

MIKAL KEEFER

GROWING SPIRITUAL GRIT

FOREWORD BY **RICK LAWRENCE**

52 PERSONAL DEVOTIONS

JESUS-CENTERED DEVOTIONS



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Growing Spiritual Grit

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FOREWORD

Does your desk look like mine?

I mean, is it a chaotic mess punctuated by piles of bills, projects, and rubber-banded correspondence waiting for you to pay attention?

From 15 feet away, these piles look like square-ish icebergs floating on the sea of my desktop, crashing into each other and covering 97 percent of the surface area.

Unlike icebergs, though, my piles are noisy—they cry out to me with the shrill blast of a screaming toddler...

- *You thought you were going to scrape by on the bills this month, but you forgot this one, didn't you? What will you do? I asked, WHAT WILL YOU DO?*
- *Umm...Weren't you supposed to make that appointment for a yearly physical exam? I wonder what undiscovered health concerns lurk in you, right now, because you've avoided this so long...*
- *What about those forms you were supposed to fill out for your daughter's college financial aid—have you missed the deadline?*
- *And what exactly are those yellowing pages at the bottom of that pile on the right side of your desk? Talk about procrastination—something under there must be pretty intimidating...*

The screaming toddlers of our everyday pressures, responsibilities, and challenges can wear us out. Maybe that's why we crave our favorite escape hatches (food, drink, entertainment) just to forget about our troubles for a micro-season.

But that won't put a cork in the toddler's mouth—it's all waiting for us on that desk or in that email inbox.

We need strength and perseverance to travel through the rough terrain of life. But 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 of great impact in the world, everyone who has lived out the mission and work of Jesus in world-changing ways, needed grit to do it. In fact, these people needed a supercharged version of grit that is stronger than the garden-variety stuff we've all developed along the way.

That "regular" version helps us hang tough when we're tempted to quit, and 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 by a growing dependence on him.

When we are captured by a passion for Jesus, we're motivated to point our little dinghy toward that sea of icebergs with a determination that is beyond our own capacity.

Not only do we take on the tough stuff, but we discover joy in the journey because Jesus is our intimate companion.

In his letter to the followers of Jesus living in Rome, the Apostle Paul describes the mechanics of spiritual grit: "We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love" (Romans 5:3-5).

With the “dear love” of God sustaining us, we find the grit we need to not merely slog through our challenges but to actually “rejoice...when we run into problems and trials.” That’s a crazy-miraculous way to live. And it’s available to everyone, no matter how big our icebergs appear to be.

And speaking of miracles, my friend Mikal Keefer performed one with the book you’re holding right now.

He immersed himself in my book *Spiritual Grit*, soaking his hyper-creative brain in its pages, and then created this companion devotional that is uniquely and brilliantly practical.

In the thoughts and questions and ideas you’re about to encounter, you’ll find a path toward transformation in your life. If you feel stuck in your personal trajectory or long for greater strength in the midst of challenges or want to help the people you love grow in their own core strength, you’re going to love this book.

And as daunting as all of this might sound, you’re going to be shocked by how fun the journey is.

Rick Lawrence

Author of *Spiritual Grit*

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?

●.....●

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 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?

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?



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 have you gained through them?

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."

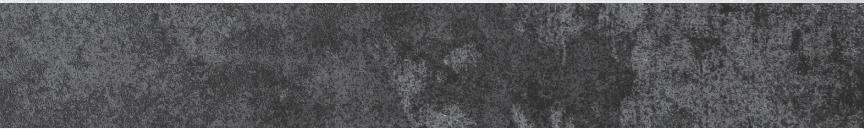
Another unexpected outcome of Chris' situation was that both he and Lynne found they had no choice but to trust Jesus.

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?

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 KEEFER 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?*

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