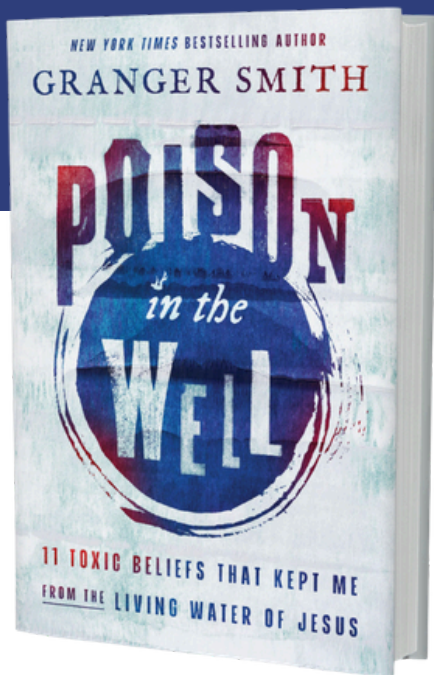


5-DAY DEVOTIONAL READING PLAN

Poison in the Well
By Granger Smith



When it dawned on me that I had been living as a “nominal Christian” or a CINO (Christian in name only), I knew I was missing out on the depth and power that authentic faith in Jesus embodies.

Let’s look at five toxins I believed—and how God is faithful to rescue us from those lies so we can receive the new life Jesus died and rose to secure.

DAY 1 - TOXIN #1: I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A CHRISTIAN

John 3:3, 1 Peter 1:23

Today, it should be completely normal to ask, “When did the Lord save you?” or “When did you become a Christian?” But more times than I can count I’ve heard someone respond with, “Well, I’ve always been a Christian.”

Let’s be clear—some people genuinely don’t remember the exact moment of their salvation, and that’s okay. Not everyone has a dramatic before-and-after story. Some remember only a season of change, not a specific day. Others honestly can’t recall a time they weren’t following Jesus. But here’s the issue: The Bible never teaches that we’re born Christians. It teaches the opposite: that we were born sinners and must be born again (John 3:3).

Nicodemus was a religious man who had grown up in the Word and thought he knew all the right things. But Jesus looked him in the eye and said, “Unless you are born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Jesus was showing him that religious heritage isn’t how you’re saved. Church involvement isn’t either. Being around the things of God isn’t the same as belonging to God. So when I hear someone say, “I’ve always been a Christian,” that phrase really sticks with me because I used to say it too. Considering what I know now about my own story, that line sounds like an echo from a life I no longer recognize. Salvation isn’t passed down like a recipe or a family tradition. As if you could inherit faith the same way you inherit your mama’s freckles or your daddy’s jawline. But that’s the lie so many of us grow up believing, especially in the South—that Christianity is just part of the family tree. You were born into it. You’ve always been in it. You never were “lost,” so you never looked to be found.

That’s not how the gospel works. A generation that assumes they are saved because they were raised in church is a generation that walks away because they never saw what saving faith looked like. Parents believe the gospel. Kids assume the gospel. Grandkids reject the gospel. It’s a slow drift, and it’s deadly to mistake heritage for rebirth.

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Your son, Jesus, to live, suffer, die, and rise again, that I might be rescued from sin and death into new, eternal life with You. Amen.

DAY 2 - TOXIN #2: I'M OK JUST TRYING TO BE GOOD

Matthew 19:21, 26; Luke 19:8–9

Is doing good deeds and trying to walk the straight and narrow enough? No, it falls far short. And this isn't just a modern issue; it's been happening since Jesus walked the earth.

A wealthy young man once came to Jesus and asked, "What must I do to gain eternal life?" He was moral, respectful, and seemingly sincere. He'd kept the commandments since his youth, or so he thought. On the surface he looked like a model believer. But Jesus looked past his résumé and straight into his heart.

"If you would be perfect," Jesus said, "go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Matthew 19:21).

That word "perfect"—*teleios*—doesn't mean flawless, and certainly not sinless. It means whole. Complete. Undivided. Jesus was exposing the young man's divided heart. This man had all the right answers but not the right allegiance. He had followed the rules but hadn't followed Jesus. And so he walked away sorrowful, not because he had great wealth, but because great wealth had him.

The rich young ruler hadn't come to surrender; he'd come to negotiate. And Jesus put His finger on the idol that owned his heart.

The disciples were stunned when they heard this. "Then who can be saved?" they asked. Jesus replied, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

Friend, God calls us to be His. To lay down anything that keeps us from Him, even if it's something we've clung to our whole lives. But don't miss this—eternal life doesn't come from what we give up; it comes from trusting the One who gave up Himself for us.

So if, like me, you have said, "I'm a pretty good person," then I have a test for you. Ask yourself: If I died today, why should God let me into heaven? What have I assumed makes me right with God? When was I born again...or am I?

If the answer to that last question is no, today is your day to surrender everything to Jesus and open your heart's door to His saving grace.

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, thank You for saving me when all my efforts to be "good" came up empty. You alone are good, and I praise and thank You today. Amen.

DAY 3 - TOXIN #3: I READ A BIBLE VERSE NOW AND THEN

Luke 24:27, 44; 2 Timothy 3:16

A verse a day is like a breadcrumb a day: not very nourishing.

Before the Lord opened my eyes to that, I always knew the Bible mattered, but I had no idea to what extent. And every now and then I still catch glimpses of that old way of thinking when I talk with others.

One time I was speaking at a men's gathering. I closed my message with a strong call for men to be in the Word every day. Afterward, a man came up to me, broken over his failing marriage. I gently asked him a few questions about his walk with the Lord. "How's your Bible reading?" I asked. "Man, I read every single day just like you said," he replied, "but I don't get anything out of it."

Something in his tone made me want to press further. "Did you read this morning?" "Yes." "What was it?" "Uh...a part of Matthew, I think." "On your phone?" "Yes." "Can you show me?"

He pulled out his phone and showed me exactly what I suspected: the daily verse that popped up on his Bible app.

Now listen, there's nothing wrong with a verse of the day. Those quick reminders can be encouraging. But if that's all we're feeding on, it's not enough. A single verse without context can't give us the sweep of the story, the richness of the author's intent, or the setting in which those words were spoken. God gave us whole books, not just fragments, and when we read them as He gave them, we see Jesus more clearly and we hear His voice more fully.

Keep in mind, too, that the entire Bible is the Word of Christ. As Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is breathed out by God." Jesus Himself affirmed the authority of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, saying they all pointed to Him (Luke 24:27, 44).

God never divided His Word into “important” and “less important.” The whole Bible carries His authority, the whole Bible reveals His heart, and the whole Bible points us to the cross.

PRAYER:

Lord God, thank You for the truth and power of Your Word. Speak to me, I pray, as I dig into the Scriptures and listen for Your voice in the pages. Amen.

DAY 4 - TOXIN #4: I MIGHT SIN A LITTLE, BUT NOT THE BIG KINDS

Romans 8:13, 1 John 1:9

One of the clearest symptoms of “nominal Christianity” is making peace with sin, treating it lightly, resting on cheap grace, or pretending it’s not really that dangerous. But a Christianity that shrugs at sin isn’t biblical Christianity at all.

Think of it like a rattlesnake on your porch. You don’t pat it on the head and let it curl up by the door; you deal with it, because you know it can kill. But CINOs act as if it’s a pet and keep it around, maybe even act like it’s harmless. Real disciples know better. They see sin for what it is and, by the Spirit, make war.

As Romans 8:13 says, “For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” That little phrase “by the Spirit” is everything. We don’t have the strength in ourselves to win this fight. God gives His Spirit to empower us to put sin to death, but make no mistake—it’s a fight. If we don’t go to war, sin will.

In this broken world, Christians are never done fighting. The battle with sin doesn’t end until we see Jesus face-to-face. Don’t think for a second that I’m somehow past it...I’m not. I stumble. I fall. But little by little the Lord is teaching me to spot the traps before I step in them. To turn my eyes when temptation whispers. To pray when anger flares. To keep Scripture close, like a sword, ready to cut down the lies.

And for those in Christ, there is this promise: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

What a mercy of God! That, even for someone like me, Jesus stretched out His arms on the cross, bearing the nails, so I could be forgiven. I don’t ever want that reality to fade from my mind, or from the minds of my wife and kids, or anyone who sets foot in my home.

PRAYER:

Father, thank You that in Christ, You conquered the curse of sin and death. Strengthen me by Your Spirit today to walk closely with You and resist the lure of evil. Amen.

DAY 5 - TOXIN #5: I'M TOO HOPELESS FOR GOD TO HELP

2 Corinthians 7:10, Colossians 1:27

Have you been living without hope? Not just a bad season, but a long, gnawing despair? Has it been years—or even decades—since a loss, a hurt, a heartache, or a failure, and you still can't seem to move forward? That's a toxin that can eat away at your soul and spirit.

Please hear me: There is no shame in grief. Many of us know the heavy cloud of depression firsthand; I certainly do. I never wrestled with this before our son River drowned. I didn't know what it felt like until we lost him. The sorrow moved from an ache to a weight that changed the shape of my days.

Depression is real, and it can feel crushing. But here's the danger that Paul named in the hardest, most loving way: "For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death" (2 Corinthians 7:10). Godly grief drives you toward Christ. It loosens your grip so you can receive mercy. Worldly grief closes you in on yourself, numbing, blaming, lashing out, or giving up. It's sorrow that refuses Jesus, not by words, but in action, and it leads only to more death.

Godly grief, when it runs to Jesus, gets turned by the Spirit into repentance, renewal, and living hope. The good news is this: Hope isn't a feeling you work up or a mindset you force. If you're a Christian, hope is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). He died for my sin, rose to crush death, and now lives to hold me steady when everything else collapses. That's why Peter called it a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3).

This hope doesn't deny or hide grief, but it transforms it. It doesn't erase pain, but it fills it with God's presence. It doesn't cancel tears, but it gives them meaning.

Real, lasting hope is confidence anchored in Christ. It's the settled assurance that the promises of God are true because the tomb is empty. Our hope doesn't hang in midair; it's tied to Jesus, risen and reigning, interceding for His people.

PRAYER:

Dear God, I am grateful today that I am not without hope. You are my hope. Help me, I pray, to grow closer to You, the hope of glory. Amen.