of tough stuff.

We need strength and perseverance to navigate the rough terrain of life. And along the way, we discover that our own strength and perseverance are often not enough.

We need something bigger and tougher. We need grit.

Grit is the engine that drives perseverance. It's the core strength that helps us face and overcome challenges and obstacles. And it's the essential characteristic that sustains our lifelong journey with Jesus.

Without grit, our faith wavers, distractions derail us, and our focus blurs.

And here's the kicker: Every person who has had a great impact on the world, everyone who's lived out the mission and work of Jesus in world-changing ways, needed grit to do it. In fact, they needed a supercharged version of grit that's stronger than the garden-variety stuff we all develop along the way.

That "regular" grit helps us hang tough when we're tempted to quit. It helps us solve difficult problems that seem too big to overcome. But personal grit is limited by our capabilities; *spiritual* grit is fed by the limitless resources of Jesus and is anchored in a growing dependence on him.

When we're captured by a passion for Jesus, we not only take on the tough stuff, but we also discover joy in the journey because Jesus is our intimate companion.

And as daunting as all of this might sound, you're about to be shocked by how fun growing spiritual grit can be.

Rick Lawrence
Author of *Spiritual Grit*

These devotions will make you uncomfortable.

That's because you'll be doing the very things Jesus asked his first followers to 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.

And 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.

You'll move outside your comfort zone, out to where you can see Jesus more clearly. You'll have conversations you haven't had before, look at people through new lenses, lean into challenging things.

You'll 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.

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 takes 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 isn't actually 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?

Good news: You'll soon be able to point to one or both of the experiences you'll find below.

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.

That medicine bottle: You trust that the pharmacist didn't accidentally substitute cyanide.

The electric outlet? You trust it will work when you plug in your laptop.

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

And that website where you learn about the world? You trust that what you see 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 each of 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?

TALK WITH JESUS

Jot your thoughts about...

- **What did you discover about yourself and trust?**

- **What did you discover about Jesus?**

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

- **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?**

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 friendship 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 to strike up a conversation with the angry man pacing the room.

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

TALK WITH JESUS

Jot your thoughts about...

- **What did you discover about yourself through these experiences?**

- **What did you discover about trusting Jesus?**

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

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

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?

TALK WITH JESUS

Jot your thoughts about...

- **What did you discover about yourself through these experiences?**

- **What did you discover about trusting others?**

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

- **Where was the spiritual grit in these experiences? What strength (even a little) have you gained?**

STRENGTH FOR THE TOUGH STUFF

Life's full of tough stuff. Maybe you're even going through some hard things right now. (That's completely normal...but not exactly fun, right?)

To get through these hard things, you need grit. Grit is the determination to stick it out when challenges and obstacles come your way. Grit doesn't always come easily or naturally; instead, you practice it until your strength and resilience grow.

This devotion will help you practice. It focuses on one person who's really good at making you stronger: *Jesus*. And then it shares his techniques for building grit in your life. Through short prayer ideas, Bible notes, questions to think about, and things to try, you can begin growing your grit starting now.

MIKAL KEEFER is a long-time follower of Jesus who frequently discovers that he's wandered off into the weeds. Jesus has used many of the activities in this book to pick him up, dust him off, and get him back on track.

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