

A 7 Day Devotional
Inspired by *Wake Up!*



INTRODUCTION

SCOTT A. SHUFORD

We created this devotional for you. Whatever your belief or situation, you are a member of the worldwide family of God: created by our Father, redeemed through his Son and within reach of the Holy Spirit. We hope you will not just listen to and enjoy the words and music from the “Wake Up!” album, but that you will engage with and grow from Pope Francis’ message of unity, charity, and hope that transcends all the issues that separate God’s children.



Be Blessed,
Scott A. Shuford
Founder
FrontGate Media

CALL TO WORSHIP

OLUJIMI (OLU) BROWN

As people gather from all the countries of our world, we hear the clarion call of Pope Francis to “Wake Up!” in this marvelous seven-day devotion filled with inspiring music and words of hope-filled grace. Our children’s future is at stake and the need to reclaim our passion for the poor is at hand. Both young and those who are aging must come together to help heal our world and restore justice and peace. Created in the image of God, we have a divine mandate to be in ministry with the marginalized members of our society. Our brothers’ and sisters’ voices are weary. Worldly corruption and greed overshadow their plight. To bring healing to our world, we only have to “Wake Up” to the grace of our God, to the mutual connection of service to all humanity.

We celebrate the Catholic Church’s legacy and how people of faith continue to respond to God’s call to be global citizens with

a global concern for all of God’s creation. We have all fallen asleep and failed to hear the cry of the oppressed, sick, lost and marginalized. However, today, tomorrow and forever we declare that we are now awake and are living in the light of Christ. As people gather from all the countries of the world, to Pope Francis we say, “Yes!” To renewed living in the spirit of being fully aware of our world, we also say, “Yes!”

Through these words of Pope Francis and these soothing melodies, we will be reminded of who we are. We will be ignited to live fully through justice and peace. What an honor for us to take this seven-day devotional journey with Pope Francis and with each other all over our world. How special it is to know that all of our lives will be better because we spent this time together.



Olujimi (Olu) Brown and his spouse, Farrah, are the proud parents of Daya and Langston. A graduate of Gammon Seminary/ITC, Olu is the founding lead pastor of Impact Church, the fourth fastest growing congregation in the United Methodist Church-USA. Impact, located in the East Point community of Metropolitan Atlanta, GA, recently launched its second location and is committed to sharing the love of Christ with the world. Visit Olu and Impact at <http://www.impactdoingchurchdifferently.org>.





DAY 1

01 “ANNUNTIO VOBIS GAUDIUM MAGNUM!”

WAKE UP TO THE GOD WHO LOVES YOU!

PASTOR RICK WARREN

*“Whoever is without love does not know God,
for God is love.”*

1 John 4:8 (New American Bible)

The Bible tells us that God is love. It doesn't say “God has love.” It says “God IS love!” Love is God's nature. Love is the essence of His character. Love is how God naturally acts.

There would be no love in the universe if our Creator was not a God of love. The only reason you are able to give and receive love is because you were made “in the image of God.” That makes you uniquely human, different from animals. God gave you the ability to love Him and to love others.

The Bible says that God created you simply to love you. You were made to be the focus of God's outrageous love. It is the reason your heart is beating right now. If God did not want to love you, then you would not exist. God only creates things that He loves.

Now God didn't need you – he wasn't lonely. Rather He wanted you, much like loving parents want children that they can shower their love upon. God wanted a family, and He wants you in it!

God's love is unlike any human love. No man or woman will ever love you as much as God does, or the way God does.

First God's love for you is unconditional. That means he loves you whether you do right or wrong. His love isn't based on what you do. It is based on who he is! God's love for you is based on his character, not your conduct. It is based on his promise, not your performance.

Second, God's love for you is unchanging. It is consistent. He loves you whether you feel it or you don't feel it. God isn't moody or fickle or inconsistent. His love is steady, secure, and solid. You can build the foundation of your life on God's love for you because it doesn't waver from day to day. Think about this amazing fact: God will never love you any more than he does right now! And God will never love you any less than he does right now!

Third, God's love for you is unending. It is eternal. That means it will never stop. You can't make God stop loving you! You can try, but you will fail, because God's love is unconditional, unchanging and unending. That means nothing in your past and nothing in your future will ever make God stop loving you. You don't know what your future holds, but you can count on this: God will still love you no matter what happens. Romans 8:38-39 tells us “NOTHING can separate us from the love of God!”

You will never be able to fully understand how much God loves you because your brain capacity isn't big enough. It's like an ant trying to understand the Internet. God's love is too great for you to grasp. A man once said to me “I think my problem is that I don't love God enough!” I replied, “No, your problem is that you don't understand how much God loves YOU! For if you did understand that, you could not keep from loving God back!” So wake up to how much God loves you! It's a truth that will transform your life!

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Rick Warren has helped people live with hope and on purpose for more than 40 years. He's the founding pastor of Saddleback Church in Southern California and author of several books, including “The Purpose Driven Church” and “The Purpose Driven Life,” read by more than 100 million people in 137 languages. He created the PEACE Plan (plant churches of reconciliation, equip servant leaders, assist the poor, care for the sick, educate the next generation), which is used by churches in 196 countries. You can hear Daily Hope, Rick's daily 25-minute audio teaching, or sign up for his free daily devotionals by going to RickWarren.org.





02 “SALVE REGINA”

WHO IS PART OF THE FAMILY OF GOD? MARCUS HATHCOCK

“**T**here are people whom we instinctively consider less and who instead are in greater need...”
—Pope Francis, September 22, 2013.

Compassion, at its root, is seeing people as God sees them. Regardless of their history, their decisions, even their sins-- seeing a beloved, created being in need of love. That’s the way Jesus lived, and by association, the way his mother, Mary, lived too.

Combined with the words of the hymn “Salve Regina” from the Middle Ages, Pope Francis’ words shared in the second track of his music project, Wake Up!, are a powerful reminder to not just love another, but to see everyone the way God does-- as interconnected, part of the same family.

The list of people in need is indeed great. As Pope Francis listed, it includes “the most abandoned, the sick, those who have nothing to live on, those who do not know Jesus, youth who find themselves in difficulty, young people who cannot find work.”

We’re invited to “be true brothers and sisters”--an invitation that’s been shouted from the mouth of God throughout the generations. Long before Jesus’ earthly ministry, Deuteronomy 15:7-8, 10 (ESV) prescribed the familiar connection between those in need and those who can help:

“If among you, one of your brothers should become poor ... you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake.”

And in the wake of Jesus’ ministry, the Apostle John posed an important question for those whose view of others doesn’t match God’s family values: “But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?” (1 John 3:17 ESV).

It’s a great question for all of us to ask as we take note of the people around us who have needs. Who are they? What’s their story? What are their needs? How have we viewed them? How does God view them? And how can God fill in the gap in our perspectives?

Lord, help us to love one another as you’ve loved us (John 13:34). Give us a realistic perspective of the grace you’ve given us, that we may be instruments of that grace to our brothers and sisters who need it, regardless of if we believe they deserve it or not. We get to love and You get to sort out the rest. Thank you for using us; give us Your eyes. In Jesus’ name, Amen.



Marcus Hathcock is the Executive Editor of NewReleaseToday.com, the largest Christian music and media site, offering the most complete and up-to-date info on faith-based arts and entertainment, and home to the NRT Radio Network with five unique stations featuring dance/electronic, worship, rap/urban and more. Husband to Savannah, father of three and a worship leader from Boise, ID, he just released his first EP, Songs For Tomorrow, and occasionally blogs at www.mheternal.com. Visit www.NewReleaseToday.com for the latest in Christian music.





DAY 3

03 “CUIDAR EL PLANETA”

MAKING THE IMAGINABLE TANGIBLE

JACI VELASQUEZ

Protecting our planet, eliminating hunger; both are noble goals. But these human endeavors will never succeed if we continually describe them with words like ‘insurmountable’ and ‘overwhelming.’ Our world has enough limitations; we need not create more with the things we say.

Spoken thoughts have power. Words can make the imaginable tangible. In fact, this very world was created when a divine thought was simply spoken out loud.

With just a word, the Creator made something out of nothing. He spoke and Time began. His voice set the Earth spinning. Grass, trees, and animals flourished; all from nothing. Then, rolling up His sleeves, God knelt on Earth’s freshly formed shore, and sunk His hands deep into the mud.

The Creator did not speak us into existence. He made us. With His own hands He sculpted our eyes, ears, nose and toes, the chambers of our heart, even the weave of our hair. Then He breathed into that first mud-man the breath of Life; filling his lungs with air, his mind with thoughts, and his soul with the same creative imagination that invented him.

But what have we done with this divine gift of creativity? Though we were handed a perfect planetary playground, a garden seeded with enough nourishment to sustain countless generations; we allowed our budding creativity to be manipulated by the Deceiver; stirring within us the desire for something “more.” That hunger made the imaginable tangible. And we reached for the forbidden.

By the time we discovered that our ‘something more’ was nothing more than the seedless fruit of ‘nothing’, it was too late. And with that tainted snack underneath the tree, we traded in our paradise for a world that is still reaching, still ... hungry.

God made all men equal. We created division all by ourselves. Our transgression set this world in motion. And the choking weeds of our actions have left our planetary garden starving for both peace and nourishment.

But our Creator is forgiving. In fact, He sent us His only Son, clothed as a mud-man, to show us, by example, how we can once again, re-create this world.

Standing in a field, Christ found himself surrounded by a multitude of His followers. They were famished. Realizing their plight, Jesus borrowed a boy’s snack and set off to eliminate their hunger. In the eyes of His disciples, the attempt seemed noble, but insurmountable. Then Christ spoke to the small basket of food. Suddenly, before everyone’s eyes, the meal became a banquet for thousands.

The example is clear. With a word, He made the imaginable tangible. Therefore, nothing in this world is insurmountable: protecting this planet, eliminating hunger, even healing the division between our Creator and ourselves.

Spoken thoughts have power. Therefore, we can accomplish anything if we simply breathe this daily prayer: “...If you can make something out of nothing, Speak Lord... make something out of me.”



Sixteen #1 radio hits, 17 albums, 7 Dove Awards, 3 RIAA Gold Records and 3 RIAA Platinum records under her belt, is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to Jaci Velasquez. Velasquez has also been the co-hostess on Salem Broadcasting Network’s nationally syndicated “Family Friendly Morning Show with Doug and Jaci Velasquez” for nearly five years. These days, even as a multi-tasking singer, songwriter, actress, radio personality, special event hostess, wife, and mother of two, her passion to serve God with the gifts He’s given her remains at her core. For more about Jaci, visit www.JaciVelasquez.com.





DAY 4

04 “¿POR QUE’ SUFREN LOS NINOS?”

“¿POR QUE’ SUFREN LOS NINOS?” “WHY DO CHILDREN SUFFER?”

MATTHEW WILLKOM

In his 2015 Apostolic Journey to the Philippines, Pope Francis was faced with a question from a 12 year old girl that has vexed many believers and has kept countless others from faith in a loving God. How could such a Being allow bad things to happen to good people?

A young child, more than anyone else, reveals the goodness of God, but also the trust He places in each one of us to care for others. Why do children suffer? “Only when our hearts can ask this question and weep, can we begin to understand. There is a worldly compassion which is completely useless,” the Pope says.

The sin of this world is ugly: human trafficking, abortion, embryo manipulation and child neglect (often by one’s own parents) all cry out to God for justice. Are we willing to confront these evils? If so, we have yet another choice: We can either succumb to a narrow outrage, pointing the blame solely on those who perpetrate such crimes and thereby conveniently use them as a distraction from our own sin; or, we can be moved with an other-worldly compassion for the victims (which include the perpetrators themselves) that can lead to a softening of our own hearts – a resolve not only to help the victims, but also to show mercy to those who have personally wronged *me*.

The latter path is what St. Francis of Assisi chose, and it is no coincidence that our current Holy Father took this saint’s name when elected pope – the same Holy Father who declared a 2015-16 Jubilee Year of Mercy. Rather than accuse others of what was wrong with the world, Francis of Assisi instead set about reforming himself, proclaiming God’s mercy. In the process, he rebuilt the Church and changed the world.

Satan entices us to sin in order that he might turn around and accuse us without any accompanying hope of redemption. However, scripture tells us that, “...the accuser of our comrades

has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. But they (the saints) have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony...” (Rev. 12:10-11)

This calls forth from us a deep faith, expressed in the underlying chant present in this track, *Jesu Dulcis Memoria*. This hymn expresses the profound love God has for humanity, and how He rewards those who turn to Him in repentance, who show mercy to others, and ask the difficult questions...

O hope of every contrite heart!
O joy of all the meek!
To those who fall, how kind Thou art!
How good to those who seek!

The answer to the question of suffering lies ultimately with sin and its effects in the world – something that God our Father had not intended, but has provided a way through in His Son Jesus Christ, the Lamb who was Himself as innocent as a young child – who in fact became a child! The reason Jesus in turn sent the Holy Spirit was to provide hope and mercy through repentance immediately after someone is convicted of sin, since God desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth, no matter what they’ve done (cf. 1Tim. 2:4).

It can be difficult sometimes to conceive that such hope and mercy are available for those who turn and repent of the crimes outlined above. Yet, that’s exactly what we’re called to embrace, especially if I expect to receive that same mercy. Governments and NGO’s can make laws and programs that are beneficial and needed, but only Jesus Christ, through His Church, can convert hearts and lead men to their ultimate eternal destination, where every tear of every child will be wiped away, and there will be no more mourning or crying or pain (cf. Rev. 21:4).



Matthew Willkom is the Morning Show Host and Program Manager of Spirit Catholic Radio Network. Matthew holds a Master’s degree in Pastoral Theology from Ave Maria University. Spirit Catholic Radio is heard throughout the Upper-Midwest and worldwide online at <http://www.spiritcatholicradio.com>.





DAY 5

07 “WAKE UP! GO! GO! FORWARD!”

WAKING UP MATT MAHER

Recently, I was out on tour. On the bus were the “usual suspects” - my band and my crew. However, during this tour, my brother and my 4 year old son, Conor, joined me. I love traveling with my son. His sense of adventure is contagious, his imagination is always active out on the road, whether it’s venturing into a new city, or a new venue or a new room of people each day. One of my favorite parts of him being on this trip with me was in the morning, watching him wake up every morning. Like any child, his first waking moments are groggy, confused and innocently curious. His favorite thing to do each morning, after he realized he was safe, with me, on the bus, was to open the shade of the back lounge where we were sleeping. Watching his eyes transition from the sleepy, to the confused, to a curious wonder towards the new environment he saw out of the window was amazing. Even more touching was his desire to share all the wondrous thoughts and questions with me, “Dada - where are we? Do you see those trees? What’s over that fence?” As a father, it brings me so much delight to see the wonder in my son, but it delights me so much more when he wants to share his wonder.

It made me think of what God, our Father, might desire for us, His children; how every morning is filled with possibilities and wonder. We wake up to a clean slate, a brand new day. We have

no idea what is in front of us, but as we approach each new day, do we want to share the wonder we have back with God? We are told in God’s Word that His mercies are new every morning (LAM 3:22-23). That means that God has allowed us to WAKE UP!, and He is not sitting there thinking about the troubles of yesterday. He is not holding a grudge over us for our wrongdoings from before. In this Year of Mercy, it’s important to remember that we are invited to humbly accept His mercy, not just one morning. Every morning we can live in the wonder of the landscape that is the mercy of God.

As the Scripture beckons, “Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you!” (EPH 5:14 NASB), we have the opportunity to joyfully enter into each day, by the mercy shown us (ROM 11:30) and take on the responsibility to “be vigilant, not to allow the pressures, the temptations and the sins of ourselves or others to dull our sensitivity to the beauty of holiness, to the joy of the Gospel”; we have the opportunity to join in God’s work and in God’s love and mercy for His body, His people. To share it with wonder so that our “friends, neighbors, countrymen, everyone on this great continent, may now receive the mercy of God.” (ROM 11:31).



Since his 2008 major label debut, recording artist, songwriter and worship leader Matt Maher has become a staple in the artistic and songwriting community. An eight-time GRAMMY® nominee, he has garnered multiple radio successes writing and recording songs like “Lord, I Need You,” “Your Grace Is Enough,” “Because He Lives (Amen),” and more. In 2013, Maher performed on stage with Pope Francis in front of more than three million people at World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro, and will perform at World Youth Day 2016 in Krakow, Poland. He also performed at the Festival of Families, The World Meeting of Families - in Philadelphia in 2015. Maher released his fifth full-length studio release in March 2015 titled Saints and Sinners. For more about Matt, visit www.MattMaherMusic.com.





DAY 6

09 “PACE! FRATELLI!”

WHERE IS YOUR BROTHER? OLUJIMI (OLU) BROWN

In this impactful invocation, Pope Francis reminds us of the importance of living in peace and not war. When we think of war, we may immediately think about soldiers, weapons and death. Even with this reality, we fight other wars where bloodshed is not as visible as the torturing of our human souls.

Since the beginning, humanity has warred with our greed. In Genesis 4:8-9 (NRSVCE), Cain led his brother out to a field and killed him. “Then the LORD said to Cain, ‘Where is your brother Abel?’ He said, ‘I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?’” We can only imagine how Cain came to kill his own brother, igniting warfare within his own family. Today, like then, God is still asking each of us, “Where is your brother?”

Presently, our world aches from the aftermath of war. Although language varies among nations, war’s sorrow remains the same across the globe. It has created a painful language of loss and despair. So many young people have died on the battlegrounds of nationalism. We survivors are left with a great cost of conflict, paid over time at a soaring premium that no accountant can tally.

We pray for the day when every society reflects the words in Isaiah 11:6 (NRSVCE), “The wolf shall live with the lamb ...” We pray for the day when youth will not die young on battlefields, rather enjoy the privilege of growing old and gray. We pray for the day when soldiers will not be deployed to war, but employed as peacemakers and community builders. We pray for the day when we have victory over the covert wars of racism, ageism, sexism and classism.

Pope Francis urges us to “Wake Up!” and to “keep alive within us the flame of hope...” We must never allow the cruel ambitions in our world to extinguish our flame of hope. We must “Wake Up!” with pure hearts and hopeful spirits, insisting that we disarm the bombs, which have broken our bodies and crushed our souls. We must expect that the balms of love and forgiveness will heal our land. Through Christ we believe and hope that one day all wars will end and we will see all of humanity as our brothers and sisters. Then when God asks the question, “Where is your brother?” our collective answer will be, “He is right here, alive and well.”



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DAY 7

11 “FAZEI O QUE ELE VOS DISSER!”

DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU

DEACON KEITH FOURNIER, CATHOLIC ONLINE

Pope Francis said to the faithful, “Dear friends, we have come to knock at the door of Mary’s house. She has opened it for us, she has let us in and she shows us her Son. Now “she asks us to ‘do whatever he tells you’ (Jn. 2:5).” He prayed, “Yes, Mother, we are committed to doing whatever Jesus tells us! And we will do it with hope, trusting in God’s surprises and full of joy.”

The first miracle occurred at a wedding because marriage is a sign of Christ’s love for the Church which is His bride. (Rev. 19:7-9) (Eph. 5:32) It occurred at the request of His Mother, who is now our mother. “When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple there whom He loved, He said to His mother, “Woman, behold, your son.” Then He said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his home (John 19:26-27).”

The Catechism explains Mary is: “the mother of the members of Christ since she has by her charity joined in bringing about the birth of believers in the Church, who are members of its head.” (CCC #963). Gregory of Nyssa wrote, “What came about in bodily form in Mary, the fullness of the Godhead shining through Christ in the Blessed Virgin, takes place in a similar way in every soul that has been made pure.”

Let us join Pope Francis and ask Mary for help in listening, deciding and acting on God’s invitations to each of us:

“Mary, woman of listening, open our ears; grant us to know how to listen to the word of your Son Jesus among the thousands of words of this world; grant that we may listen to the reality in which we live, to every person we encounter, especially those who are poor, in need, in hardship.

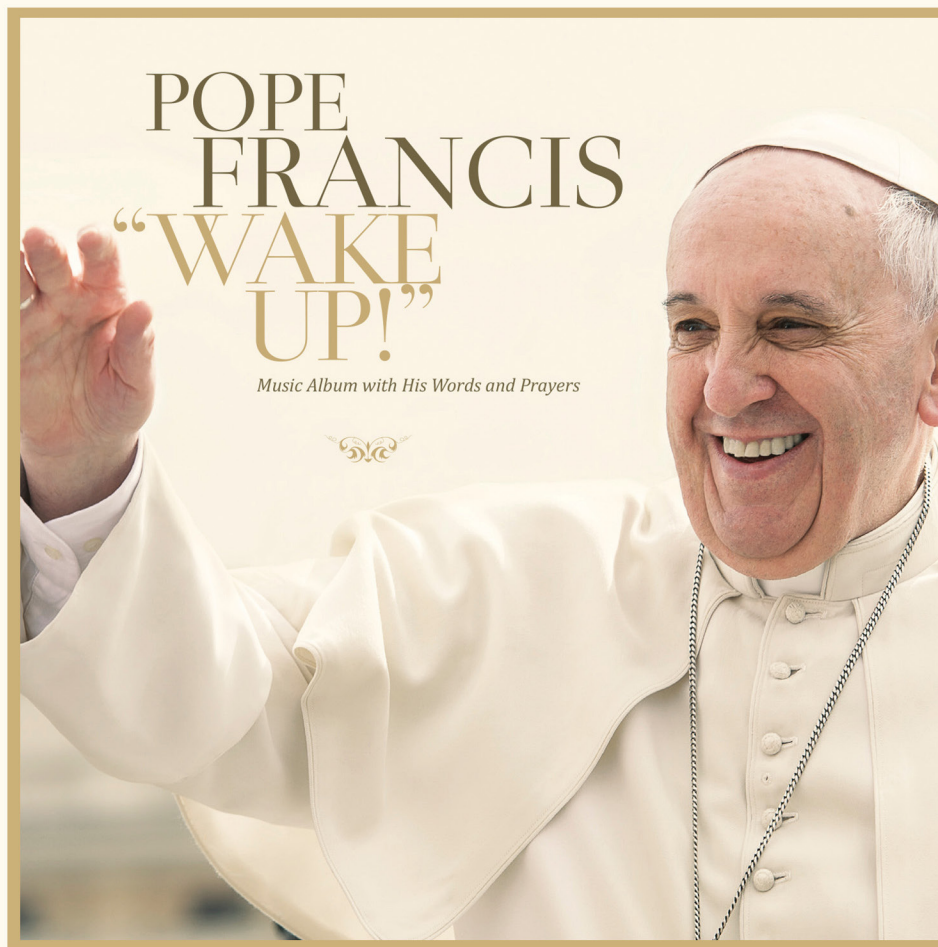
“Mary, woman of decision, illuminate our mind and our heart, so that we may obey, unhesitating, the word of your Son Jesus; give us the courage to decide, not to let ourselves be dragged along, letting others direct our life.

“Mary, woman of action, obtain that our hands and feet move ‘with haste’ toward others, to bring them the charity and love of your Son Jesus, to bring the light of the Gospel to the world, as you did. Amen.”



Deacon Keith Fournier is a Catholic Deacon of the Diocese of Richmond, Virginia, U.S.A, Constitutional lawyer, speaker, teacher and published author. He holds a Bachelors and Masters Degree in Theology, a Juris Doctor Degree in Law and is completing his PhD in Moral Theology. He is the Editor in Chief of Catholic Online, one of the world’s largest integrated media platform’s dedicated to presenting the Catholic Christian worldview in this new missionary age. Visit Catholic Online at www.Catholic.org.





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