

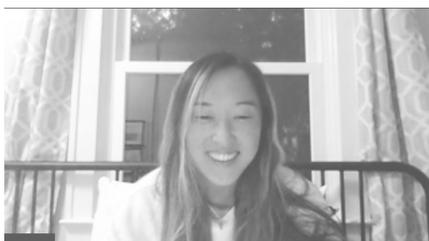
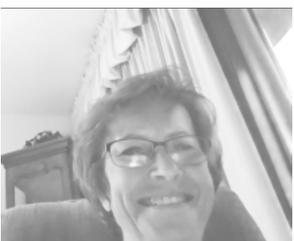


portland
communities

THE EXPERIENCE WORKBOOK

VOLUME 3

BY PASTOR RAY NOAH
WITH PASTOR MATT BLANKENSHIP



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GOD
THE CHURCH
YOUR PURPOSE

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WELCOME TO PORTLAND COMMUNITIES

Welcome to the next chapter of the Portland Communities Experience. Our goal for this experience is for you to deepen your connection with God, His Church and your purpose, through the discipleship community with whom you are about to grow.

Portland Communities are about more than another series of classes or church programs rather they are about true transformation and life change. Through the next eight weeks, it is our hope that you root your life in rhythms of discipleship that draw you closer to God, inspire real questions and conversations, and help you find yourself in God's great story.

Communities are both the discipleship intensive you are about to embark on, as well as any small group gathering through the Portland Christian Center family that meets regularly to spend time together, discuss Scripture, and do life together...serving Christ. In fact, at the end of the Communities experience, you and your group will be uniquely set up to continue growing and serving together as a small group. God's plan is for His Church to grow together in community, which is why Portland Communities is designed to equip you to do just that.

Over the course of the Communities Experience, you will engage in the rhythms of learning to be Christ-like. In this guide, you will find daily devotionals designed to engage you in regular reading of scripture and prayer. Through God's power and His working through your group interactions, we pray you will experience spiritual freedom, practice giving and serving sacrificially, and sharing your testimony (your story) about how God has transformed your life.

Whether you are meeting in person or online, this workbook is designed to be a devotional and discussion guide for you. We hope you will read and dwell on the daily devotionals as well as journal answers to the daily response questions. All of this will come in handy for weekly community group discussion.

When we finish this season of Communities, we will celebrate together what God has done and launch you and your group into a new season of exhilarating spiritual growth. Our hope is that you continue these rhythms as your spiritual journey continues beyond Communities. So, come with an open heart and mind, and see how God will surprise you!



COMMUNITIES COVENANT

It is our desire to promote a safe environment for sharing the most important things in life. We want to provide a place where people can reveal openly and confidently the broken areas of their lives without judgment or condemnation. We are not here to “fix” one another, but rather encourage openness, vulnerability, and intimacy during discussion and prayer times. To ensure a safe haven for personal sharing, we ask that each Portland Communities participant enter into an agreement of confidentiality. This agreement is between you, your group and God.

Additionally, to get the most out of this experience, our hope is that you make a commitment to attend all sessions and participate in the group discussions. Whether in person or online, consistency and participation are crucial.

I agree to attend as many group meetings as possible and keep all things shared by my group members confidential at all times.

Signed

Date

INTRODUCTION

What does it take to be a fruitful disciple of Jesus? It is simpler than you might expect. Not easy, but simple. Mark tells us that when Jesus called His very first disciples, “He appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with Him and He might send them out to preach.” (Mark 3:14)

If we want to have the kind of closeness that the Peter, James, John and the other disciples had with the Lord, and to live the kind of lives of Kingdom impact they had, perhaps we need to go back to this original discipleship template. Maybe authentic discipleship begins, continues and ends simply by “being with Him.” In other words, we need to spend a lot more time with Jesus than we currently do.

I can think of no more effective and satisfying way of doing that than in a community of Christ-hearted friends committed to studying the life of Jesus together — absorbing His words, emulating His life, and acting on His commands. With the encouragement and accountability we offer to each other, we have the opportunity to become so saturated with Jesus that we begin to live as Jesus would if He were in our place.

With that in mind, we have produced this devotional guide. Using the Gospel of John as our guide, you will be given the opportunity to spend time with Jesus within the context of your small group community. All other worthy achievements as His follower derive from this one thing: just being with Jesus in intimate fellowship. In fact, that is what John said,

■ *“This is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” (John 17:3)*

So why John? Two reasons: One, John loved Jesus as much as any person ever did. And we need inspiring examples, so John is our guy because of his singular devotion to Christ. John was extremely close to Jesus, which is precisely why we are going to be absorbing John’s Gospel over the next several weeks. May we end up closer to Christ than ever before.

And, two, John was loved by Jesus as much as any person ever was. Five times, John alone is the disciple described as “the one Jesus loved.” (John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7 & 20) Again, I think that should be reason enough to explore this man’s relationship with Jesus in hopes of finding out what made Him so lovable to our Lord.

Now does it bother you that Jesus would love some more than others? Is that what’s going on here? I don’t think so. I agree with St. Augustine: “God loves each of us as if there were only one of us.” The truth of the matter is that some people have a closer relationship with Jesus than others. And that is simply because they have responded to Christ’s love more than others. So the more we respond to Christ’s personal love for us, the more of His love can be received by us.

I John 3:1 says, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God. And that is what we are!” John was speaking from first-hand experience about an unbelievable opportunity that is available to you, too! Anyone who personally accepts Christ as Savior and Lord is granted the privilege of being adopted into God’s family. And included in that are all the benefits of being fully identified as God’s favored child.

Now that is the opportunity of a lifetime—and beyond! That is the Good News—and it is the best news you’ll hear today, or any day hereafter for that matter. John 1:12 says “To all who received Jesus, He gives the right to become children of God. All they need to do is to trust Him to save them.”

John’s most famous verse is John 3:16. It has twenty-five words. At the center of the verse, “Son” is the thirteenth word. The first twelve words are all about God: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten...” The last twelve are about you: “That whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” God is on one side and you are on the other, and Jesus got in the middle to bring God’s love to you, and you into God’s love—both now, and for all eternity.

Wow! You matter to Jesus that much!

And in this devotional journey you will now share with your community, by revelation—immediate (Divine download) or progressive (walking with Jesus)—grasping what that means will radically change your life.

So enjoy being with Jesus, and enjoy the journey!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Faith Ray". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.





WEEK

1

DAY 1

BEING WITH JESUS

Read John 17:3

“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

More than anything, we were created for an intimate relationship with God. Now, there are certainly other things that will please God and bring glory to Him through our lives, but nothing is more honoring to the Creator than to walk in a close, personal, and loving relationship with Him.

According to the Bible, the only way that gets expressed is by knowing Jesus: by being in an all-consuming, life-altering journey that comes from persistently hanging out with Jesus as His devotee. In fact, the Apostle John, the one who knew and loved Jesus as much as any human being ever, said this was, in itself, eternal life.

Acts 4:13 shows us the inevitable outcome of being in that kind of intimate, persistent, loving relationship: “When the Jewish council saw Peter and John’s courage and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.”

Peter and John had simply “been with Jesus” until they looked and acted increasingly like Him—they had assumed His mindset, absorbed His characteristics and expressed His behavior. They had hung out so closely in such an intense way with Jesus that they had absorbed Him to the point they were now exuding Him without even thinking about it. They had been transformed through that relationship and conformed to that relationship!

That is what you and I were created to experience: A relationship with Jesus whereby His life gets transmitted to us, and through us, so that we begin to transmit the infectious DNA of Jesus Christ.

You may not have a religious pedigree or be well-versed in theology. You may not be naturally winsome, or articulate, or even all that likeable. Your “cool factor” may be pretty much non-existent. Maybe you lack more than you have. That doesn’t matter! What you do have trumps all you don’t have: You have every possibility that Peter and John had to “be with Jesus”.

That is the greatest goal you can have—that at the end of the day, the only thing people can do with you is to take note that you have been with Jesus. They may not like you or be impressed with you and they may wish you would just go away. But when it is all said and done, all they can do with you is to admit, “obviously, you have been hanging with Jesus!”

Make that your goal today. And then start hanging with Jesus. Pure and simple—that is eternal life!

You were made for that! The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8:29, “From the beginning God decided that those who came to Him... should become like His Son.” That is God’s inexorable plan: to make you like Jesus! He is orchestrating everything in your life right now for that purpose—circumstances, disappointments, temptations, opportunities, blessings. At this very moment, God is leveraging heaven’s resources to conform your character to Christ’s. That ought to give you confidence. As A.W. Tozer noted, “When I understand that everything happening to me is to make me more Christlike, it resolves a great deal of anxiety.”

So, your journey into Christlikeness is not all up to you! God is rearranging heaven and moving earth to give you opportunity to be with Jesus—and to become like Jesus.

Yet divine transformation needs human collaboration. In a way, being with Jesus is on you! It is not just a mindset or a good intention. It is an intentional posture. As much as anything, to get intentional with your growth toward Christlikeness will require of you the daily practice of being with Jesus. Divine transformation requires human collaboration!

I would simply suggest that each day—and throughout the day—you literally invite Jesus to join you in what is in front of you. Literally ask Jesus, “How would You handle this situation? What do You think about this opportunity? What should I do about this challenge? How would You respond to this person?” Just practice being with Jesus in the ordinary moments of your daily life.

To get practical with this, think about it this way: If you were to literally spend time with Jesus, what three attributes, attitudes and or actions would you witness in Him?

For me, when I think of what Jesus would be doing in any one of His ordinary days: One, He would be unbendingly truthful, yet incredibly gracious with people. Two, He would serve people—especially those we would consider the least worthy of His service. And three, even when He was treated unfairly, He would never retaliate; He would only offer love and grace in return.

Gracious, serving, forgiving—there are thousands of descriptives I could come up with—you too. So take a moment and write down the first three qualities of Jesus that come to your mind. Then your assignment this week will be to intentionally hang out with Jesus, consciously and consistently doing those three things you wrote down that you believe Jesus would do. Give that your best shot, and most likely, you will look a little more like Christ by this time next week!

And maybe people will take note that you have been with Jesus.

“Putting on Christ...is not one among many jobs a Christian has to do; and it is not a sort of special exercise for the top class. It is the whole of Christianity. Christianity offers nothing else at all.” (C.S. Lewis)

DAY 2

YOU ARE OWNED!

Read John 1:1-5

“Before anything else existed, there was Christ, with God. He has always been alive and is Himself God. He created everything there is—nothing exists that He didn’t make. Eternal life is in Him, and this life gives light to all mankind. His life is the light that shines through the darkness—and the darkness can never extinguish it.”

Think for a moment about the significance of John’s words in verse 3: “[Jesus] created everything there is—nothing exists that He didn’t make.”

If nothing exists that Jesus didn’t make, including you, then what does that mean for you? Well, if you hold the Bible to be true—that it is God’s authentic inspired, authoritative Word—then there is no more significant chapter in the Bible than John 1. And there are no greater words that bear upon your life than what you find in verse 3:

■ *“He created everything there is—nothing exists that He didn’t make.”*

What does that mean for you? Simply, yet most profoundly, this: You are not your own; you are owned. God created you, and as your Creator, He has a right to rule over you. You are not the god of your life. You are not the king of you. You have no rights of godship, no authority to sit on the throne of your kingdom, no grounds for demanding your way, getting what you want, fulfilling your wishes, achieving your dreams, or tickling your fancy.

Yes, you are owned. Therefore, self must be dethroned; it must actually be obliterated!

Since God created you, along with everything else that you see and don’t see, He therefore owns everything. And, since He designed everything in the universe, then everything exists for His pleasure and His purpose. And, by the way, John 1 tells us, since Jesus was with God from the beginning, and is God, and was the agent of creation, then He holds the deed of ownership over you. That ownership is honored through His Lordship over your life. Abraham Kuyper said, “There is not an inch of any sphere of life of which Jesus Christ the Lord does not say, ‘Mine.’”

Now the good news is that His ownership is not grievous or burdensome. God is no tyrant, even though He has every right to be. In fact, it is just the opposite with God: it is an ownership that is loving, generous, and gracious. John says this is clearly demonstrated in the life of Jesus, who came to earth in human form to reveal in living color the God who was previously revealed in His created order and by His written law (John 1:10-11), yet now is revealed as the God who is full of glory, grace, and truth (John 1:14). Furthermore, to all who surrender and reorder their lives

to God's rightful ownership, He gives them the right to enter into a relationship with God in the same way that Jesus lived in relationship with God: as child with Father (John 1:12).

Yes, you are owned. And as self is dethroned, even obliterated, ownership becomes relationship. Then, through relationship, you will witness His glory, you will discover His truth and you will experience His grace. You will now be living in the loving care of the eternal Father as His dearly loved child.

Abraham Kuyper was right: "There is not an inch of any sphere of life of which Jesus Christ the Lord does not say, 'Mine.'" If you claim Jesus as Lord of your life, then He holds the deed of ownership over you. But, this is no grievous ownership. Rather, as you take the step to dethrone self and enthrone Jesus as your sole owner, you will personally and powerfully experience this beautiful reality declared throughout the Gospel of John: a light that can never be extinguished—the abundant life now and eternal life forever.

With that in mind, it is imperative that you realign everything about your life—words, relationships, thoughts, wishes, plans, actions, patterns—to the fact that Jesus is Lord of you. Everything else must become a distant second to that. Truly, since He created you, anything that doesn't fall under His absolute Lordship over your life doesn't deserve to exist at all. As William Barclay said,

■ *"The essence of Christianity is not the enthronement but the obliteration of self."*

Now obviously, you will need the help of the Holy Spirit to achieve complete surrender to His utter ownership—which is a subject that much of the rest of Scripture fleshes out. But as you take the step to dethrone self and enthrone Jesus as the owner of you, you will experience this beautiful reality of John's Gospel: the light of life (John 8:12); a light that can never be extinguished—the abundant life now (John 10:10) and eternal life forever (John 3:16).

■ *In order for any to have Christ as their Saviour they must first have received Him as their "Lord", as their King to rule over them, for God saves none in their rebellion against Him. We must cease our rebellion against Him and His authority and give Him the throne of our hearts as our ruler or He is not our Saviour no matter what our profession. (I.C. Herendeen)*



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Perhaps you may want to join me in offering this heartfelt prayer, "Jesus, You are the rightful ruler of me. I surrender everything I am and trying to become to Your Lordship. Take me over, clean me up, set me on a course that will only and always bring glory to You and demonstrate Your ownership of me to the world. I cannot do this on my own—obviously—so thank You for making this a reality by the same power that created me. In Jesus' name, Amen!"

DAY 3

HOW TO SAVE PLANET EARTH

Read John 1:1-4

In Him [Jesus] was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

An insightful person pointed out that some people change their ways when they see the light, others only when they feel the heat.

First, the good news: God is in control. He has an unstoppable plan—and if you are a fully devoted follower of His Son, Jesus Christ, you are in the very center of His plan. Good things are in store for you. Hang on to that as you read on.

Now the dose of reality: Most people would agree that Planet Earth is in serious trouble; it is rapidly, steadily being engulfed in moral, cultural and spiritual darkness. We don't need a prophet of doom to tell us that; we are reminded of it every time we open our eyes. Ask the average guy or gal on the street and they will tell you that mankind is headed in the wrong direction.

Obviously, this present world has a growing list of seemingly unsolvable needs—poverty, ignorance, climate upheaval, famine, disease, political instability, crime, violence, the threat of war, war, drug abuse, human trafficking, intolerance, religious persecution, the breakdown of the family, and on and on the list goes. Though these problems are nothing new to the world scene, there is now a sense of foreboding in both high officials and ordinary citizens around the globe that these problems are swallowing up any chance for progress toward civility and stability that we might have been moving toward at some point.

The writer of Judges prophetically summed up our twenty-first century world in the last verse in his book when he wrote, “There was no controlling moral authority to govern peoples’ lives, so everyone did what was right in their own eyes.” (Judges 21:25) Unfortunately, in the day of the Judges, and in our day, “what was right”, without the presence of the “Controlling Moral Authority” without fail produces moral, cultural, economic and global chaos. Predictably, what we see and sense today is what happens when, as Aleksander Solzhenitsyn lamented, “Men have forgotten God; that’s why all this has happened.” In his famous Templeton Address, “Men Have Forgotten God”. Solzhenitsyn said:

“The failings of human consciousness, deprived of its divine dimension, have been a determining factor in all the major crimes of this century...Yet we have grown used to this kind of world; we even feel at home in it.”

Don't get used to it! Don't ever feel at home in this present world. Don't accept the growing darkness as inevitable. Why? Light has come into this dark world, and while most reject the light for the growing darkness, you can live in that light and even be a reflector of that light in the darkened corner of the world in which you live.

■ *“Jesus is the answer, for the world today, above Him there’s no other, Jesus is the way.” (Andraé Crouch)*

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

The Apostle Paul wrote in Colossians 1:27, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Since Christ Jesus lives in you by His Holy Spirit, how about you let His light shine through your life in the darkened corner of the world to which He has assigned you? How? Re-read Matthew 5:14-16 where the Lord calls us to let our lights shine. I think you might come up with a few ways to turn on your high beams for Jesus.

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- As you look around your life and the day and age in which we live, what do you see as being engulfed in or controlled by the darkness?
- How is Jesus the answer according to this passage?

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DAY 4

AN UNBELIEVABLE INVITATION

Read John 1:12

Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, he gave the right to become children of God.

What an unbelievable invitation the Apostle John is describing! Anyone who personally accepts Christ as Lord and Savior is granted the privilege of becoming a fully loved child of God—including all the authority and benefits of being fully included in God’s forever family. Now that is an invitation to which no other compares!

Because of statements like that, arguably, the Gospel of John is the best loved of the four Gospels. John speaks from a closeness to Jesus that few have ever experienced—and it leaks through every line in his account of Jesus. There are more memorable verses in this Gospel than the others—John 3:16 for instance, the entire Bible is summed up in just one verse. Each chapter inexorably draws the truly interested and open-hearted seeker to desire Jesus more and more. It’s no wonder people love John’s clear and compelling story.

What John is describing in this stunning invitation is nothing less than unfathomably profound! Think about the One who is really making this offer: It is none other than the eternal and exalted Christ Himself. John describes Him in the most eternal and lofty language possible in the opening lines of chapter one. Let me offer you this paraphrase (from the Living Bible) of how John sees Jesus:

“Before anything else existed, there was Christ, with God. He has always been alive and is Himself God. He created everything there is—nothing exists that He didn’t make. Eternal life is in Him, and this life gives light to all mankind. His life is the light that shines through the darkness—and the darkness can never extinguish it.” (John 1:1-3)

It was God Himself, in the person of Jesus, who came into a world He created—a world that for the most part, not only missed the true consequence of His arrival, but actively rejected it: “But although He made the world, the world didn’t recognize Him when He came. Even in His own land and among His own people, the Jews, He was not accepted. Only a few would welcome and receive Him”. (John 1:10-12)

But here is the good news—and it is the best news you will hear today, or any day hereafter for that matter: “But to all who received Him, He gave the right to become children of God. All they needed to do was to trust Him to save them.” (John 1:12b)

What that means is that if you are trusting in Jesus Christ as your Savior (the only One who can forgive you and cleanse you from your sins), and have personally invited Him to be the Lord of your life (the One to whom you have turned over control of your moment-by-moment life), then you have been given the right (authority given by God Himself) to be made right with Him, brought into His eternal family, given the gift of eternal life (John 3:16) and given the opportunity to walk in intimate relationship each and every day with the very Agent and Owner of Creation (the One who spoke everything into existence by His own breath for His eternal purpose and therefore has the sovereign right to rule over all of it and everything within it).

Wow! You matter to God that much; you are that important to Him!

You have been invited into a close, personal fellowship with Jesus—the Designer, Creator, Ruler and Sustainer of the universe. If you can begin to fathom what that means, it will absolutely blow your mind, in the best sense of the phrase.

The right to become a child of God—now that is an unbelievable invitation! I hope you will believe it—and live like God’s true children are meant to live.

“God’s desire is to not only have you experience His love, but to totally overwhelm you with His love. To have you experience it to overflowing. To have you sense, feel, taste, and touch His love for you. He really wants you to experience Him!”
(Linda Boone, *Intimate Life Lessons*)

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

Memorize John 1:12 in your favorite version. Each day this week, list a benefit of being a true child of God and throughout the day, declare that to be true of you.

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- When you were a kid, was there ever a family that you wished you were a part of?**
- What are the benefits of being a child of God?**
- According to this scripture, what do you have to do to become a child of God?**

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DAY 5

GRACE AND TRUTH

Read John 1:14

“The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

There is a cute story about a family who brought their newborn daughter home from the hospital for the first time. The mom was a little concerned how the baby’s 4-year-old sister—who had been the only child to that point—would handle this new addition to the family. So mom and dad instructed “big sister” that she could be around the baby only when they were there, and that she had to be very loving and very gentle.

It wasn’t long after that mom walked by the baby’s room only to discover the sister hovering over the crib. Mom was alarmed, so she snuck up behind the little girl to see what was going on, and noticed she was gently stroking the baby’s hair with her hand and whispering, “Baby, can you tell me what God is like...I’ve forgotten.”

That’s one of the deepest cries of the human heart—to know what God is like.

Bible teacher R.C. Sproul was once asked, “What, in your opinion, is the greatest need in the world today?” His answer was that people needed “to discover the identity of God.” He was then asked, “What is the greatest spiritual need in the lives of church people?” His answer was much the same: “To discover the true identity of God. If believers really understood the character and the personality of God, it would revolutionize their lives.”

The good news is, that God has made Himself knowable. He is not some unapproachable deity way out there in a galaxy far, far away. He is the God Who is there, Who is near, and Who will reveal Himself to those who long to know Him.

Jesus, the One who knew the heart and nature of God better than anyone, taught us in the opening line of the Lord’s prayer to approach God as “Our Father in heaven”, which literally means, “Our Father, Who is as close as the air we breathe.” Moses exclaimed in Deuteronomy 4:7, “What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to Him?”

What does God want us to know? He is near and He is knowable, that’s what. Furthermore, He has made Himself knowable in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. And what do we know of God through Jesus? Primarily that God is the perfect blend of grace and truth!

Grace and truth is what Jesus perfectly modeled. Remember Jesus' interaction in John 8 with the woman caught in the act of adultery who was about to be stoned? After embarrassing her executioners into inaction, He gently asked this guilty woman, "Where are your accusers? Has no one judged you guilty?"

She replied, "No one, Sir."

At that, Jesus offered these grace-truth words that would utterly right this sinner's upside-down life: "Then I don't either. Go now and leave your life of sin."

Behind this amazing display of grace and truth, as Walter Trobisch said, what we find is that Jesus "accepts us as we are but when He accepts us, we cannot remain as we are." Jesus brings our sin to the surface, and when we acknowledge it by confession and repentance, totally, graciously, and forever forgives it. The adulteress went away forgiven, with a new clean heart and a brand new chance at life.

Only grace and truth can do that for sinners.

"Becoming a Christian—not just in name only, but placing life-altering, radical trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior—is predicated upon forgiveness. God's forgiveness of our sins is the pivot point of authentic faith. When we accept Jesus, Jesus accepts us—just as we are but when He accepts us, we cannot remain as we are. Jesus brings our sin to the surface, and when we acknowledge that sin by confession and repentance, He totally, graciously and forever forgives it. That's why, when you read the Gospels, prostitutes, publicans, and other big-time sinners responded to Jesus so readily. At some level, they recognized their sin. That was why forgiveness was so appealing to them—and still is! What does the world need more than anything right now? What does your sinful next door neighbor so desperately need? The same thing you need: God's forgiveness! And when you meet Jesus, you meet God's full forgiveness—given freely but costing you a changed life."

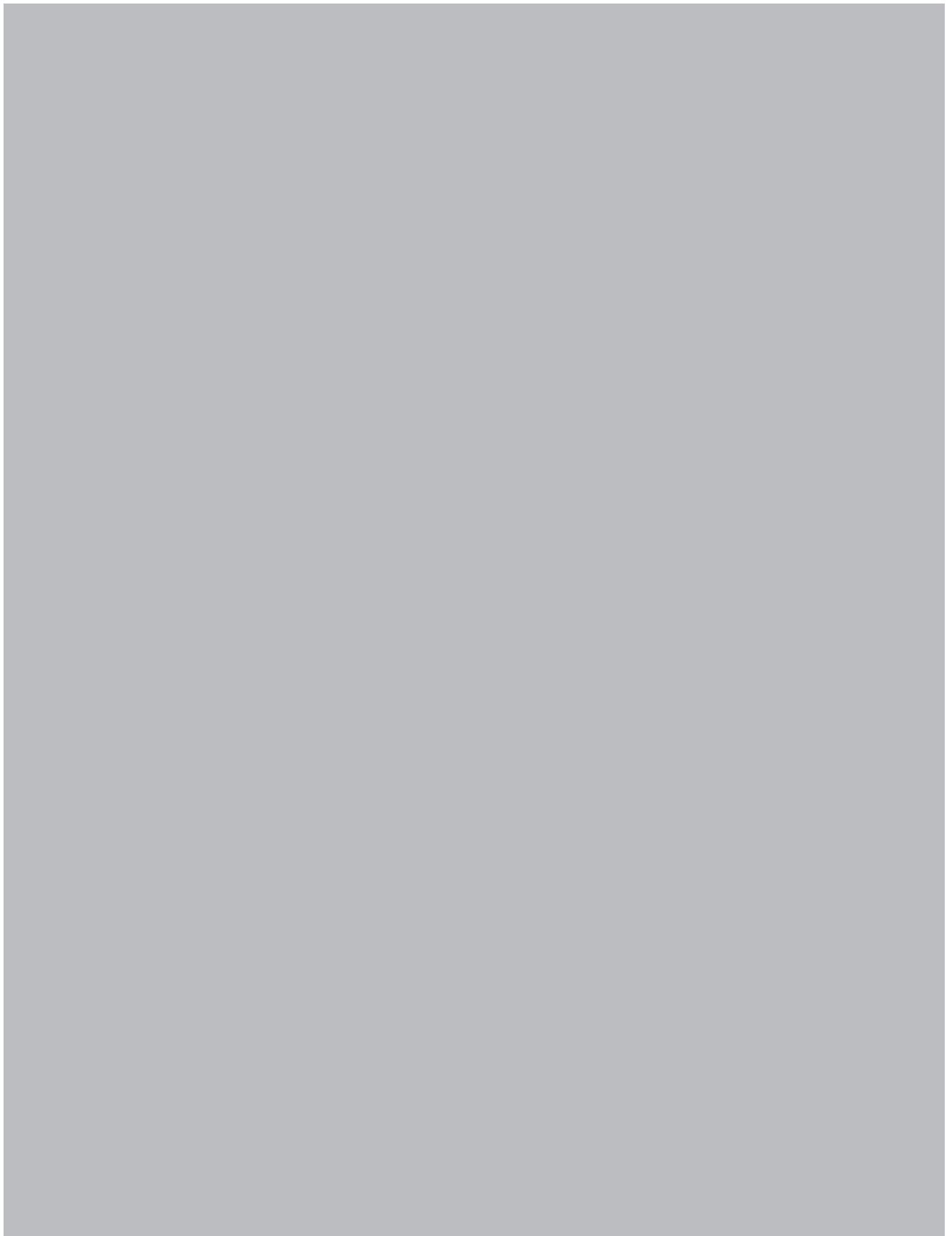
And when you meet Jesus, you meet God. And, when you meet God, you get a whole lot of truth and a big dose of grace—and it completely revolutionizes your life.

"Prostitutes are in no danger of finding their present life so satisfactory that they cannot turn to God; the proud, the avaricious, the self-righteous, are in that danger." (C.S. Lewis)



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Take some time to memorize and meditate on another important verse: "Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God." (John 1:12)





WEEK

2

DAY 1

EXERTING ETERNAL INFLUENCE

Read John 1:40-42

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of these men who heard what John said and then followed Jesus. Andrew went to find his brother, Simon, and told him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means "Christ"). Then Andrew brought Simon to meet Jesus.

I would argue that Andrew is the most inspiring and important figure in the New Testament because of his simple, non-threatening, doable example of bringing lost people into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. The cumulative effect, compounded through history, of his simple but winsome witness ranks him among the greatest in terms of exerting eternal influence.

Andrew didn't have any special skills or advanced evangelism training, he just simply brought people to meet Jesus, and then let Jesus do the rest.

Even though Andrew was the first disciple Jesus enlisted, and even though he was the first to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, he never achieved the fame that his brother Peter did. Jesus never included Andrew in his inner circle, like Peter. Andrew wasn't there at the Transfiguration, like Peter. Andrew wasn't there when Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, like Peter. Andrew never preached like Peter, never wrote a letter that got included in the New Testament, like Peter, and was never recognized as a key leader in the early church, like James.

Peter's name appears close to 200 times in the New Testament, 96 times in the four gospels—only Jesus is mentioned more often. We find Andrew in only 11 different places, 10 of them in the Gospels—mostly in a list of the disciples; five as "Peter's brother." Only three times do these passages tell us any details about Andrew—and even that is minimal. Someone once asked a conductor what the most difficult instrument to play in the orchestra was. He said, "second fiddle." That was Andrew!

Yet beneath everybody's radar, Andrew was being used in the most powerful way of all—to bring people to Christ. Andrew not only brought Peter to Jesus, but in John 6:8, we find it was Andrew who brought the boy with the loaves and fish to Jesus, and then one of the outstanding miracles of the Bible took place: The feeding of the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish. On account of Andrew, we have a story preserved that has helped millions to understand that Jesus is the true and only Bread of Life. Then in John 12:20, some Greeks came to Philip and said, "we want to see Jesus." Philip took them to Andrew, and what did Andrew do? He hooked them up with Jesus.

Andrew became both the first home missionary when he led Peter to Christ, and the first foreign missionary when he led these Gentiles to Jesus.

In Andrew, you don't find any special skills or an incredibly charismatic personality, or an extremely articulate speaker. You just find a guy who was faithful, available, and useful. He just kept bringing everybody who got near him to Jesus.

Tradition tells us that Andrew just kept on introducing people to Jesus for the rest of his life. He was finally put to death at a ripe old age in Greece. His death came after he befriended Maximilla, the wife of the Roman proconsul Aegeas, and led her to faith in Christ. Aegeas became so enraged over this that he ordered Andrew to offer sacrifices to a heathen god. When Andrew refused, he was severely beaten, tied to a cross, and crucified. That cross, shaped like an X is today called St. Andrew's cross. It is said that he lingered for two whole days before dying, but the whole painful time, he preached the Gospel to everyone who came by. Andrew never stopped introducing people to Jesus, even to his last breath.

Every time Andrew is mentioned, he's bringing someone to Jesus—then Jesus does the rest, and lives get transformed. His single talent seems to have been leveraging his earthly relationships to introduce seekers to eternal life through Christ. He doesn't lay the "Four Spiritual Laws" on people; he doesn't whip out a "Roman Road" tract on them. He just says, "Hey, come with me, I've got someone I want you to meet."

That's exerting eternal influence, which is as simple as inviting family, friends and acquaintances into your spiritual environment—your church, your small group, your ministry team—and letting God do the rest.

"The greatest expression of love is to share with them the most precious thing a Christian has, which is the good news of the salvation of Jesus Christ." (Brother Andrew)



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Following Andrew's example, exert some eternal influence this week by bringing someone to church with you.



DAILY RESPONSE

- Think of who "brought you to Jesus." Take some time right now to thank God for them...and maybe thank them too if you can.
- How is bringing someone to Jesus exerting eternal influence?
- How can you "bring people to meet Jesus" this week?

DAY 2

UNDER THE RADAR MIRACLES

Read John 2: 7-10

Jesus told the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” When the jars had been filled, He said, “Now dip some out, and take it to the master of ceremonies.” So the servants followed His instructions. When the master of ceremonies tasted the water that was now wine, not knowing where it had come from (though, of course, the servants knew), he called the bridegroom over. “A host always serves the best wine first,” he said. “Then, when everyone has had a lot to drink, he brings out the less expensive wine. But you have kept the best until now!”

It was His first recorded miracle—and even then, Jesus was reluctant to perform it. It was not yet time to launch His public ministry as Messiah of Israel, but he was at a wedding with His family and the wine was running low. The event planner was in a panic, so Jesus’ mother said, “No worries, my son will take care of it.” Thanks, mom! So Jesus turned water that was being stored in several thirty-gallon jars nearby into the best wine the world has ever tasted before and since.

Of the many things that could be discussed from this water-into-wine miracle, one of the facets that stands out the most to me is how understated Jesus was in performing this miracle. When the great tasting wine was discovered, neither the master-of-ceremonies nor the happy partygoers knew where it came from. Only those who brought the water jugs to Jesus knew that He had transformed the liquid. And Jesus wanted it that way.

In fact, that seemed to be the way Jesus performed most of his miracles. He never made a big deal out of them, other than to draw praise to his Father. He never made a spectacle of his divine powers. He never showcased the miracles’ recipient like a zoo exhibit. Jesus’ miracles, you might say, were under the radar.

Yet there is no way to keep an authentic miracle under wraps—not for very long anyway. Sooner or later, the power of God breaks containment, and word gets out. Maybe that is why Jesus handled miracles the way He did—He let the miracles do the talking.

Unfortunately, too many spiritual leaders today who have been used in the miraculous don’t follow Jesus’ lead. The bigger the miracle, the quicker the press conference or the book deal or the fund raising letter! Now to be fair, if I turned water into wine, or raised someone from the dead, or performed some other sensational miracle, I’m afraid I, too, would head right to the local Christian network to tout what God had done through me. That is too bad! God doesn’t get all the glory when we grab some of it for ourselves.

Maybe we would see more supernatural displays of God’s power in our culture if we would

commit to allowing the miracles to speak for themselves—and to fiercely make sure that all the glory goes to God when he graces us with one.

■ *“That is what gives Him the greatest glory—the achieving of great things through the weakest and most improbable means.” (Thomas Merton)*

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

In “The Way of the Heart,” Henri Nouwen wrote, “To live and work for the glory of God cannot remain an idea about which we think once in a while. It must become an interior, unceasing doxology.” Spend some time today—and make it a practice every day—thinking of how to give God glory through your life.

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- What makes you think the most in this devotional?
- Why do you suppose Jesus kept his unparalleled spiritual power on the down-low for so long?
- How do you think you should be living to position yourself in such a way that God does the miraculous in and through you?

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DAY 3

A FRIVOLOUS MIRACLE OR AN EXTRAVAGANT GOD

Read John 2:11, NLT

This miracle at Cana in Galilee—turning water into wine at a wedding—was Jesus’ first public demonstration of his heaven-sent power. And his disciples believed that He really was the Messiah.

Turning water into wine! Really? For your first miracle, you choose to keep the party guests happy by miraculously making sure there is a free flow of adult beverages. Wouldn't it have been more impressive in announcing to the world that you, the Messiah, have arrived by raising a dead person back to life or by performing some other more worthy miracle—like supplying a starving family with food or creating money for a destitute widow or by healing a young child dying with leukemia?

Doesn't running out of wine at a wedding seem like a First World problem? And doesn't God stooping to supply the new, improved wine seem a bit frivolous? So why this frivolous miracle as His inaugural miracle?

Well, only God knows the answer to that question, but here's what I think: what might seem like a frivolous miracle is really the introduction of an extravagant God.

You see, many of us have been conditioned to believe that God doesn't intervene in relatively unimportant human affairs when more pressing concerns are on His plate, like war, global warming, human trafficking or widespread injustice. We have trouble believing that the Almighty intervenes in our ordinary, unimportant, trivial affairs.

But does He? Well, sometimes! Can I expect that of Him? Does He care about my wedding reception or my favorite sports teaming winning a match or my missing iPhone? Should I really be bothering Him with my ordinary, unimportant stuff?

I don't mean to be irreverent, but it doesn't hurt to ask! Jesus helped his mom, who was likely coordinating this wedding, out of a jam by changing ceremonial water, which theologically, may very well represent the limits of human fallenness, into party wine, which represents the liberality of divine grace. Jesus didn't have to. It wasn't on His agenda. He wasn't responding to a life and death need, but he did it anyway.

What that shows us is something pretty cool: The extravagant nature of this God revealed in a miracle you and I probably wouldn't have dared to ask for.

That's the God I want and need every day of my life. And that's the God we're offered in Jesus!

This “frivolous” miracle brings a distant, unreachable God out of the heavenly realms and right into our humble realities. It’s not only interesting; it’s purposeful that verse 11 says the very first place Jesus chose to “reveal his glory” was somewhere very ordinary. He chose a home for His first miracle. He went public at a wedding in Cana—a wide spot in the road.

So what does that tell us? Simply this: Jesus desires to be real—and to reveal God—in your daily ordinariness, too. He wants to reveal glory—that is, God’s manifest presence—in the nitty-gritty reality of your life: your marriage, family, work, school and private world. It also means that he cares about what you do in your ordinary days—your marriage, job, school, private times—your life outside the sacredness of church. God doesn’t want to just show up for you at church on Sunday mornings. He wants to be real, and powerful and close, even in your unexciting, uneventful moment-by-moment world.

Nothing about your life is too insignificant to qualify for God’s extravagant grace—apparently not even the beverages on the menu at your party!

That’s the God you and I want and need every day of our lives. And that’s the God we’re offered in Jesus!

*“Consider God’s generosity toward you rather than your own unworthiness in his sight, and live in His strength, rather than in the thoughts of your own weakness.”
(St. Vincent De Paul)*



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Make a list of your wants—not your needs—and take them before God in your prayer time. As you do, reflect on this verse: “You can ask Him for anything, using My name, and I will do it, for this will bring praise to the Father because of what I, the Son, will do for you. Yes, ask anything, using My name, and I will do it!” (John 14:13-14)



DAILY RESPONSE

- ⦿ Do you think that only large scale things are important to God or do little things also catch His attention?
- ⦿ Does knowing how God views things change the way you view things?
- ⦿ Take some time to pray after this devotional and ask Jesus to reveal God to you today in just the way He has planned to do so. Now be watchful, even in the little things to see what God will do.

Handwriting practice area consisting of 20 horizontal dotted lines.

DAY 4

ACCESS DENIED

I have always enjoyed this story of Jesus cleansing the temple. I love the robust image it paints of Him. It stands in stark contrast to most of the historical paintings as well as the more recent images we get from the portrayal of Jesus by filmmakers. For some reason, artists from the Renaissance on up to this very day have given us a feminized Jesus—soft, tender, doe-eyed, almost porcelain-like.

That is not the Jesus of John 2:13-17,

When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts He found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So He made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves He said, “Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!”

Jesus doesn’t appear all that soft in this encounter, does He? As a matter of fact, He opened up a can of comeuppance on these merchants of religion, and no one dared stop Him. Go down to your local Saturday Market and do that, and see what happens. People typically don’t take too kindly to having their economic systems so abruptly disrupted.

Jesus was different. He was right—and people knew it. His anger was one of righteous indignation and holy zeal for the House of the Lord. So why was he so angry? Was it simply because these merchants had ruined Jesus’ preferred way of experiencing worship at the temple? I don’t think that was really it.

No, Jesus was upset because at the end of the day, enabled by a religious system that had grown corrupt and with the full support of a self-serving priesthood, these merchants had made it more difficult for worshipers to come and freely experience the love, acceptance and forgiveness of their Heavenly Father. The drift in temple worship had been to restrict access of people seeking God, whereas everything Jesus stood for and did—His miracles, His teaching and ultimately His death—was to open up a “new and living way” into the very throne room of God. If you want to get Jesus mad, just make it hard for people to find his Father.

In this case, a house cleaning of the strongest order was long overdue, and if the worshipers present that day didn’t overtly cheer Him on, they were secretly applauding on the inside.

Now as much as we enjoy this story, it really is incomplete if we don’t fast-forward to our time and ask how Jesus would respond if he walked into our church today. How much more zeal would Jesus have for His body, the temple of the Holy Spirit—that is, the church? How much

more holy fire and righteous indignation would he display for that which he suffered and died to redeem? How much more upset would he be that the new community of grace—the New Testament church—had denied access to seekers by the very activities, programs and systems it claims will attract them?

In the new economy of the Kingdom of God, the church has replaced the temple as the dwelling place of God in the earth. Of course, that refers more to a people than a place—and yet both are the church. What would Jesus see in your church—in you, in your brothers and sisters in the local community of Christ, and in the activities that take place in your church building?

I have a sense that each—both people of worship and places of worship—are due for a little divine house cleaning. How about we get started before the Lord of the church has to show up and do it for us! And if nothing else, let's eliminate anything that in effect, communicates "access denied" to people desperately needing to experience the presence of God.

■ *"Learn to break your own will. Be zealous against yourself." (Thomas `A Kempis)*



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Is there zeal—a fire in your bones—for God's house? If not, rethink your attitude and repurpose your energies toward the place where you worship. And not only the physical house in which God's people gather, but also in the spiritual house made up of his redeemed children—the Body of Christ. Examine your attitudes for the world-wide church of Christ. And one more thing: How about your physical body? God's Spirit dwells there, too. Is the way you treat it God honoring? Change the way you treat God's house so that it will be said of you, "zeal for your house consumes me."



DAILY RESPONSE

- What is your mental picture of Jesus when you envision Him? Does this story in scripture challenge your mental view at all?
- What stands out to you about the reasons Jesus cleared the temple?
- How does this make you want to treat your own body, the temple of God's Holy Spirit?
- How does this challenge you to help and not hinder access to others needing to be in the presence of God?

DAY 5

BELIEVE!

John 2:19-22

Jesus said, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” ... (the temple He had spoken of was His body. After he was raised from the dead, His disciples recalled what He had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

If you were a spiritual seeker exploring what the Christian faith was all about, and John’s Gospel was your only source, it wouldn’t take you very long to discover the key component to Christianity. It can be boiled down to just one word—a very simple word that is repeated throughout the book; a single, simple word, yet a word that carries within it the most profound implications. That word is “believe”.

That is Christianity at its purest and simplest: To believe in Jesus Christ.

Now this is belief that is more than mere intellectual acknowledgement in the historical Jesus. It is more than just acknowledging that he was a good man, a wonderful religious leader or even to say that he was God come in the flesh.

Rather, the kind of belief John is describing—the kind that brings us into an experience of the abundant life of God now and eternal life after we die, is to believe that Jesus Christ is both Savior and Lord. It is to be fully persuaded of whom Jesus is and convinced that what Jesus said is true. It is to have complete confidence that the claims and demands Jesus made are credible beyond any shadow of doubt. It is the kind of belief that entrust one’s life and stakes one’s eternity upon the veracity of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It is to be so radically won over that all of one’s life will be placed under the guidance, pleasure and worship of Jesus.

In the twenty-one chapters of John’s Gospel, all but three use the word “believe” to describe either people’s response to Jesus or Jesus call to those who would be His followers.

In John 1:7, John the Baptist is introduced as the one whose entire purpose is to prepare people to believe in Jesus, the coming Messiah.

In John 1:12, the Apostle John explains of Jesus, “all who receive Him, to those who believe in His name, He gives the right to become the children of God.”

In John 3:14-18, which includes the most famous verse in the entire Bible—the Bible summed up in just one verse—John 3:16, we learn that Jesus will ultimately die on the cross so that people might believe and thereby live forever:

“The Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in Him.” Jesus said. For God so loved the world that He gave His One and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”

Now in this present chapter, John 2:11 tells us that after Jesus performed His first miracle, His disciples believed in Him. Toward the end of the chapter, the Jewish leaders ask Jesus for a miraculous sign to prove His authority for driving the merchants from the temple. Jesus only offers them the sign that will come after they destroy the temple, which He will raise up in three days (a veiled reference to His own death and resurrection). Speaking of that in John 2:22, the Apostle John writes, “After He was raised from the dead, His disciples recalled that He had said this, then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.”

When you get to the end of the Gospel, John reveals to the readers of His Gospel account why he has recorded the stories and teachings of Jesus:

“Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”
(John 20:30-31)

Believe! That is Christianity pure and simple. And as you read the Gospel of John nearly 2,000 years after John wrote it as an eyewitness to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, that same purpose is still in effect: That you might believe—place totally, radical, life-altering trust—in Jesus Christ as both Savior and Lord!

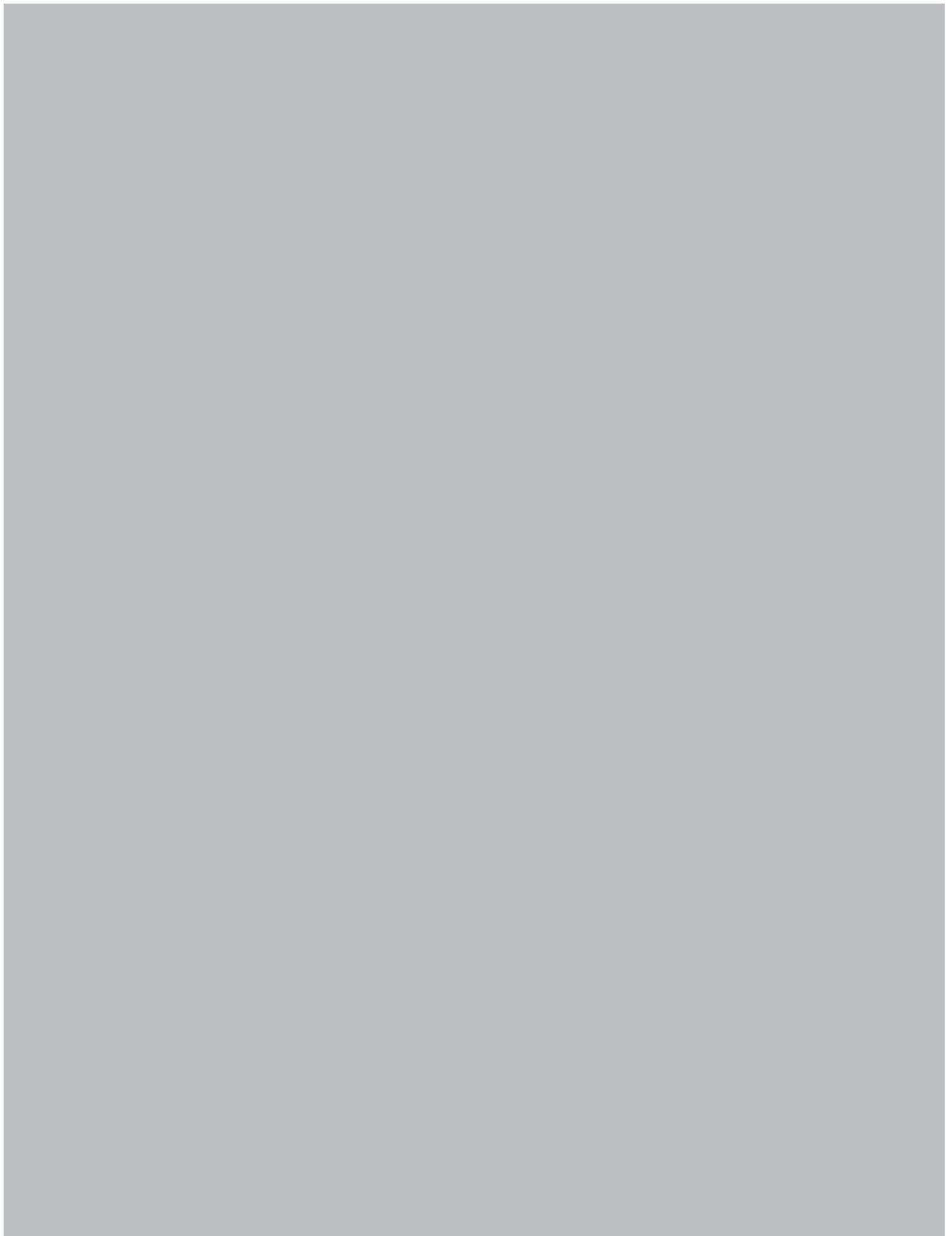
Do you believe?

“All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator for all I have not seen.”
(Ralph Waldo Emerson)



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

As you read through the Gospel of John, underline any place where you see the words “believe” or belief” as it relates to either people’s response to Jesus or Jesus call to those who would be His followers. And above all, ask that God would deepen your own belief as you absorb John’s Gospel.





WEEK

3

DAY 1

REBIRTH REQUIRED

Read John 3:3

Jesus answered and said to Nicodemus, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God."

Nicodemus was a very bright man. He had given himself to much study and he'd grown quite famous as a teacher in Israel, but he had little wisdom as to how to be in right standing with God. He knew a lot about God, but he didn't know God.

Nicodemus was rich. Tradition tells us that he was one of the three richest men in Jerusalem, but how much a person has does not change who they are. You can have plenty of money, a lot of fame, an enviable place in life, but it doesn't change the fact that you're still a sinner in need of a Savior.

Not only was he rich, Nicodemus was also respected. He was a member of the Sanhedrin, the prestigious ruling spiritual body of Israel. He was a rabbi. Jesus refers to him in verse 10 as "Israel's teacher," which suggests that he had attained celebrity as a master communicator. However, what you have achieved doesn't change who you are before God. The truth is, hell will be populated with many admired people, because admiration, though not necessarily a bad thing, does not equal salvation.

Nicodemus was rich, respectable, and he was religious. He was a Pharisee. He kept the Mosaic Law to the down to its minutiae. He was morally pure to a degree that you and I can't imagine. But religion doesn't redeem the heart; religious ritual is not the same as right relationship with God. Titus 3:5 reminds us, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us."

Nicodemus was a person who did all the right spiritual things, knew all the right spiritual language, had gained everyone's spiritual admiration, but was still empty on the inside because he was still spiritually lost. That's why Jesus said, "Nicodemus, you must be born again." He is simply saying that human beings must have two birthdays to get to heaven. We must have a physical birthday and we must have a spiritual birthday.

Jesus uses the picture of physical birth to point out the need for spiritual birth because of the obvious comparisons. To begin with physical birth provides life. All babies have life because they are born. Likewise, spiritual life cannot begin until spiritual birth occurs. Not only that, physical birth means a brand new start. No baby is born with a past. They only have a future. So it is with the spiritual birth. When you get saved, you get a brand new start. Your past is wiped away and the future begins. That's why Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come".

Most profoundly, physical birth takes place because of the suffering of another. A mother literally, through the pain of childbirth, comes close to death in order to bring life into this world. Jesus didn't come close to death—he experienced death so that you and I might be born again. Spiritual birth rests squarely on not only the pain and suffering of another, but also on the passion and love of another.

So what does that mean? It means that salvation requires a new beginning. Not just a reformation of your flesh, but a rebirth from death to life. It means that someone else had to die so that you could be reborn. That's why you can't do it on your own. It only comes through depending on the complete and adequate supply of God's saving love through Christ's passionate suffering for your eternal salvation. It means because of Christ's adequacy, you can have a brand new beginning and an unending future with God.

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

He would say to you: You must be born again! Have you?

“A man can eat his dinner without understanding exactly how food nourishes him. A man can accept what Christ has done without knowing how it works: indeed, he certainly would not know how it works until he has accepted it.” (C.S. Lewis)

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- Do you know anyone who knows a lot about God but doesn't know Him personally? Could this or has this ever been you?
- Why do you think Jesus uses the term “born again” to describe salvation?
- Perhaps the best question to ask yourself today is, “Have I been born again?” Take some time to thank God for your salvation and, if you have not been born again, now would be a great time to ask Jesus give you this fresh start.

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Handwriting practice area consisting of 20 horizontal dotted lines.

DAY 2

THE BIBLE IN ONE VERSE

Read John 3:16

“For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”

John 3:16—it’s the whole Bible in just one verse. The verse is so simple that any child can memorize it, yet it is so infinitely powerful that it can totally, radically transform your life. That’s right, this verse is not just an amazing statement about God’s universal love for all mankind, it is about God’s personal love for you!

God so loved the world, but He didn’t just look at it as one big mass of nameless faces. When He looked at the world and loved it, He was looking at you. Max Lucado, who wrote an entire book just on John 3:16, said, “If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. If He had a wallet, your photo would be in it. He sends you flowers every spring and a sunrise every morning.”

God has a crazy love for you! He really does. St. Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, one of the most influential figures in church history, said: “God loves each and every one of us as if there were only one of us.” Think about that: If you were the only person on this planet, God would have loved you so much that he still would have given Jesus to die for your sins. There would still be John 3:16 if you were the sole human ever created.

One of my favorite authors, Brennan Manning, told the story of an Irish priest on a walking tour of his rural parish, and he happened upon an old peasant man kneeling by the roadside, praying. The priest was impressed: “You must be very close to God.”

The peasant looked up from his prayers, thought for a moment, and smiled, “Yes, he’s very fond of me.” This simple man had a profound sense that he was loved by God, and that was all that mattered. From that story, Manning developed a personal declaration: “I am the one Jesus loves.”

That is in no way arrogant; it is actually quite biblical. The Apostle John identified himself throughout his Gospel as “the one Jesus loved.” That came to be John’s primary identity in life. If you were to ask John, “Tell me about yourself,” he wouldn’t have said, “Well, I’m an apostle, and the author of this incredible Gospel.” Rather, John would have simply said, “I’m the one Jesus loves.”

Now if John could think of himself that way, so can you. John 3:16 gives you permission. So, I hope you’ll practice remembering this today: “You are the one Jesus loves!”

"We have a share in the special love of Jesus. We see evidences of that love...in the precious blood that He so freely shed for us...Behold how He loves us!"
(Charles Spurgeon)

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

Do you ever wonder if God really does love you? I do. The cross is a continual reminder for you and me that when he stretched out his arms on that wooden crossbeam, it was as if he were saying, "I love you this much!" Then he bowed His head, and died. And there is nothing today that can separate you from that love. Let the power of God's love absolutely, profoundly change your life today!

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- In what ways does John 3:16 encapsulate God's love for you?
- How does it feel to be the one Jesus loves?
- If you have not done so already, take time today to commit this verse to memory. Say it over and over and never forget it. In fact, repeat it to someone else who needs to hear it.

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DAY 3

HOW WE KILL OUR CHRISTIAN WITNESS

Read John 3:17-18

“God did not send His Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it. There is no eternal doom awaiting those who trust Him to save them. But those who don’t trust Him have already been tried and condemned for not believing in the only Son of God.”

Unfortunately for too many Christians, John 3:17 gets lost in the shadows of the verse that immediately precedes it—John 3:16. Who doesn’t love that verse? It is the heart of God—His sacrificial love for a sinful world; it’s the Bible summed up in one short verse; it’s the simplest yet most powerful collection of words the world has ever known. The truth that Jesus declares in John 3:16 is the only hope for the world.

But Jesus’ followers often miss what follows: He didn’t come to force His gracious offer of eternal life down the throats of those who resisted. His plan wasn’t to set up a spiritual police state to enforce adherence to his sacrificial love. He wasn’t even going to publically condemn those who foolishly, perhaps even violently, rejected the divine plan to eternal life.

So why do so many believers have an insatiable need to condemn the unbelieving world? If condemnation were what sinners needed, Jesus would have done that. Rather, Jesus understood that their very resistance of His grace and rejection of His atonement was all the condemnation that was needed. The unbelieving world already stood condemned. Why condemn what was already condemned?

Contrary to Jesus’ approach, condemnation seems too often to be our leading evangelistic strategy. But when believers, churches and spiritual leaders take to their social media outlets to decry the current crisis of morality in America, or lash out on the airwaves about the obvious failures of our out-of-control government, or write in their blogs about the evils of gay marriage or the horror of late term abortion or the ills of our increasingly secular culture, we are well on our way to destroying whatever Christian witness we might have once been able to exert. Does that mean I am in favor of those things or believe that we should never speak out about sin or injustice in the world? Not at all!

It’s just sadly interesting to me that we tend to pass too quickly over the greatest truth in the Bible, John 3:16, and go right for the jugular vein in condemning what already stands condemned when Jesus Himself, the one we represent, didn’t even do that. Christian pollster George Barna summarized recently some research on the church’s perception in the world by stating, “the Christian community is not known for love.” If Jesus was known for loving the world so much that He gave His life to redeem it, why should that be any less true of His followers? He concludes

that this perception renders ineffective most of our evangelistic efforts. Our condemning voice overshadows our loving heart.

So what should be our response to all of these ills in the world that need to be set aright? Are we to just idly stand by, do nothing and say nothing? No—we would be derelict in our discipleship to take that approach.

We would, however, be far more effective in reaching and redeeming the world if we would do what Jesus did. The best evangelism remains that by our love—for the Lord, for each other, and for the lost—that an unbelieving world will be attracted to our Savior. Like Jesus, when we demonstrate selfless, stubborn, sacrificial love, we will have the undeniable effect that Jesus had: the world will be both repulsed yet attracted by God’s irresistible love in us.

That is the strange thing about God’s love: while every human being fundamentally craves it, because of sin, many foolishly, sadly reject it. Those who do stand condemned already. Yet the fact remains, whether our witness is embraced or repulsed, we have an undeniable impact in forgoing condemnation and letting love speak for itself. The Apostle Peter wrote:

“You’ve been chosen...to declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into his light ...[So] live such good lives among unbelievers that even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us...Always be ready [to share your faith], but do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.” (1 Peter 2:9 & 12, 3:16)

I watch too many believers who are anything but that as they engage in politics, cultural issues or theological debates. It seems that some Christians are more passionate about their point of view than pointing people to Jesus. We would win more debates, elections and, souls too, if we’d learn to offer our opinions with more love and less condemnation.

The word “evangelism” is from a compound Greek word, “eu,” meaning “good” (euphoria) and “aggelos” meaning “messenger” (angel). So euaggelos is simply “a good messenger.” Our task is just translating the Good News by our selfless, sacrificial lives in a way that reconnects lost people with a loving God.

Bottom line: Jesus didn’t condemn; He just fiercely, stubbornly, unconditionally loves. We should go and do likewise.

■ *“You must be the good news before you can share the good news.” (Joe Aldrich)*



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Your assignment this week will be to light a candle instead of cursing darkness when you come across the temptation to condemn. And believe me, you will face such a temptation.

DAY 4

THE BEST MISSION STATEMENT

Read John 3:30

“He must increase, but I must decrease.”

Over the last two or three decades, it has become clear, at least in the western world, that a person cannot be successful, live a truly satisfying life, and experience significance as a human being without a well-written, eye-catching personal mission statement. Likewise, no corporation can increase its bottom line and influence its market without a corporate mission statement. Next to oxygen and nourishment, a mission statement is essential to life.

Of course, I am speaking facetiously. To be sure, strategically developing and clearly stating your personal or corporate mission is a good thing. I have one. Jesus had one: “The Son of man came to serve, not be served, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45) The Apostle Paul had one: “I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.” (Acts 20:24) You would do well to have one, too.

But what would happen if the qualifier to every mission statement of every Christian and every faith-based organization was the same as John the Baptist’s? Oh my! We would change the world—that’s what would happen!

John the Baptist’s mission statement can be found in John 1:7, “John came as a witness to testify concerning that light (Jesus Christ), so that through him all might believe.” Throughout his ministry, John faithfully, fearlessly, and passionately executed against that calling until he himself was executed, literally, for doing his job. (Mark 6:14-29) And, while in reality, John’s time in fulfilling his mission was brief, it was undeniably powerful.

It is very likely that John could have avoided what, from a human perspective looked like the failure of his business. Most likely, he could have gone on to a lucrative career as a speaker, or the leader of a religious movement. But, had he done that, from an eternal perspective, he would have failed at his mission.

No, John’s mission to testify to the Light (that is, Jesus and His messianic mission) was controlled by this caveat: that no matter how famous and prosperous his clients were willing to make his ministry, John knew that he had to decrease so Jesus could increase. After all, his mission was simply to introduce and represent Jesus. Jesus was the real deal; John only knew of Jesus. It was Jesus, not John, who had the bona fides to speak of the Kingdom of Heaven since he had been there and was actually from there. And with that was the case, the more successful John did his job of introducing Jesus, the less of John people needed to see.

Now of course, you and I are likely not called to John the Baptist’s path. He was unique in the initial public offering of Jesus. Yet in another sense, all Christians and Christian organizations are called to introduce and represent Jesus. And to successfully execute against that mission—however that mission statement might be personalized uniquely to you and me—John’s caveat must control ours as well: In all that we do, in the success that we experience, in the direction we take and in the dreams we pursue, we must decrease so that Jesus can increase.

From a human point of view, that might seem silly. But from heaven’s perspective, that is the path by which you and I can change the world—for Christ’s sake. Yes, that is the best mission statement!

■ *“Humility is the displacement of self by the enthronement of God...[it] is nothing but the disappearance of self in the vision that God is all.” (Andrew Murray)*

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

If you have a personal mission statement (or a corporate one), add John’s caveat to the end of it: “Jesus must become greater; I must become less.”

 **DAILY RESPONSE.**

- If you were to craft a mission statement for your life, what do you think it would be?
- What is our “mission” as scripture lays it out?
- Why is humility essential for this mission?

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DAY 5

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Read John 4:16-18

“Go and get your husband,” Jesus told her. “I don’t have a husband,” the woman replied. Jesus said, “You’re right! You don’t have a husband—for you have had five husbands, and you aren’t even married to the man you’re living with now.”

An entire book could be written about this story of Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar. For instance, a whole chapter could be written just about the inclusiveness of the Kingdom of God. Another chapter could lay out a master blueprint for starting spiritual conversations with anyone from an authentic seeker to a theological weirdo. And of course, several chapters could present a compelling theology of worship from what Jesus says just in these few verses.

But at the end of the day, what you will find is that any encounter with Jesus doesn’t simply warm your heart to the Kingdom of God or perfect your evangelistic technique or inform your theology or just cram more spiritual information into your head, it touches the true condition of your heart. That is what happened to the woman at the well.

This sinful Samaritan sister is like a lot of people in our society today, even church-going types, who are attempting makeovers, not only of the physical kind, but of the whole-life kind. Like her, so many people are profoundly unhappy, dissatisfied, empty on the inside; and are trying to make over their lives by filling that missing void. But, any makeover effort that isn’t God-initiated, God-empowered, and God-focused, is akin to rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic.

In this woman’s case, she’d gone from man to man, hoping the next would be better—but each relationship left her increasingly dissatisfied, damaged, and desperate. What Jesus was telling her was that she didn’t need a man to complete her. She didn’t need just a “relationship makeover” she needed a new “water source” (John 4:13-15, NLT)—she needed a brand a new life.

This woman is really a mirror of our age. We go from experience to experience, job to job, purchase to purchase and relationship to relationship, hoping that that next great thing will be what finally brings us fulfillment.

“If you are looking to a thing, or job, or another person to fulfill you, you are putting an expectation on something or someone that they cannot meet. When you live in that kind of pattern, your life will end up as one long, futile attempt to find completion.”

Remember the gushy line from the movie that all the romantics swooned over: “You complete me?” That sounds so romantic it has to be true, right? It’s not! It is one of the Enemy’s great deceptions. What Jesus was saying to this Samaritan woman—and by extension, to you and me—is that only God can complete you. When you come to God for completion, then those unrealistic expectations that you have placed on position, possessions and people will be removed, and only then can you drink the living water and never thirst again.

The bottom line to this story—and to your life and mine—is simply this: We find real completion only in God.

“When I have learnt to love God better than my earthly dearest, I shall love my earthly dearest better than I do now... When first things are put first, second things are not suppressed but increased.” (C.S. Lewis)

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

People, position and possessions: take a moment, or several if you need, and honestly evaluate whether they have surpassed God in terms of what you depend upon to satisfy your emotional needs for security, significance and satisfaction. If they are out of order, ask God to forgive you—and help you to reprioritize your tank-fillers—and then get ruthlessly committed to letting God be God in your life!

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- **As you read this passage in John 4:1-42, what stands out to you about the transformation that happens in this woman?**
- **What lessons can we learn from the way the woman at the well was living her life?**
- **If you were in her position and Jesus sat down next to you, what do you think your conversation would be like?**

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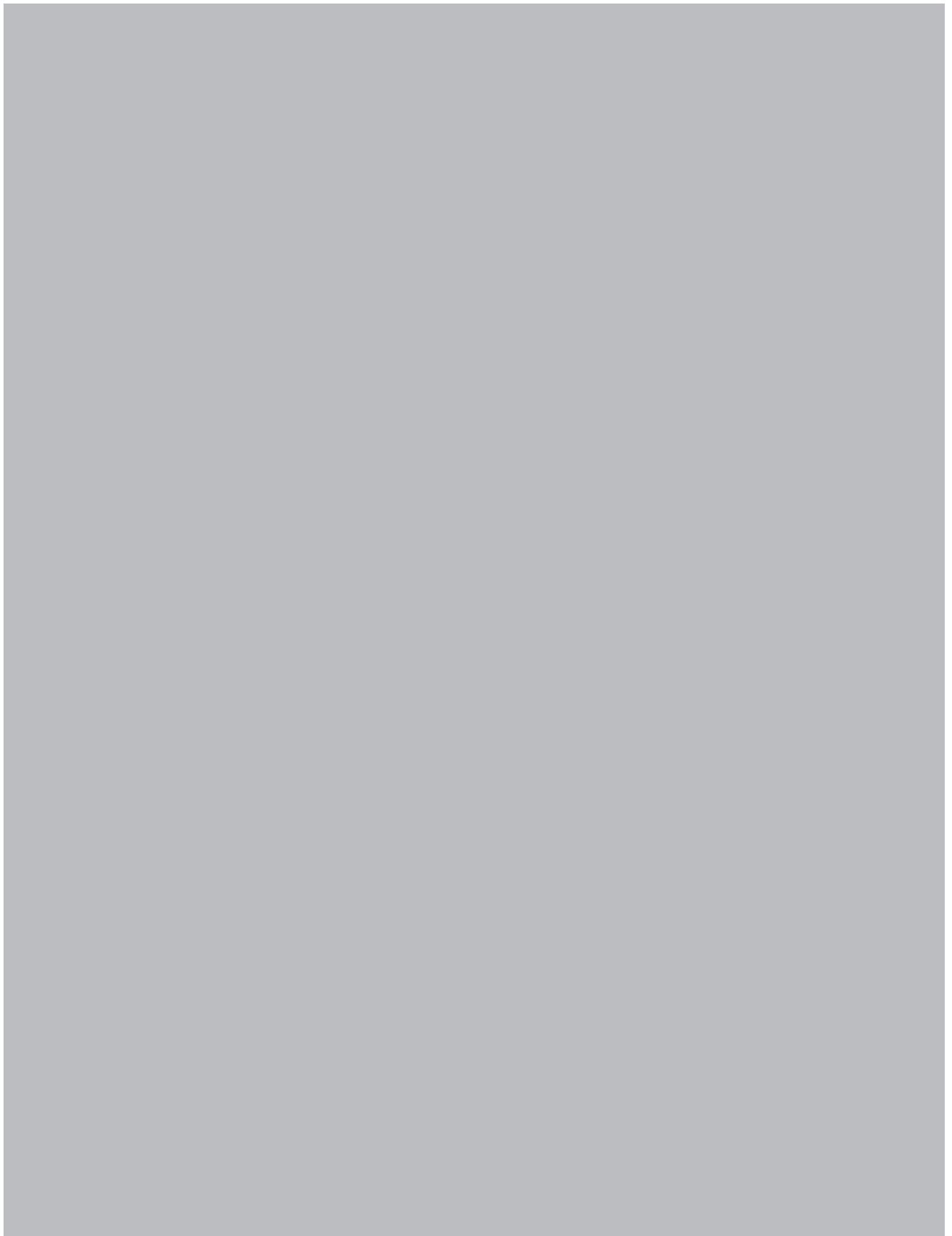
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WEEK

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DAY 1

GOD MADE IN MAN'S IMAGE

Read John 4:21-24

Jesus replied, "Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about Him, for salvation comes through the Jews. But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship Him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth."

The Samaritan woman who encountered Jesus at the well of Sychar was subconsciously looking for a god made in her image—a god to her specifications. This was a fairly common among worshipers not only in Jesus' day, but in ours as well. It occurs when we attempt to come to God on our terms rather than His; when we make worship more about us, and what we like, than about God and what He likes; when, in effect, we recreate God in our image rather than approaching Him as beings created in his image.

That was the problem with the worship of the Samaritans. They had corrupted worship to fit their own needs to the point Jesus said, "You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship." (John 4:22, NLT) They had become "Burger King worshipers." Do you remember the old Burger King advertisement? "Hold the pickle, hold the lettuce, special orders don't upset us. Have it your way."

That little jingle is fitting for what we modern day "Samaritans" are doing with our experience of worship. We love a customized church experience. We expect worship services to be tailor-made just for us. We expect the praise, programs and preaching to satisfy our preferences. We want church designed to meet our needs, music tuned to our exact tastes, preachers crafted to our specifications, messages that mesmerize, and a made to order God—a "Burger King God" who says, "Have it your way."

Some time ago, Los Angeles Magazine ran an article called "God For Sale". The author said, "It is no surprise that when today's affluent young professionals return to church they want to do it only on their own terms. But what is amazing is how far the churches are going to oblige them." Newsweek Magazine added, "They've developed a pick and choose Christianity in which individuals take what they want and pass over what does not fit their spiritual goals..."

Nothing can be further from the "spirit and truth" worshiper of verse 24 that Jesus said God the Father is seeking. When it comes to God, and the way you worship him, you need to start saying, "Have it your way." Me too!

If you will learn what it means to do that, you will drink water from an altogether different kind of well—and you will never thirst again!

■ *“Worship changes the worshiper into the image of the One worshiped”*
(Jack Hayford)

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

Honestly evaluate your worship expectations. Do you approach worship asking God how he prefers your worship? Or do you tell God, albeit in not so many words, “this is how I want it?” If it is the latter, a little repentance is in order.

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- In what ways do we try and craft God into our image?
- What does God want of us in worship of Him?
- How does true worship change the worshiper?

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DAY 2

THE BEST INVESTMENT YOU WILL EVER MAKE

Read John 4:34-38

Jesus said to them, “My food is doing the will of him who sent me and finishing the work he has given me. Don’t you say, ‘Four months more and then comes the harvest’? But I tell you to open your eyes and look to the field—they are gleaming white, all ready for the harvest! The reaper is already being rewarded and getting in a harvest for eternal life, so that both sower and reaper may be glad together. For in this harvest the old saying comes true, ‘One man sows and another reaps.’ I have sent you to reap a harvest for which you never labored; other men have worked hard and you have reaped the results of their labors.”

Now is the time! There has never been a greater opportunity for return on your missions investment than right now—your investment of praying for missions, giving to missions, encouraging missionaries, going on a mission and in a way that encompasses everything about you, living a missions driven life. And by “missions” I mean anything that has to do with proclaiming the Gospel to those who haven’t received it yet and influencing them into God’s eternal Kingdom.

That’s what Jesus is prophetically saying in John 4:34-38. In verse 35, he pleads with His disciples: “Open your eyes; see the fields! Now is the time—they’re ripe for harvest.” And notice how He frames His missions appeal in terms of return on investment in verse 36: “The reaper will get rewarded now, plus bring in a harvest that’s eternal.” (JBP)

As we sit at the end of the age, the evidence shouts that this is a “kairos” moment. “Kairos” is the Greek word used in the New Testament for a God-opportunity; “chronos”, on the other hand, is the word used for actual time, that is, chronological time. This is that kairos time of which Jesus spoke where those who pray for, go on and give to missions will get in on an eternal harvest that is unprecedented in history.

If there was ever a time, it’s now to repurpose your life for greater missional engagement. If you’ve not, get all in, make the change to go all out for missions. If you already are engaged in missions, recalibrate for more. Now is the time! Don’t miss out!

As you correctly absorb John 4, there are three unavoidable convictions you will lay claim to in relation to the huge and ripened harvest that is our present world.

First, you will become convinced that doing missions is your divine mandate. In verse 34, Jesus directly connected reaching this foreign seeker with both the will and the work of God: “What keeps me going is to do the will of the One who sent Me, finishing the work He started.” (MSG)

I realize that what I'm talking about—dedicating your time, energy and money...or more of it—may not be too comfortable for you. Unless you are convinced of what Jesus was convinced of—that this is the will and work of God—any call to commit your resources of time and energy will seem pushy about this. But sincerely pray about it. Don't do or not do it because a pastor or missionary is pressuring you. Open your heart to God, and simply ask, "God, help me to see the harvest—and what You would have me to do about it!"

Secondly, you will become convinced that doing missions brings the deepest satisfaction. In verse 32, Jesus said, "this is My nourishment!" It has been my experience that missional investment and involvement satisfies a core desire like no other. In an age that deeply longs for satisfaction but can never seem to really find it, I can promise you this: what deeply satisfied Jesus' soul will be that which can only and fully satisfy your soul!

Thirdly, you will become convinced that the missional sacrifice of others demands your best sacrifice. Notice verse 38: "I'm sending you to reap what you've not worked for. Others have done the hard work, now you'll reap the benefits of their labor." The investment of those who've gone before us demands that we do no less.

Think of the comfort missionaries have given up over the centuries to take Jesus to unreached people. It is the story of sacrifice! They died—often literally—to our version of the good life to bring the Good News so others can live.

James Calvert, in the 1800's, shipped off to go as a missionary to the cannibals on the Fiji Islands. As they neared the islands, the captain tried to dissuade him. "You'll lose your life and the lives of those with you if you go among these savages." To that, Calvert replied, "Captain, we died before we came here."

To Calvert—and other missionaries, I think they would all say, it was no sacrifice; it was our nourishment; it was our calling. We would do it all over again.

When you consider missionaries, starting with Jesus clear down to those serving in far away and difficult places in the world today, their sacrifice is best honored by your sacrifice! Mine, too! Missions is your calling. It's your privilege. It will be your nourishment. And in eternity, it will prove to be the best investment you ever made.

 *"The spirit of Christ is the spirit of missions. The nearer we get to Him, the more intensely missionary we become." (Henry Martyn)*



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Your assignment this week is to give an offering to a missions organization. It is not the only way to be missional, it is a good start, because as Jesus said, "where your treasure is there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:21)

DAY 3

TO BELIEVE IS TO SEE

Read John 4:49-50

“Sir,” replied the official, “come with me before my child dies.” Jesus said to him, “Go; your son will live!” The man believed Jesus’ words and went.

In essence, what this father in John’s story (John 4:43-54) said was, “I’ll see it when I believe it!” And that, my friend, is at the core of outstanding faith. Let me explain:

While we live at a time and in a culture where the scientific method has become man’s guiding theology, it is God who has set the rules for knowing and experiencing Him. And He has declared that the avenue to knowledge and experience is by way of faith.

This is an infinitely critical point in light of the fact that modern man has elevated the empirical over revelation as the way to enlightenment. Obviously, a world that is determined to put faith only in that which can be demonstrated by data, where man’s reason is king and metaphysical faith is optional, is in direct conflict with God’s world.

But for the Christian, everything starts with God. Sensory data—what a person can see, hear, smell, touch, and taste—is not a bad thing; don’t misunderstand. In my humble opinion, scientific provability is God-given, and since God created it, we would do well to exercise it. It is not antithetical to faith—necessarily—but while physical proof can lead to knowledge or an acknowledgment of God, only revelation can lead to a knowledge of who God truly is—the God of the Scriptures who has revealed Himself through Jesus Christ, and who, according to His own sovereign plan, at times breaks into our lives with His power.

Revelation is based on something other, something more. Revelation is based on the truth that God took the initiative to make Himself knowable, that He has revealed Himself—both spiritually and physically—to us through His Word and by His Son. Now the empirical and the revealed will not contradict each other, because both are from God. But what we see and what we can prove alone will not suffice.

In the eleventh century, St. Anselm argued that faith is the precondition of knowledge: “I believe in order that I may understand.” In other words, knowledge and experience cannot lead to faith. It might get you close, but it won’t get you there. Faith is a gift from God, and when faith is experienced, true knowledge and experience flows.

What Anselm said was eloquently stated long before in the fourth century by another pillar of the Christian faith, St. Augustine. Augustine taught that, “faith is to believe what we do not see; and the reward of this faith is to see what we believe.” In God’s world, we are to express faith in God first; then knowledge of God and experience with God will flow.

In the story we read about in John 4, this is exactly what is going on with the government official from Capernaum. Jesus has just made the frustrating observation that people will only believe when they see his miracles and wonders (John 4:48). And even then, it is very likely that their “belief” will only be temporary; only good until the next miracle is needed. But then this father, desperate for his deathly sick son to be healed, offers a different response to Jesus: He is willing to believe in order that he might see.

So what does that have to do with what you are facing in your life today? Plenty! God is discernable and knowable through the exercise of your faith. Perhaps you don’t see evidence of that right at this moment, but let me challenge you to believe what you don’t see, exercising faith in a loving God, and the reward will be that you will see, sooner or later, what you believe.

It takes faith—but that has been proven over the millennia! Just ask the father whose son was healed in John 4.

■ *“Faith is to believe what we do not see; and the reward of this faith is to see what we believe.” (St. Augustine)*

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

Perhaps you have been depending on your sight more than your faith these days. If so, here is a prayer you might considering offering to God: “Gracious Father, I believe. Help any unbelief I may have. I don’t see everything I’d like to see, but I believe. And while I pray that You would reveal Yourself in my life today in tangible ways, I also pray that I would trust Your love, Your care, and Your promised favor even if the tangible doesn’t appear. In the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ, the revealed Word, I pray. Amen.”

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- What is your biggest takeaway from this passage?
- Are there areas in your life where you have valued the empirical over the revelational?
- Are there any areas you feel God calling you to believe it before you see it?

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DAY 4

DO YOU REALLY WANT TO CHANGE

Read John 5:2-6

In Jerusalem there is a pool, called Bethesda which has five colonnades. Within these lay a large number of the sick—blind, lame, and paralyzed waiting for the moving of the water [they believed would heal them]... One man was there who had been sick for 38 years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew he had already been there a long time, He said to him, “Do you want to get well?”

Does it seem that Jesus question, “do you really want to be healed?” is a bit insensitive? After all, this man had been paralyzed—and totally dependent on others—for thirty-eight years. He had been waiting at this pool for who knows how long, in the belief that when the waters stirred, whoever got into the pool first would receive the healing they needed.

Do you really want to be healed—really, Jesus? The answer to that is a resounding “no; not at all is that insensitive of Jesus!” Since Jesus’ one desire was to do the will of the Father and restore the lost sheep to the care of the Good Shepherd—and therefore, insensitivity could not be a part of his character—there must be more here than meets the eye.

One of the things we see in this story is how Jesus’ power operates. And whether it had to do with healing, as is the case here, or deliverance or salvation, the power of God flowed through Jesus mercifully and graciously, but that Divine flow always demanded a human response to be fully activated and thoroughly experienced. That human response is what we call faith. And anytime Jesus acted in a way that we might consider harsh, it was simply the Lord doing what He discerned would be needed to move a person to respond to God in faith.

In this story, we see a pattern of this very thing. To begin with, Jesus initiated the man’s healing by asking him if he really wanted to be healed. It could have been that the lame man had grown accustomed to his condition, as strange as that may sound. But think about it: others did everything for him, and to be suddenly healed would turn that arrangement upside down. He would now have to work, take care of himself, and contribute to his family and society.

Or, it could be that this man’s hope was so dead that any expression of the faith needed to respond to a work of God had died with it long ago. But, this man’s response was immediate and sure. Yes, he wanted to be healed—even though that seemed impossible since he had no one to help him—so he was ready for the change, and all that change would require in his life.

Being ready for change—and willing to cooperate in it—is a critical piece to the work of God in our lives, since Divine transformation cannot take place without human cooperation. The sick, the enslaved, the unsaved, must see their need for God, must be ready to abandon their dysfunction and be willing to step in faith for God’s work to take its full course.

Moreover, we see that in asking the lame man to “get up,” Jesus was saying, “grab your will, reject your dysfunction and exercise your faith to join in with what God desires to do in your body right now.” As William Barclay said, “The power of God never dispenses with the effort of man.” The power of God in our lives is released to have its effect when our will engages God’s. Now to be clear, our will doesn’t create God’s power, it only opens the spigot wide for that power to flow. Said another way, our faith doesn’t earn God’s favor, but certainly, it either activates it and/or enhances its effect to a fuller degree in our lives.

“Get up”...a very bold command to you and me, perhaps even insensitive to expect such a thing of a man paralyzed for thirty-eight years, but it was what this man needed to catalyze the human faith needed to activate Divine power. And as he bent his will to accommodate the command of Jesus, power happened—and so did one of the outstanding miracles of the Bible.

In this is the pattern to the release of power—God’s power to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. We face so many things that in our lives that hinder, harass and hurt us. But when we offer faith and are willing to risk bending our will to God’s will—even if we have lived in bondage to a condition for an insufferably long time—the opportunity is created for God’s power through Christ’s Lordship to turn our victimization into victory.

“As our Lord asked the sick man whether he wished to be healed, so, without our consent, He will not save us; and sinners are without excuse for not consenting to the will of the Lord and their own salvation.” Bonaventura

GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Faith is your response to what God has already willed and what He desires to do. Your faith doesn’t create His power; it only turns on the flow so that when His timing is right, Divine energy to heal, deliver, strengthen, and save can wash over you in mighty waves. If that be so, then ask God to purify your faith—and be ready to offer it to your gracious God.

DAILY RESPONSE

- **What does this story in scripture teach you about fully activating your faith before expecting to receive from God?**
- **What do you think of the statement, “Be ready for change...and willing to cooperate in it?”**
- **Take some time to pray and ask God where you need to “get up” in your faith this week.**

DAY 5

NO JUDGMENT

Read John 5:24

Here is the truth: those who hear my words and believe in Him who sent Me have eternal life. They will not be judged, but have already passed from death to life.

We live in a culture that despises the notion of judgment on any level. And in particular, we are not too comfortable with an angry God. People prefer a tame God to a dangerous one. As Dorothy Sayers aptly put it, “We have declawed the Lion of Judah and made him a housecat for pale priests and pious old ladies.”

I don’t blame people for that. But if we are to be faithful to the authority of the Scripture, then we will have to acknowledge that God hates sin, that it is morally offensive to His nature and only it is only right and just that He judges the unrepentant who persist in breaking His moral law.

The sobering reality is, God’s righteous wrath will be poured out on sinful humanity some day in the future. When people die in their sinful state, there is a literal hell that awaits them, a physical place where they will suffer the eternal wrath of God. Likewise, Scripture is very clear that one day, at the end of the age, the Great White Throne Judgment of God (Revelation 20, Romans 2:5-6) will mark the final end of sin, when Satan, evil systems, and all the wicked will be cast into the lake of fire forever.

Obviously, that is a boatload of bad news! Yet amazingly, because of the immutable character of our gracious and merciful God, even within the bad news there is good news—Good News that should cause our hearts to explode in grateful praise. We can escape judgment!

You see, God’s righteous wrath for mankind’s sin was satisfied at Calvary when Jesus suffered and died as the final sacrifice for our sins. God fully focused His judgment against sinful man on His sinless Son, Jesus, as He hung on the cross. In the greatest act of grace and mercy ever, Jesus bore the wrath of God for the sins of the world when He was crucified. (1 Peter 2:24)

And Jesus is very clear that when a person puts believing or saving faith in who he is (God in the flesh) and in what he was sent to do (die as the redeeming sacrifice for the sins of the world) and personally trusts that he rose from the dead as Lord of life, then that believing person gets a pass on the worst, most dreadful, persistent fear—in this case, a reality-based fear: The fear of dying and facing the judgment of God.

For sure, it can be quite discouraging to hear about a God who actually punishes sin. And yes, we can understand why our culture wants to deny the reality of any kind of judgment. Yet anyone—yes, anyone—can take heart that in spite of that reality there stands, at the center of Divine wrath the grace and mercy of a God so loving that He was willing to sacrifice His only Son so that the guilt of sin could be erased from our account.

And that includes you, me and anyone else who will surrender to Jesus in believing faith. As Jesus said two chapters previously, “God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him would not die but have eternal life.”

Obviously, there is a reason that John 3:16 is the most well-loved verse in the entire Bible.

■ *“People want a God without wrath who brings people without sin into a kingdom without judgment to a Christ without a Cross.” (H. Richard Niebuhr)*

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

When you are in conversations with people who don’t believe in Jesus—and even with some who claim faith in Christ—it is likely that some of those you encounter will be of the “no judgment” mindset. Try to represent this Truth when that happens: Yes, there is a judgment coming, but there is also an escape clause that God has built into His righteous obligation to judge sin—saving faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. That really is Good News!

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- **Have you ever had judgement passed over you? How did that feel?**
- **When you consider the judgement we are saved from by a relationship with Jesus Christ, how should that impact how we think, feel and live?**
- **How can you tell someone about freedom and forgiveness in Christ without coming across judgmental to them?**

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WEEK

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DAY 1

LOVING SCRIPTURE BUT MISSING GOD

Read John 5:39-40

You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to Me! Yet you refuse to come to Me to receive this life.

I can think of no simpler yet more powerful practice for greater spiritual growth and intimacy with God than daily Bible study. The truth is, if you don't have a regular quiet time with God—which would include not just reading, but meditation as well as incorporating the Scripture in prayer—you will be stunted in your spiritual vitality. It is as simple as that.

Yet Bible reading, journaling, Scripture memory and all the other wonderful disciplines that involve the Word of God are not enough. In fact, there is a very real danger lurking in the practice of daily quiet time that will lead to even greater distance from God than not reading at all: Love of the Word of God more than love of the God of the Word. That is what we might call bibliolatry.

Bibliolatry occurs when we acquire biblical knowledge without spiritual discernment; when our study of the Word is not commensurate to our obedience of the Word; when our love for Scripture exceeds our love for God, and correspondingly, love for our fellow man; when pride in our practice of Bible reading leads to a false sense of righteousness; and when the spiritual discipline of quiet time becomes a work of law rather than an experience of grace. When that occurs, in effect, we are worshiping the Bible rather than the God of the Bible.

There are far too many “Christians” who read the Bible little, if at all. That is an unfortunate blight on the modern church. Yet there is another segment of believers, much smaller, but in deeper spiritual danger, who have been lulled into a sort of spiritual smugness because they fancy themselves as “people of the Word” or because, as they happily proclaim, the church they attend really “teaches” the Word.

Knowing the Bible isn't enough. Satan knows the Bible as well as anyone. He can quote it at will. Daily reading and Scripture memory aren't enough. Nicodemus (see John 3) had that down pat. Going to a church that teaches the Word verse-by-verse isn't enough. The Pharisees had that down pat, yet they were far from God.

Hearing, reading, and believing the Bible aren't enough. Believing in Jesus is. Jesus said, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.” (John 3:36)

The ultimate goal of Bible study should not be to gain greater knowledge of Scripture, or to grow spiritually, or to simply be able to check off that item on your daily list of things to do. The best goal—the only goal, in fact—should be to know God and His Son, Jesus Christ. By

“knowing”, I am not referring to an intellectual event, but the intimate exchange of one’s life with the Almighty whereby love is deepened, obedience is practiced, and faith is expanded.

That is when searching the Scripture leads to eternal life.

“Christ is the Word of God. It is not in certain texts written in the New Testament, valuable as they are; it is not in certain words which Jesus spoke, vast as is their preciousness; it is in the Word, which Jesus is, that the great manifestation of God is made.” (Phillips Brooks)

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

Honestly evaluate your study of God’s Word. Is it leading you to greater intimacy, obedience and love, or is it simply growing your knowledge of the Bible with growth in the aforementioned? Ask God to show you, and make adjustments immediately.

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- Why is daily time in scripture and prayer so important?
- How can we guard against a mis-prioritization of our spiritual development?
- How do you think Jesus wants you to grow in your intimacy with Him and understanding of His Word this week?

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DAY 2

KICK THE APPROVAL HABIT

Read John 5:41-42

“Your approval or disapproval means nothing to me, for as I know so well, you don’t have God’s love within you.”

One of the secrets to Jesus’ life—His incomparable achievements, His inner joy, His impact in history—was His freedom from the need for human approval. He understood His identity was in God, and that was His true north. Nothing else mattered; nothing else swayed Him—even to the point of enduring the worst kind of rejection and suffering to fulfill what His identity demanded of Him. And that is why we call Him Savior!

Don’t you wish you could live that way, too—free from the addiction of human approval? Well, you can—and you should. Now it won’t be easy to embrace that your true identity comes from God, because your enemy, Satan, works constantly to rob you of it and replace it with a false identity that requires the constant approval of others, but it will be well worth the effort to live, like Jesus did, as the person God’s sees you to be. And how does God see you? Probably the most powerful truth in Scripture on God view of you is Ephesians 2:10,

“For you are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for you to do...”

Do you realize what that means? You—right now, not someday, but right now—are God’s masterpiece. You are His work of art created anew in Christ to reflect the supernatural beauty, fundamental goodness and intrinsic worth of God Himself. That’s why Ephesians 2:11 goes on to say, “Therefore, remember...” Don’t forget who you are and “Whose” you are and what He has done to recreate you!

You see, you are not the sum total of what you do and how well you do it. That’s not your identity. Obviously, you live in a world where you are expected to perform at a high level of effectiveness and excellence if you hope to succeed and have the approval of others. That is what you must do, but that’s not who you are. And if you make your performance the basis of your identity and worth, your life will be dominated by anxiety, dissatisfaction, fear of failure and all kinds of other insecurities.

Likewise, you are not the sum total of what others think about you. Your worth is not the result of their approval. You live in a world governed by popularity and polls where approval and acceptance are important. It would be foolish to deny that. But your worth is not based on whether others think you are pretty or powerful or charismatic or charming. You are of inestimable worth and infinite value because God says so. He says, “You are My work of art! A masterpiece. When I made you, I outdid Myself! And when sin messed you up, I spent a lot to restore you; I paid to

reclaim you as My very own with My son's blood. Don't ever forget that!"

If you do, you will succumb to this debilitating addiction that blinds you to the truth that you are of such high value to God. Being addicted to the approval of others will lead you to become a people-pleaser, overly sensitive to criticism and ultimately to a life where the fear of rejection affects everything about you.

God doesn't want you to live your life addicted to others' approval; He paid with His son's blood to set you free from the fear of rejection. That is why the Apostle Paul called you to a very spiritual activity—the practice of remembering. What do you need to remember?

One, remember that striving for other people's approval is a wasted expenditure of energy and counterproductive to your faith. It's foolish to exert effort to get what God has already given. When you catch yourself trying to convince people how smart, successful or striking you are to gain their admiration, just stop and practice remembering: Remember how enriching and freeing it is to live in God's acceptance and approval.

Two, remember that other people's opinions can only enslave you if you let them. Author David Burns writes, "It is not another person's approval that makes me feel good. It's my belief that there is validity to their approval or disapproval."

Quit giving other people's opinion of you that kind of divine power. Suppose you were to visit a psychiatric ward, and a patient came up to you and said, "I had a vision, and I was told the fourth person to walk through that door today would be special messenger from God. You're the fourth, so I know you are the chosen, the holy one, the world's savior. Let me kiss your feet." Would you base your identity on that? Would your self-esteem rise as a result of that? Of course not! Why? You considered the source.

God is the only true source for your identity; only God's opinion truly matters! As Ephesians 2:10 says, "You are His workmanship." As your Designer, He alone is qualified to evaluate your worth. So don't give worship to another's judgment of you!

Practice remembering who you are—and Whose you are—and you will begin to live a lot more like Jesus did: free from the need for others' approval.

■ *"The fear of human opinion disables; trusting in God keeps you stable." (Proverbs 29:25, Free)*



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

If you haven't already, memorize Ephesians 2:10. And for extra credit, memorize 1 John 3:1 as well. Then, each day this week, spend time before you head out for the day and before you go to sleep at night meditating on what God's truth means for you.

DAY 3

DON'T SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF (IT'S ALL SMALL STUFF)

Read John 6:3-6

Jesus went up into the Hills and sat down with His disciples around Him. Soon he saw a great multitude of people climbing the hill, looking for Him. Turning to Philip he asked, "Philip, where can we buy bread to feed all these people?" (He was testing Philip, for he already knew what he was going to do.)

I'm not sure who first said it (its origin has been attributed to several different authors), but I think it offer some sage advice for people who follow Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Rules for living, we could rightly call it. It simple goes like this:

Rule # 1: Don't sweat the small stuff.

Rule #2: It's all small stuff.

That is true! You see, with God, nothing is impossible; it's all small stuff to Him. That is not just my theology, that comes from God's own mouth. God told a perplexed Abraham and a cynical Sarah when he announced to them that they would have a son well into their 90's (and beyond, actually, for Abraham):

"Why did Sarah laugh? Why did she say, 'Can an old woman like me have a baby?' Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return about this time next year, and Sarah will have a son." (Genesis 18:13-14)

Is anything too hard for the Lord? No—it's all small stuff! Even giving barren, octogenarian couples their first child.

When Jeremiah the prophet was crying out to God over the devastation of Israel and the insurmountable problems the nation was facing, the Holy Spirit inspired him to prayerfully pour out this affirmation in his appeal to the Almighty for help:

"O Sovereign Lord! You made the heavens and earth by your strong hand and powerful arm. Nothing is too hard for you!" (Jeremiah 32:17)

Later in that same chapter, God himself sent this word to the prophet:

"I am the Lord, the God of all the peoples of the world. Is anything too hard for me?" (Jeremiah 32:26-27)

Is anything too hard for the Lord? No—it's all small stuff! Even taking a shattered, scattered nation and reconstituting them for His glory and purpose.

Do you get the point? Nothing is above God's pay grade. That's because the created order in its entirety was conceived and perfectly engineered in the mind of God before it came into being. God created everything that exists by the breath of His mouth. God hung the stars by flicking them into space with His finger. He holds everything that we see and don't see perfectly into place by His powerful and caring hand. There is nothing—absolutely nothing—that escapes His watchful eye.

And therefore, there is nothing—absolutely nothing—that is too big or too hard for Him. Nothing is impossible to God, and therefore, all things are possible for His people.

That's why Jesus, who is God the Son, the agent of creation, said to Phillip, "what shall we do with this gigantic crowd of seekers? They're hungry, and we've got to feed them. Where can we get that much food?" Of course, we know how the massive crowd would get miraculously fed because John clearly states that Jesus already knew what He was going to do. His question to was just to test Phillip for the purpose of stretching his faith.

And Jesus will do that with us, too. Even though He already knows what He's going to do, He doesn't automatic do it without first stretching, tempering, testing and strengthening our faith, which is of greater value than any miraculous intervention we could hope for.

But don't miss the whole point of this: Jesus already knows what He needs to do. And if that is true, then Rule #1 for you as He is follower would be, "Don't sweat the small stuff!" Why? It is a wasted use of energy, and it's dishonoring to the One who already knows what to do. Therefore, as his follower, Rule #2 is certainly true too, "It's all small stuff!"

Since that is true, why not relax a little bit today, and let God be God. Exercise your trust and let God take care of your big stuff, since it's all small stuff to Him.

■ *"All things are possible until they are proved impossible and even the impossible may only be so, as of now." (Pearl S. Buck)*



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

What are you sweating today? Visualize holding it in the palms of your hands. Walk outside and lift your hands Heavenward and release it to the Lord with these words, "Father, this is too big for me, but not for You. Here, You take it and do with it according to Your purpose." Then thank God that He has just given you the greatest gift: He has stretched your faith!

DAY 4

PRAYING BEFORE YOUR MEAL

Read John 6:11

Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterward He did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted.

This easy-to-overlook verse is sandwiched between two of Jesus' outstanding miracles—the feeding of the five thousand with five loaves of bread and two small fish. and the miracle of Jesus walking on the water. Not only that, at the end of this lengthy chapter is some of the heaviest theology that Jesus would ever lay on His would-be followers. It was so demanding and confrontational, in fact, that His followers called it a “hard saying”, and many of them quit following Him from that point on.

With so much important stuff going on in this chapter, it would be easy to miss the fact that Jesus stopped to give thanks before a meal. Think about that for a moment: Why would Jesus do that? In a sense, wasn't He really saying grace to Himself? What purpose did this serve?

To begin with, I think Jesus was truly grateful to His Father for this provision of resources by which the miraculous feeding could occur. I think Jesus was authentically thankful that His Father had authorized the use of Divine power and was about to yet again authenticate the Messianic ministry and mission of the Son. I think the Second Person of the eternal Trinity was a fundamentally grateful being. It was just who Jesus was; the organic overflow of His Divine nature was love, joy, confidence and, in this case, gratitude.

Jesus—the eternal, self-existent One—said grace before His meal. And if Jesus, who didn't have to do it, did it, then we, who don't have to do it, most definitely should.

Not only that, Jesus was modeling for us the appropriateness and power of gratitude. He was reminding us by his actions that it doesn't hurt to stop and express thanksgiving to God, and one of the simplest and recurring ways to enter into gratitude is to say a simple “thank you” before each meal.

We don't know exactly what Jesus said in His prayer, but it was likely short and sweet. John simply says He “gave thanks.” He acknowledged God in that moment, drawing attention to the Heavenly Provider and reminding both Himself and those who were within earshot of his dependence on and gratitude to Father God.

That is something you and I can do, too, each time we sit down (or drive through) for a meal. We can give thanks. As redundant and useless and perfunctory as it may seem, there is power in this simple act. And if Jesus, who didn't have to do it, did it, then we, who don't have to do it, most definitely should!

“We ought to give thanks for all fortune: if it is good, because it is good; if bad, because it works in us patience, humility, contempt of this world and the hope of our eternal country.” (C.S. Lewis)

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

Before every meal this week, say grace. Pause, think about it; then offer up to your gracious Heavenly Father the gratitude that is in your heart for all the good things He has provided.

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- How does thanking God for a meal show and contribute toward an attitude of gratitude in our lives?
- How else can you demonstrate and reinforce gratitude to God for all He has done for you?

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DAY 5

MIRACLES ARE MOMENTARY; FAITH IS FOREVER

Read John 6:27

“Don’t work for the food that perishes but for the food that lasts for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal of approval on Him.”

People are infatuated with miracles! They always have been and always will be. I get that! I would love to see more of them as well. And in fact, even though some would deny the miraculous still occurs, they are abounding around the world—especially where we find Christianity in developing nations. When I return from my church planting mission in Africa, usually with dozens of stories of the miraculous, I am always asked, “How come we don’t see the supernatural like that in America?”

I have opinions about that, which I will save for another time, but the point I want to make is that we are no different than the people in Jesus’ day. They too, wanted Jesus to show them the miraculous. Even after He performed miracles, they would turn around and ask Him to do a miracle—not another one, mind you, but “do a miracle” as if He had not done one in the first place—so they could believe in Him. (John 6:30)

Well, Jesus wanted them to believe in Him too. So throughout His ministry, He performed miracles to get their attention and clear the path for them to put saving belief in Him as Messiah, God’s Son, sent as the only source of their eternal salvation. In this chapter, John 6, Jesus has just performed two of His many outstanding miracles: the feeding of the five thousand with five loaves and two fish and walking on water in the midst of a raging storm on the Sea of Galilee. And He points out to the people that these “works of God” were to lead them to the only work of God that the Father wanted from them: “Believe in the one He has sent.” (John 6:29)

Now while Jesus used the miraculous to draw attention to His Divine mission and to authenticate his Divine nature, he also knew that people would gravitate to His miracles as an end in themselves, and not as the pathway to saving belief. That’s why He challenged their shortsighted and selfish request for more miracles:

“But you shouldn’t be so concerned about perishable things like food [which had just been provided in the miracle feeding]. No, spend your energy seeking the eternal life that I, the Messiah, can give you. For God the Father has sent me for this very purpose.” John 6:27

What was Jesus saying? Miracles are temporary. Think about it: The five thousand people who had just received the bread and fish in the miraculous multiplication would be hungry again the next day. The disciples who were deathly afraid while in the boat that stormy night would face the temptation to fear again, even though Jesus had just demonstrated once and for all his sovereignty over the elements. The people that Jesus raised from the dead in this life would die again some day. So, too, would the people He miraculously healed.

Yes, miracles are temporary fixes to human frailties, and occasionally our gracious and merciful God breaks into our humanity to provide them, but the miraculous is simply a pathway to saving belief (the faith required for our eternal salvation) and trusting belief (the faith required to obediently walk in daily dependence on God). Miracles are for the moment; belief is boundless, going beyond the moment and lasting throughout eternity.

So if a miracle is provided in the moment, and it leads to faith, which is forever, then more power to the miraculous!

“The gospel which they so greatly needed they would not have; the miracles which Jesus did not always choose to give, they eagerly demanded.”
(C.H. Spurgeon)

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

Let me suggest you offer this prayer: “Father, help me to practice Your presence in the daily ordinariness of my life. Teach me to make righteous judgments so that I might see You in every person I meet, every event I take in, every plan I execute, and in every detail of my world.”

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- Do you think it is okay to pray for miracles?
- What do you think the purposes of miracles are?
- According to Jesus in this passage, where is our focus to be when considering the miraculous?

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WEEK

6

DAY 1

STAR-STRUCK FANS OR FULLY-DEVOTED DISCIPLES

Read John 6:53-56

So Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. But anyone who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. Anyone who eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me, and I in Him.”

The crowds had been pretty impressed with Jesus—and why not? He had healed their sick; he had fed their multitudes—5,000 of them were treated to a full meal when He miraculously multiplied a couple of sardines and five loaves of bread; He had even walked on their water—literally traipsing across the Sea of Galilee, and if that weren’t miraculous enough, it was in the middle of a storm

So you can see why they wanted to hang around Jesus. Who wouldn’t?

But Jesus didn’t want star-struck fans, He wanted fully devoted disciples. So, in essence, He said, *“Whatever your reason for following Me up ‘til now, let Me take you to a deeper, more satisfying experience, and you can only do that by taking My life fully into your own.”* Oh, He didn’t say it quite that innocuously; He got pretty graphic and told them they had to eat His flesh and drink His blood if they wanted to be His disciples. And when the adoring crowds heard Jesus lay down the demands of discipleship in that way, they were shocked—and turned off. The New English Bible translates John 6:60 this way: *“This is more than we can stomach. Why listen to such words?”*

Why were they so upset? Was it because they found Jesus’ word so revolting? Was it because they didn’t understand what He was saying? I don’t think so! In fact, they were upset because they knew all too well what he was asking of them. He was calling them to accept Him as God’s Son, the true bread of life, the only one who could truly satisfy their spiritual hunger and quench their thirst for God, both now and for all eternity. Jesus was calling them radically to commit their lives totally to Him, promising that if they did, then, and only then, would their deepest longings and innermost needs be fully met in Him.

Jesus’ call to radical discipleship, using those provocative terms, would not have been unfamiliar to them. When a leader in that era called for unreserved commitment, He would demand that His followers “eat His flesh and drink His blood.” So, the reason the crowd was upset and abandoned Jesus at hearing this was because they knew exactly what Jesus was asking: Nothing less than total commitment and full surrender.

Interestingly, Jesus used two different words in two different Greek tenses for “eating his flesh.” In John 6:53, the word “eat” meant to eat once and for all—a specific act at a moment in time that produced continuing effects into the future. He was speaking of the act of salvation—a specific moment in time when you give your life over to Christ and are born again. Salvation occurs at a moment in time, but it produces effects that continue throughout life and clear into eternity. The second word for “eat” in John 6:54 referred to a continuous act of daily and voraciously taking life-giving, soul-satisfying nourishment into one’s life. Jesus was referring not to salvation, but to the daily walk of discipleship.

In both cases, to “eat and drink of Him” means to so thoroughly absorb Jesus that every fiber of who you are and every aspect of how you live is fundamentally and profoundly affected. And, when He is invited in and allowed to fully and completely take over your life that way, something wonderful will happen: Jesus begins to show through.

That reminds me of the story of a little girl who turned to her mother on their way home from church and said, “Mommy, the pastor’s sermon confused me.” The mother said, “Why was that?” The girl replied, “Well, he said that God is bigger than we are. Is that true?” The mother replied, “Yes, honey!” Then the little girl said, “And he also said that God lives in us. Is that true, mommy?” The mother again said, “Yes, that’s true, too.” Upon hearing that, the girl said, “Well, mommy, if God is bigger than us and He lives in us, wouldn’t He show through?”

That is what happens when you take Jesus so thoroughly and fundamentally in to your life—both at salvation and in your daily walk as His disciple. He begins to show through, and that is a good thing! If He is not showing through, it is likely that you are lacking in good spiritual nutrition, and, in the words of your Lord, you need to go back and “eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man.”

■ *“Salvation is free ... but discipleship will cost you your life.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)*

GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Offer this prayer of committed discipleship: “Jesus, I want to absorb Your life so fully into mine that You show through. I offer myself to You; Lord, fully take me over.”

DAILY RESPONSE

- **If you are a follower of Christ, what have been some of the hardest sacrifices you have made to follow Jesus? If you are not yet a Christian or perhaps new to the faith, what is hard about this teaching in scripture?**

DAY 2

THE GRAVITATIONAL PULL OF HUMAN CELEBRITY

John 7:2-4

Soon it was time for the Jewish Festival of Shelters, and Jesus' brothers said to Him, "Leave here and go to Judea, where your followers can see your miracles! You can't become famous if you hide like this! If you can do such wonderful things, show yourself to the world!"

"Thou shalt become famous" is not one of the Ten Commandments. "Blessed are the spiritual celebrities, for they shall draw much attention" was not one of the Beatitudes Jesus laid down in the Sermon on the Mount. "Feed My sheep...so it can grow into a nationally televised mega-ministry" was not the charge Jesus gave His disciples.

Yet the all-consuming desire for fame and the gravitational pull of celebrity is stronger today among Christian leaders than ever before. Jesus' brothers would have made a great PR team, but they don't hold a candle to today's image conscious ministries. All you have to do is tune in to Christian television, turn on Christian radio, walk into a Christian bookstore, or surf just about anything Christian and you will be immediately impressed with the swelling ranks of those who have attained Christian rock star status. In this day and age, to make it to the "big", all you've got to do is sell a book, have your own show—or get on one, be the spiritual authority all the media quotes when there is breaking news, have your own blog, replete with adoring readers and do whatever you can to get your name—and your mug—out there where the folks can discover just what a gift you are to humankind.

That doesn't sound too much like Jesus, does it? He resisted any and every attempt to become famous, catapult to power, get rich and build a crowd of raving fans. In fact, He did just about everything you shouldn't do to build a successful ministry. He avoided attention—if it was for wrong motives. He said very hard things to would be followers. He insulted the religious movers and shakers. He hung out with the wrong people. He championed causes no one on their way to the top would touch with a ten-foot pole. He grew his band of followers down to 11 guys who were mostly religious rejects. And He got himself killed—crucified as a common criminal.

Oh—and He changed the world!

Wouldn't it be refreshing to see a new crop of spiritual leaders who didn't give a fig about fame and celebrity dominate the Christian scene today? Well, turn off your TV—and the radio. Forget about the cover of the latest edition of "Jesus Weekly" and quit reading all those pastor-blogs (except for one). Get in your car and take a drive out to a small town some Sunday, walk into a little country church and you are likely to find a simple shepherd who isn't very famous—and

won't ever be—except with God. He, or she, simply loves God, and the flock—and one day, when the dust settles and we all stand before God, that faithful pastor will receive a standing ovation from the Great Cloud of Witnesses.

They never sought fame—they only wanted to make Jesus famous!

Fame is a bee.
It has a song—
It has a sting—
Ah, too, it has a wing.
~Emily Dickinson

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

Memorize Mark 10:45, “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- Why do you suppose we pursue fame and recognition so easily and quickly when given the chance?
- What stands out to you about how and why Jesus seemed to avoid fame?
- Where is God prompting you to step out of a limelight and into more private intimacy with Him today?

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DAY 3

WATER-WALKING FAITH

Read John 7:7

Jesus said, “[the world] hates Me because I accuse it of sin and evil.”

One of the things an authentic, fruitful, effective Christ-follower must master in life is balance. Balance isn't listed as a virtue in New Testament theology; it is not a mark of discipleship that Jesus articulated; it is not the tenth fruit of the Spirit. Yet balance is the byproduct of Christian virtue, it demonstrates we have a grasp on what it means to live as a true disciple and it is evidence of the Holy Spirit's production of spiritual fruit in our lives.

If we are to live as Jesus lived and think like Jesus thought, then like Jesus, we must learn to balance truth with grace, tolerance of flawed humanity with fidelity to God's standard of holiness, working out our salvation with resting in God's effort, and on it will go. But, balance for the Christian is neither easy to achieve, nor to maintain, because the drift of the sin nature still fighting for mastery of our lives is always toward an extreme.

Nowhere is this imbalance more apparent in our contemporary American experience of Christianity than in our posture toward sin. It is especially noticeable in the current cultural debate on same-sex attraction where many spiritual leaders are now rejecting this idea that the believer must “love the sinner but hate the sin” as un-Christlike. Yet, Jesus did exactly that. So that, too, is a balance that we must learn to achieve.

Of course, some will passionately disagree with my statement. I understand that push back. There is a legitimate discussion these days about how to approach the issue of sin in our culture. But, my fear is that because the secular mindset is increasingly pressuring the church to not only condone same-sex lifestyles, but to celebrate them as perfectly healthy and appropriate, and because of our growing fear that the world will hate us if we stand in their way, many Christians—leaders and lay people alike—are going to great lengths to avoid calling out sin where sin desperately needs to be called out. A too large percentage of believers now live with a consuming phobia of being labeled—labeled a homophobe, a hate-monger, intolerant, and ignorant, and worse.

But let's remember that Jesus was hated and called names precisely because He pointed out the evil and sin in the world. Sinful man didn't reject and ultimately crucify Him because He came saying “everything is alright; go your merry way.” Jesus was murdered because He said things like, “You are slaves of sin, every one of you.” (John 8:34) Believers by the thousands have not been martyred throughout Christian history because of their tolerance of sin; they were killed because they rubbed against the grain of evil cultures.

Now again, balance is the key. Jesus didn't come to condemn sinners—they were already under condemnation—but by His righteous lifestyle and message of holiness, sin was condemned. Jesus didn't condemn the woman caught in adultery in John 8, but He wasn't afraid to tell her to go and "sin" no more. The very first words out of Jesus' mouth as He began to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom was "repent"! "From then on, Jesus began to preach, 'Turn from sin and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.'" (Matthew 4:17)

Jesus wasn't afraid to use the "s" word. Sin is sin, and it separates from God. As C.S. Lewis said,

"Jesus Christ did not say - Go into all the world and tell the world that it is quite right." If we are to truly love people as Jesus did, then at some point their sin must be a topic of conversation. For people to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, sin must be acknowledged and repentance must be expressed. There is no other way. To point that out is truly the most loving thing a believer can do with an unbeliever.

Of course, it is all in the delivery. People must know that you truly love them if the call to repentance is to be received from a loving heart. But even then, since the message of righteousness rubs against the grain of a fallen world, we must be prepared to be labeled. But remember, it won't be the first time.

The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold; men who in their inmost souls are true and honest; men who do not fear to call sin by its right name; men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole; men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall. (Ellen G. White)



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Don't ever be afraid to call sin, sin. Jesus did, so should you. But you must figure out how to do it as Jesus did—from a posture of love, grace and mercy. And one of the best ways to get into that posture is to, first, truly repent of your own sin, and two, humbly live in the knowledge that you are nothing more than a sinner saved by grace.



DAILY RESPONSE

- **Have you ever, or do you find areas of your life to be out of balance? What are some examples of this?**
- **What defines balance in the life of a Christ follower?**
- **Take some time to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal areas of sin in your life that cause an imbalance in your life. Make some promises to God today as you ask for His help in resisting sin and temptation and gaining spiritual balance.**

DAY 4

A BAPTISM OF CLEAR SEEING

John 7:24

“Look beneath the surface so you can judge correctly.”

People were making judgments about Jesus, and as we see in John 7, increasingly, those judgments were not very positive. In fact, opposition and outright hostility were coming to a boiling point, and it would soon lead to His death.

That is the way it was with Jesus and still is. In His day, people either loved Him or hated Him—there was no neutral ground. Being around Jesus demanded a position on one end of the spectrum or the other, but staying in the middle was not an option.

To arrive at an opinion of Jesus, a judgment had to be made. Sadly, those who rejected Him formed judgments that were not based in righteousness and truth. Their judgments were based on the fact that Jesus had made them uncomfortable. He had challenged their traditions. His ministry had colored outside the lines of established theology. His way of doing things didn't look like theirs. Why, He even had the audacity to actually heal someone in dire need on the Sabbath—and they didn't like that one bit (even though, as Jesus pointed out, their outrage was pretty selective on this one).

Never one to shy away from controversy and confrontation, Jesus challenged their attitudes toward him as well as their approach to life in general. He called them to reject this judgment-by-appearance mindset that was keeping them from seeing God for a clearer view of life as seen through the lens of righteousness. Learning to make righteous judgments would make all the difference in their world—it would lead them to see God in the daily details of their world, and in the end, it would lead to eternal life.

Unfortunately, most of the people in Jesus' day rejected what He had to say. But the story is not meant to end there. Jesus' challenge to “judge with righteous judgment” (NIV) or to “look beneath the surface” (NLT) calls us to reexamine the way we arrive at the opinions we hold and honestly ask ourselves whether they are based on appearance, built on preference, colored by pre-conceptions, or rooted in righteousness.

We form judgments and opinions every day—perhaps every hour—about the people we encounter, the events we observe, and the world we live in. Every moment of our day presents opportunity to either see the work that God is doing in the people around us and events that we encounter or to miss it entirely. And depending how we form our judgments, we will either embrace God's work, or like the people in Jesus' day, reject it and miss out on the greatness of God in the daily ordinariness of life.

Open your heart—God is at work all around you. Open your eyes—you will find God’s thumbprint on everything you encounter. And if you will learn to root your opinions, conclusions, and attitudes in righteousness rather than mere appearance, you will discover Jesus in the details of your day!

“We need a baptism of clear seeing. We desperately need seers who can see through the mist—Christian leaders with prophetic vision. Unless they come soon it will be too late for this generation. And if they do come we will no doubt crucify a few of them in the name of our worldly orthodoxy.” (A.W. Tozer)

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

Let me suggest you offer this prayer: “Father, help me to practice Your presence in the daily ordinariness of my life. Teach me to make righteous judgments so that I might see You in every person I meet, every event I take part in, every plan I execute, and in every detail of my world.”

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- **Are there teachings in scripture that make you uncomfortable? How do you deal with that discomfort when you feel it?**
- **As God reveals areas of growth and correction needed in your own life, how do you deal with it?**
- **If you were to pray for a “baptism of clear seeing”, what do you think would be revealed to you? In fact, why don’t you try that today and see what God reveals?**

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DAY 5

THE GREAT OFFER

Read John 7:38-39

“Anyone who believes in Me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, ‘Rivers of living water will flow from His heart.’” (When he said “living water,” He was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in Him. But the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet entered into His glory.)

In the beginning, God created the earth and walked upon it in unfettered intimacy with Adam and Eve. But, they sinned, and the face-to-face intimacy they enjoyed was now broken. God no longer walked the earth in relationship with man.

But then Jesus came to earth to re-reveal the Father to sinful man. After millennia of His physical absence, as the prophet had said, God was now with us again, but this time in Jesus, our Immanuel. Jesus, the “Word”, was with God, was God and created all things that exist, and “took on human flesh and took up residence among us.” (John 1:1 & 14)

Then Jesus left earth to go back to heaven, and in the process he promised the Father would send the Holy Spirit to be in—not just with—his followers. (John 14:16-17) The Holy Spirit would represent and further reveal God in unprecedented and unconfined ways. (John 15:26-27) He would guide into truth, comfort, and empower. He would fill Christ’s followers to full and overflowing with the abundance of God. They would experience “rivers of living water” filling them up and spilling over from their lives.

What an offer Jesus was making. What other leader could ever come close to that? Obviously no one could match the great offer of the Holy Spirit coming to dwell, fill and overflow the life of the believer. To have intimate fellowship with God fully restored; to have “God with us” now become “God in us”, and continually, no less; to have the guiding, comforting, empowering a force of God at our disposal, permanently and profusely—this is the great offer!

So just what did Jesus mean when He referred to this as “rivers of living water” that would completely satiate the thirst of those who drank? How about this:

Satisfaction: Obviously, spiritual hunger would again, as in the beginning of creation, now be fully and forever satisfied as the Holy Spirit of God took up residence in each believer. That which Jesus promised—life more abundantly—would now become real and practical.

Significance: Not only would the Spirit satisfy, but he would enable those He indwelt with the very life force and creative power of God through supernatural gifts (1 Corinthians 12:7-11) to carry out the works, speak the words, and fulfill the will of the Heavenly Father. Through the Holy Spirit, believers could be used to do things only God could do.

Success: To know (“the Spirit will reveal and guide you into all truth” — 1 Corinthians 2:10; John 16:13) and do (“you will receive power after the Holy Spirit comes upon you” — Acts 1:8) the will of God is the height of human success. God with us is now God in us doing through us what only God can do. There is no greater, more lasting, significant and satisfying expenditure of one’s life.

That is what is possible through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. That is indeed, the great offer!

“Wise leaders should have known that the human heart cannot exist in a vacuum. If Christians are forbidden to enjoy the wine of the Spirit they will turn to the wine of the flesh....Christ died for our hearts and the Holy Spirit wants to come and satisfy them.” (A.W. Tozer)

GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

John 20:21-23 tells us that after His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples and said, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” If you would like to be inundated with the life force of the Holy Spirit, make this bold request of God: “Spirit of God, breathe new life into me!”

DAILY RESPONSE

- Which of the 3 “S’s” mentioned above stands out to you personally? Why?
- Journal about and talk about (in your community group) the statement, “To have intimate fellowship with God fully restored; to have “God with us” now become “God in us”, and continually, no less; to have the guiding, comforting, empowering force of God at our disposal, permanently and profusely—this is the great offer!”

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WEEK

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DAY 1

GRACE!

Read John 8:2-5

At dawn He appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around Him, and He sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do You say?”

In one of my favorite books, *What’s So Amazing About Grace*, Philip Yancey writes,

“Grace means there’s nothing we can do to make God love us more—no amount of spiritual calisthenics and renunciations, no amount of knowledge gained from seminaries, no amount of crusading on behalf of righteous causes. And grace means there’s nothing we can do to make God love us less—no amount of racism, pride, pornography, adultery or even murder. Grace means that God already loves us as much as an infinite God can possibly love.”

That’s why I love this story of the adulterous woman’s life-transforming encounter with Jesus; it just exudes grace! And it reminds me of how God looks right into what Lewis Smedes called this, “glob of unworthiness that is me and offers to accept me, own me, hold me, affirm me, and never let go of me even if He’s not too impressed with what He has on His hands.”

A glob of unworthiness—that’s me...you, too! And that’s God—loving us, without limit—because of his incredibly great grace! King David, who knew a lot about personal failure and unworthiness, wrote in Psalm 103:8, 10-14,

“The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love...He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on His children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him; for He knows how we’re formed, He remembers that we’re dust.”

That theology of unconditional love, undeserved mercy and unlimited grace is what’s fleshed out here in this story in John 8. And it’s not only the message Jesus wrote with his finger as he stooped to scribble in the dirt, he wrote it with his blood as it dripped to the dirt from the cross. Grace is his life-message! Amazing grace, how sweet the sound! It’s the one thing that’ll touch your core need today; it’s the only thing that’ll transform our lost world.

In 1988, a concert was held in London's Wembley Stadium, and throughout the day, bands blasted the crowd high on booze and drugs with their ear-splitting music. But for some reason, the promoters scheduled an opera singer as the closing act, Jessye Norman. At the finale, she walked out with no band or singers—unknown to the crowd, which was shouting for more Guns 'n Roses. Jessye began to sing, "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound. That saved a wretch like me!" And remarkably, 70,000 fans got quiet.

By the second verse, "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved," they were putty; by the third verse they were digging into their memories to sing along, "and grace will lead me home." As she sang, "When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun; We've no less days to sing God's praise, than when we first begun" a transcendent reverence had enveloped the stadium.

What on earth wields that kind of power over a beleaguered psalmist, or an adulterous woman, or a stadium full of drug-addled rock-n-rollers? Grace!

Now don't miss the point of this story: The adulterous woman reminds us that every sinner has a future, but every saint has a past. We're all born broken, and we become whole only by the mending of grace, God's glue. And no matter how bad, how unworthy, how disqualified you think you are, you are not beyond the renewing reach of God's grace. That's why prostitutes, publicans, and other sinners responded to Jesus so readily—still do. They knew their sin; that's why forgiveness was so appealing.

And no matter how good, worthy, and qualified you think you are, apart from grace, there's no good in you. In fact, on your best day, apart from grace, Isaiah said your righteousness is as filthy rags. (Isaiah 64:6) That's why, as C.S. Lewis said, "[Adulterous women] are in no danger of finding their present life so satisfactory that they cannot turn to God; [it's] the proud ...the self-righteous [that] are in that danger."

So wherever you fall on the continuum—from super-saint to seedy sinner—just remember: every saint has a past, but every sinner has a future. And grace is there waiting for you! Grace! It's only by grace that the brokenness we're born with, and live with, is mended.

■ *"To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you." (C.S. Lewis)*



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Take a moment today to simply and gratefully reflect on God's grace.

DAY 2

NOT GUILTY

Read John 8:11

“Jesus said to [the adulterous woman], “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.”

If I were writing this story instead of John, the scene would have called for Jesus order down fire from heaven to torch this nasty bunch of Pharisees who had brought the adulterous woman before the Lord. At the very least, I would have had Jesus snatching the poor lady from their grasp and beaming over to Galilee to set her free. That would have made a great story—Oscar-worthy, I’m sure!

But as we have come to expect of Jesus, He does the unexpected. Instead of special effects and edge-of-your-seat drama, He simply stoops over and writes in the sand. Do you ever wonder what He wrote? “Jesus was here,” or perhaps He traced out the Ten Commandments, or better yet, a list of the Pharisees’ secret sins or maybe even the names of their mistresses?

Whatever it was, the religious “KGB” kept pressing until finally He said, “Look, if any of you are without sin, you can be the first one to throw a stone at her.” Then He began to scribble again, and with those words, Jesus lobbed a grenade into their midst that exploded their self-righteousness. Now defenseless, one-by-one the Pharisees, from the oldest to the youngest, walked away, leaving only Jesus and this sinful woman.

Now what would happen to the adulterous woman? Could she expect to get preached at again, some more condemnation, another helping of humiliation and a pile of rejection? That had been the pattern of her life so far. Instead, Jesus gently asks, “Where are your accusers? Has no one judged you guilty?”

She replied, “Sir, they’re gone...they didn’t judge me guilty.”

Then Jesus lobbed another grenade—this one a grace-grenade that utterly exploded this sinful woman’s self-condemnation and turned her sad world right side up: “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.”

So just what was it that Jesus wrote in the sand? I think it is highly likely that he bent over and with His finger, etched these words: “Not guilty!”

A few weeks later, Jesus again wrote those very same words in the sand. This time it was not with His finger, but with blood that dripped from His nail-pierced hands and feet, leaving an indelible stain on the ground at the foot of the cross. This time it wasn’t just meant for an

adulterous woman, it was meant for unfaithful, guilty people like you and me:

“Not Guilty. Paid in full. Completely forgiven.”

I don’t know what that grace-explosion does for you, but it makes me want to “go and sin no more.”

“This is the mystery of the riches of divine grace for sinners, for by a wonderful exchange our sins are now not ours but Christ’s, and Christ’s righteousness is not Christ’s, but ours.” (Martin Luther)



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Have you thanked the Lord lately for His grace—grace that has covered all of your sins! Perhaps now would be a great time to do that. And maybe today would be a great day to extend His grace to another undeserving sinner like you.



DAILY RESPONSE:

- In your opinion, what are the top three most amazing parts of this Bible story?
- What important lessons can we learn from this passage about how Jesus forgives and about how we should in turn forgive?
- What is the natural response that is also shown in this scripture to being forgiven for much sin? How does that translate to a response in your life?

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DAY 3

ENJOY YOUR NEW TIME ZONE

Read John 7:30

The Jewish leaders tried to arrest Jesus; but no one laid a hand on Him, because His time had not yet come. (John 7:30, 8:20)

Twice we are told in John 7 and 8 that the Jewish leaders, increasingly threatened by Jesus, tried to arrest Him, but couldn't. The reason they couldn't? Because Jesus' time had not yet come!

Several times in John, Jesus reveals His total awareness and complete submission to God's timetable. In John 2:4, Jesus tells His mother, who is insisting that He perform the miracle of turning water into wine, that this is not the right time for Him to "go public" with His ministry. In John 12:23 and 27, Jesus is revealing to His disciples that He will be crucified as a part of God's redemptive plan for mankind. He is grappling with that reality as a man (His own suffering and death) and as deity (taking into Himself the world's sin), but at the end of the day, His will is to submit to the beautiful but awful reality of dying on the cross—because the hour—the perfect time—had come. In John 13:5, Jesus reveals His perfect love to His disciples by washing their feet, knowing that the hour of His arrest and crucifixion was at hand. Speaking of which, in John 17:1, Jesus realizes the weightiness of God's hour—the ultimate triumph of Divine life over death through the cross—is now upon Him, so He offers His moving "high priestly" prayer that we have come to know and love.

We may think time marches on, unimpeded by fate, uncontrolled by human planning or Divine intervention, but Jesus had a different view of time. And why not, as the Word, the creative agent of the Holy Trinity, he had created time and gifted it to the Father as servant to his eternal plan. Jesus knew that time was in God's wise and loving hands—ever day, ever hour and every split second!

A man named David had also come into that revelation. In Psalm 139, King David wrote, "Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed." (Psalm 139:16) David knew and relied upon this immutable truth that Jesus was depending on, that God knew the exact number of days that David would live, and he would not die a day sooner nor live a day longer than what God had foreordained. And for David, nothing could change that—not betrayal, not war, not poverty, not disease—nothing. God alone held that power over David's life and foreknew the hour of David's death.

That's why David and Jesus found this world a perfectly safe place. That's why even in the midst of his crisis, they could calmly walk into the storm, courageously walk into battle, fearlessly face the angel of death—circumstances that would cause ordinary humans to lose heart—because they knew it was the Lord who was sustaining them.

When you understand that your life—your days, your hour, your time—is in the sovereign hand of God, you just think that way; you just live your life that way. Time—your time—is servant to the Master’s plan.

Arthur W. Pink wrote, “A consciousness of our powerlessness should cast us upon Him who has all power. Here then is where a vision and view of God’s sovereignty helps, for it reveals His sufficiency and shows us our insufficiency.”

Yes, God is sovereign, and He has infinitely large hands. And like Jesus and David, your life is there in his hands, too. You know that...or maybe you don’t. But even if you don’t, that truth remains firm, and because of the saving faith that you have expressed in Jesus Christ, your address has permanently changed to God’s hands.

It’s high time you started enjoying your new time zone.

■ *“As truly as God by His power once created, so truly by that same power must God every moment maintain.” (Andrew Murray)*

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

Memorize Psalm 139:16. Every day this week, when you are tempted to worry over your life, quote that verse to your worries.

 **DAILY RESPONSE:**

- What does this passage teach us about time?
- Does this lesson change your perspective on how you perceive and spend time? How so?
- Try a spiritual exercise today...do your best to think of all of your time as given by and designed by God...then see how that impacts your life. Journal about this and discuss it in your community group.

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DAY 4

A FORCED CHOICE

Read John 8:58-59

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was even born, I Am!" At that point they picked up stones to throw at Him. But Jesus was hidden from them and left the Temple.

There were many reasons, I suppose, the Jews wanted to kill Jesus. They were jealous of His popularity with the people. They hated that He didn't defer to their spiritual authority and were put off that He wasn't impressed by their religious heritage. They were irked that He ministered to marginalized people, hung out with the wrong crowd, operated outside the lines of Jewish protocol and a thousand other things that He did, or didn't do, that bugged the daylights out of them. In general, the genuine authority and real power that Jesus displayed in his life and ministry exposed the spiritual impotence of these Jewish elites, which in turn, brought out some fierce insecurities displayed in their childish opposition and irrational hatred of the Lord.

But the main reason their hatred turned murderous? It wasn't that Jesus sort of acted like God. It wasn't that He beat around the bush about his deity. It wasn't that He made some veiled and esoteric claim about Messiahship. No—He flat out claimed to be God.

That is why they wanted to kill Him. In fact, Jesus committed the ultimate faux pas by using the revered designation for God that no god-fearing Jew would utter so causally and irreverently: "I AM!" Are you kidding me: "Before Abraham was, I Am!" What was He thinking? Saying that about yourself in that culture could get you killed.

Of course, Jesus knew that. In fact, His bold claim would get Him killed. Jesus didn't care—He was God come in the flesh, and He wasn't going to back away from that claim one inch. That is why He came, and that is precisely what He claimed—no if's and's or but's about it.

When you consider that claim Jesus purposely made about Himself, you are forced to eliminate all of the other nice-sounding, politically correct things people say they believe about Him. In other words, Jesus cannot be just a good teacher, just a great moral leader, just a respected prophet, just a great figure of history. With Jesus, you have to eliminate "just" from your vocabulary. Jesus left the Jews with no other option, and He doesn't leave you with another option either.

As C.S. Lewis said "[With Jesus] you must make a choice. Either He was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman, or something worse. You can shut Him up as a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that option open to us. He did not intend to."

I am sure glad the Great I Am forced that choice on me! How about you?

“The discrepancy between the depth and sanity of His moral teaching and the rampant megalomania which must lie behind His theological teaching unless He is indeed God has never been satisfactorily got over.” (C. S. Lewis)

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

Jesus! You got to do something with Him. You’ve got to love Him or hate Him...but you really can’t live with anything in between and live an intellectually honest life. So be honest—where do you line up with Jesus? I hope you go with what He claimed, and proved, about Himself.

 **DAILY RESPONSE:**

- Does this devotional challenge any of your ideas about Jesus? If so, journal and talk about these with your community group.
- What happens in our lives when we acknowledge Jesus as God, very God Himself?

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DAY 5

AN EXPLANATION FOR SICKNESS AND SUFFERING

Read John 9:2-3

“Rabbi,” His disciples asked Him, “why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents’ sins?” Jesus answered, “It was not because of his sins or his parents’ sins. This happened so the power of God could be seen in him.

Suffering—where does it originate? When someone gets sick, contracts a disease, or is born with a disability, is that the result of personal sin—either theirs or their parents? Has the devil inflicted the suffering upon them? Did God cause it? When we, or the people we love are forced to endure suffering, we get pretty passionate about finding answers to those questions.

What Jesus said was that not all sickness and suffering is the result of a specific sin. However, in a general sense, because we live in a world broken by sin, bad stuff that was not a part of God’s original plan for human beings now happens. And to be sure, the Bible does teach that I can bring some physical suffering on myself. If I do not follow God’s principles, my body will experience the consequence. If I do not eat right, sleep enough and exercise regularly—which is sin, since my body is a temple of the Holy Spirit—then I should not be surprised when my body reacts with an infirmity. If I do not listen when God’s Word says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but pray about everything” and I worry a lot—which is a sin—if I get an ulcer, then I am to blame. If resentment builds in my spirit—which is a sin, since I am not to allow bitterness to take root and defile me—then the doctors say that what is eating me will not only eat away at my mental health, but it will also take bite out of my physical health.

So when it comes to suffering and sickness, I need to pay attention to the sin-factor in my life. When sin is at the root, then James says that confession and prayer is the appropriate response to my suffering:

“Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises. Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven. Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” (James 5:13-16, NLT)

However, not all suffering is the result of sin. Jesus blew that idea out of the water here in John 9 when he talked about the man born blind and clears up the notion that the blindness

was the result of neither his nor his parents' sin. Sometimes God permits suffering in your life simply because He wants to heal you and let it be a testimony to the world. John 11:4 tells the story of Lazarus, who was sick and near death. In that case, Jesus said, "The purpose of his illness is not death, but for the glory of God."

Now God doesn't heal every sickness; if He did, none of us would ever die and go to heaven. But for sickness that is within the Lord's will to heal, James 5:14 says that we are to do a couple of things: one, we are to take the initiative and summon the spiritual leaders of the church. And, two, we are to have those elders anoint us with oil and pray.

This prayer for healing is to be done "in the name of the Lord." The "name" represents Christ's authority, which is the basis for all healing. When we offer prayer for healing under these conditions and in that manner, James says, "such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well." (James 5:15, NLT)

God is the healer, not the person praying. Let's never forget that! In this age of flamboyant faith healers, sometimes you get the idea that it is their ability and spirituality that gets the job done. It is not; God alone deserves the credit.

That brings us back to what Jesus said about suffering and sickness: Sometimes it is not the result of sin. It is simply so that God's power and glory can be revealed in the restoration!

*"It is in sickness that we most feel the need of that sympathy which shows how much we are dependent one upon another for our comfort, and even necessities. Thus disease, opening our eyes to the realities of life, is an indirect blessing."
(Hosea Ballou)*



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

If you are suffering from an illness, study James 5:13-18 and follow what it says. And memorize Jeremiah 30:17, "'I will restore you to health and heal your wounds,' declares the Lord." That is a pretty good promise to claim, wouldn't you say?



DAILY RESPONSE:

- So, why do bad things happen to good people?
- According to the scriptures in this devotional, what are some reasons for suffering?
- What is the answer to suffering according to scripture?





WEEK

8

DAY 1

MAKING HAY WHILE THE SUN SHINES

Read John 9:4

Jesus said, "All of us must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent Me, for there is little time left before the night falls and all work comes to an end."

Do you live with a sense of urgency as it relates to God's timetable? Our grandparents and generations before them seemed to understand that life came with an expiration date. We don't! Probably because life was hard, opportunities weren't dished out on a silver platter, life expectancy was significantly less than it is today, they approached life with a great deal more seriousness than we do today.

Our generation seems to fit the profile of the people Jesus described who will be living in the last days:

"The world will be at ease—banquets and parties and weddings—just as it was in Noah's time before the sudden coming of the Flood; people wouldn't believe what was going to happen until the Flood actually arrived and took them all away. So shall my coming be." Matthew 24:34-39

In this John 9 story, Jesus heals a man born blind on the Sabbath—a real no-no in first century Jewish religious culture. As Jesus performs this miracle, serious questions are thrown his way from both the crowd of astounded onlookers as well as the angry Jewish spiritual leaders. The crowd peppers Jesus with a "stump the messiah" question: Why was this man born blind; was it his parent's sin or his? The religious leaders' interrogative was more dastardly: How could you do this on our holy day, the Sabbath? Never mind that a flesh and blood miracle was standing in living color before their very eyes, they wanted to know who he thought he was to "work" on a day no work was to take place.

Then in the midst of all these questions, Jesus makes this statement about carrying out the task assigned by God before time expires. It seems a bit out of the blue and disconnected until you consider the context. On the one hand, since the man had been born blind, it would have been perfectly acceptable to allow things to remain as they were. The fates had determined this man's condition; no need to rock his boat. On the other hand, Jesus knew that performing this miracle on this day—the Sabbath—would invoke the ire of the religious rule keepers and even seal their blind hatred for him. So it would have been easier for Jesus not to do this, or to delay doing it.

But Jesus was not one to avoid conflict or to take an easy path. And in this statement, he was sending both a message and a warning. The message was that the work of God must take

priority over everything else in life—religious rules, man’s time, cultural mores, people’s feelings. And the warning was that there was a limited amount of time and opportunity to carry out the work of God. Tomorrow may not come; night is falling; if we are to do the work of God, we must act as if this is our window of opportunity, because that divine window is closing.

Now that truth applied to not only Jesus, but it applies to you and me as well. Notice that Jesus said “we’ must do the work of the One who sent me.” As God-followers, we have been given the same two things Jesus had been given: a divine assignment and a limited amount of time. So stop underestimating the brevity of your life and the time you have to make your days count; look up and see that eternity is in view.

James 4:14-16 tells us, “You don’t even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.”

James says that it is foolish and downright sinful to assume that we’ve got tomorrow. Why? Because life is unpredictable: “you don’t even know.” None of us know what is going to happen tonight much less next year: a war could start, the economy could collapse, your friends could leave you. That is not meant to frighten you, but to cause you to be more dependent on God and more serious about doing His will while you keep an eye on eternity.

Not only is life unpredictable, but James is also saying that life is brief. “You are a mist,” he says. Mist comes from the Greek word “atmos” which is where we get our word “atmosphere.” Your life is like fog; it rolls in at night but it burns off by noon. Who knows how long you are going to live? None of us do. I’m only one heartbeat away from eternity. Life is short; you go from highchair to wheelchair, from diapers to decay in a millisecond. As Chris Matakas said, “We rise to meet each day because there will come a time when the day will rise without us”

The point is, there are no guarantees, so don’t presume on tomorrow. For sure, plan for the future, but live like today is the last. Moses prayed, “Lord teach us to number our days aright, so that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” (Psalm 90:12) Wisdom would teach you to live today as if you knew tomorrow you would stand before God. And that is a great way to live.

The early Christians lived that way. They were pretty urgent about the time. They learned to order their lives by seriously seeking and then immediately living out the Lord’s will. They came up with a Latin watchword to remind each other of the importance of actively keeping the Lord’s will in mind. It was Deo Volente: “If God wills.” In fact, in some periods of history, the believers would end their letters with “D.V.” Deo Volente. Then they would respond to, “If God wills” with another phrase, “Carpe Diem: Seize the day!”

What a great philosophy for living to live like Jesus lived: “If the Lord wills, I will seize the day!”

■ *“I have been impressed with the urgency of doing. Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Being willing is not enough; we must do.” (Leonardo da Vinci)*



GETTING TO KNOW

Jesus: What is it that God is calling you to do that you have been putting off? Telling someone that you love them or asking for their forgiveness? Volunteering to lead a ministry? Going on a missions trip? Getting counseling for an addiction? Having a difficult conversation with a loved one? Witnessing to someone you care about? Carl F.H. Henry said, “The gospel is only good news if it gets there in time.” Jesus says to you, “now is the time, night is at hand, so do the work my Father has assigned to you.” Today is the day!



DAILY RESPONSE

- What kinds of things do we do as humans to use the time we are given and prepare for our end of life?
- According to Jesus, what should be at the top of the list for how we spend our time as Christ followers?
- Take some self-inventory today. How are you doing in using the time you have for God’s assignments?

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DAY 2

THE MOST POWERFUL TESTIMONY OF ALL

Read John 9:25

“I don’t know whether He is a sinner,” the man replied. “But I know this: I was blind, and now I can see!”

The Pharisees didn’t like the fact that Jesus had healed a man born blind on the Sabbath. The truth is, they didn’t like Jesus at all, and they were looking for Him to slip up so they could do away with Him once and for all. Perhaps this latest “Sabbath miracle” was their chance.

They found the man Jesus had healed and began to question him. Had he really been born blind? Was this a hoax? Was he secretly a disciple of Jesus? Would a true man of God really heal on the Sabbath?

These weren’t just the innocent questions of a curious group. This was an interrogation. The tone of the Pharisees was intimidating and threatening, and the implication was that it wouldn’t go well for this healed man and his family if he didn’t repudiate both the miracle and the miracle worker.

Then, in a flash of unrehearsed inspiration and simple brilliance, the man parries their attack and thrusts the most persuasive of all daggers into their opposition against Jesus: The testimony of a satisfied customer. All this man knew was that he was once blind, but now he could see. Case closed; end of story. The Pharisees were defenseless. What response could they give against such overwhelming evidence?

That is the simple power of a personal testimony. When you speak for Christ as a satisfied customer, as one whose life has been changed forever, as one who was once spiritually blinded by sin but now can see by God’s grace, there is no defense. Who can argue against that?

Your testimony may not be as dramatic as the healing of the man who had been born blind, but it is just as powerful a weapon as his. Why are you a Christian? How has Jesus made a difference in your life? What do you find in your faith that nothing else in the world can match? How has God’s power helped you to overcome adversity or discouragement in life? There is unassailable evidence in each of those stories—so learn to talk about them with people who don’t share your faith in God. You, too, are a satisfied customer, and a satisfied customer makes the most compelling witness of all.

Take a moment today to think through your story. Perhaps you should write it out—one or two pages will be enough. Simply describe what your life was like before Christ, how you came to know him, and the joys and benefits of what it means to now be His follower.

I guarantee, God will give you an opportunity before too long to share your story with someone who needs to know Jesus.

“We must have the glory sink into us before it can be reflected from us. In deep inward beholding we must have Christ in our hearts, that He may shine forth from our lives.” (Alexander MacLaren)

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

As suggested above, write out your own “before and after” account of knowing Jesus. And expect to share it—an opportunity is just around the corner.

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- If you were to wrap up your story of Christ’s salvation given to you as a satisfied customer, how would you put it?
- Take some time today to write out your testimony (your story) about how Jesus has saved and transformed your life.
- Also, spend some time in a prayer of thanksgiving for what He has done for you and try to find an opportunity to tell someone else about Him.

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DAY 3

THE SEEING BLIND

Read John 9:39

Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment, in order that those who do not see will see and those who do see will become blind."

Helen Keller, who with the help of Anne Sullivan, overcame deafness and blindness to become one of the most inspirational figures in modern history, made this profound observation:

■ *"The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision."*

Of course, Helen was speaking out of her own courageous and overcoming experience, but I wonder if she was thinking about the Pharisees who rejected Jesus healing of the blind man in John 9. Truly, these who were experts in the Old Testament Scripture and obedient to it even beyond what it required were in reality, more blind than the blind man before his healing. They could physically see, but in the realm that counts for all eternity, they would have made a bat seem like a seeing-eye dog.

Though it doesn't have to, that often happens as people react to Jesus. He came into this world for judgment—according to His own words—but that judgment didn't take the form you might expect of a judge. Jesus didn't have to sit behind the bench, hear the evidence, deliver the verdict and pronounce the punishment; the Pharisees did it for him. In their reaction to what was clearly an outstanding and undeniable miracle (John 9:24-34), they stubbornly clung to the company policy: You can't heal on the Sabbath! Jesus simply brought the evidence against them to the surface; they judged themselves.

They were seeing, yet blinded by the truth that was right before their very eyes! How sad.

The truth is, when people are exposed to Jesus—His life, ministry, miracles, teaching, death, and resurrection—a reaction is forced. They are forced to make a judgment—but that judgment is really self-judgment. How we respond to Jesus does not reveal anything new about Jesus, it reveals news about us—either the Good News that we have by faith believed (or are willing to believe) in who He claimed to be, or the bad news that unless we have a change of mind and heart, we will be self-condemned to an eternity separated from Christ.

When exposed to Jesus, if a person finds nothing to desire or admire, then that one has already condemned him or herself. But when they see something in Jesus that causes them to bow in surrender to His awesome and obvious Divinity, then they are on the path to eternal life.

Perhaps the greatest attribute that you and I can present before God is a conscious awareness of our own spiritual blindness. To humbly acknowledge before God that because of our own fallen nature we cannot see, we are on our way to sight. If we long to see the things of God,

Jesus will open our spiritually blind eyes just as much as He physically opened the blind man's eyes to 20/20 sight.

What a gift: To know that we are blind apart from our openness to Jesus. It is only those who once were blind—and know it—that now can see. And see they do! Opened to them through Jesus is the sum total of all the grace, truth and glory of God—and what a sight to behold!

■ *"Was blind, but now I see." (John Newton)*

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

Ask God to help you see where you may be persisting in spiritual blindness. Then bring your blind eyes to Jesus for healing. He was pretty good at that, you know—still is!

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- As you think of your own life, are there areas where you have been blind in the past but Jesus has made you to see spiritually?
- What stands out to you most about spiritual sight from this devotional?
- Take a look at the "Getting to Know Jesus" section and make that request of God right now.

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DAY 4

A FIGHT YOU CAN WIN

Read John 10:10

The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

You have an enemy. His name is Satan. Jesus called him a thief and a liar. His main weapons are subtly and deception—and he's pretty good at it, since he has been at it since the beginning of human history.

The Enemy hates God, and everything of God, which includes you. He has a nefarious plan for your life. He wants to rob you of the abundance of God, destroy your identity and destiny as a child of God, and kill you, body, soul and most of all, spirit, keeping you from eternity with God. In fact, even right now he is strategically and specifically working to do you in.

The real problem is that you may be completely oblivious to the work of the Enemy. Out of ignorance, disbelief, or plain old lassitude and indifference, most of Satan's victims fiddle around while he goes about his evil work undetected. George Barna, a Christian researcher and pollster, asked people to respond to this statement in a national survey: "Satan, is not a living being, but is a symbol of evil." Among those who claimed to be born again, 32% agreed strongly, 11% agreed somewhat and 5% didn't know. That means of the total number responding, 48% of born again believers either agreed that Satan is only symbolic or weren't sure!

Barna's findings would suggest that half of you reading this devotional today, in spite of what the Bible clearly teaches, think of the devil only as a boogie-man from a spiritual fairy tale, not a real being bent on destroying you. Jesus would beg to differ with you. He wants you to know that Satan and his demonic legions are alive and well on Planet Earth. Satan is the enemy of God, and because he can't do anything to God, he chooses to attack what is most precious to God—that is, you.

Now it is critical to your well-being—spiritual, physical, relational, financial—for you to understand that bit of bad news in order for you to fully employ the Good News in Hebrews 2:14, which reminds us that Jesus came "so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil." You are not alone in this fight against the evil one, nor are you doomed to defeat. 1 John 3:8 tells us, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work."

Yes, Satan is real, but Jesus has defeated Him. Furthermore, as a Christ-follower, you, too, have power and authority to defeat the devil. In Luke 10:17-19, we are told, "the seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in Your name.' Jesus replied, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to...overcome all the power of the

enemy, and nothing will harm you.”

I like that, don't you? Not only do you have power and authority over the Enemy, Jesus' has guaranteed your victory. I prefer those kinds of fights...ones that I know I'll win!

So here's the deal: If you will stay alert to the conflict, wise up to the ways of your enemy, and take him on in the authority and power of Jesus' name, you will win. Guaranteed!

Keep that in mind today—and go give 'em heaven!

■ *“The enemy will not see you vanish into God's company without an effort to reclaim you.” (C.S. Lewis)*

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

Try praying this prayer every day: “Lord, keep me wise to the ways of the Enemy today. Lead me away from temptation and keep me from the evil one. Help me to walk in the victory over Satan that You secured at Calvary.”

 **DAILY RESPONSE:**

- What do these passages teach us about who Satan is and the hope we have against him found in Christ's power?
- What actions can we take and what actions will Jesus take to help us fight against the enemy of our souls?
- How can you pray today for protection, resistance to temptation and victory over the devil?

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DAY 5

MAKING JESUS FAMOUS

Read John 10:15

“I lay down My life for the sheep. But I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them [in] also, and they will listen to My voice. Then there will one flock and one shepherd.”

The more I learn about Jesus, the more intensely missionary I become. That’s because Jesus was intensely missionary. He was a missionary Messiah!

You cannot read too far into the Gospels without discovering that Jesus fervently cared for the things His Father cared for—His sheep, especially sheep that were not yet eternally secure in the Father’s fold. In John 10:1-15, using very tender pastoral language, Jesus describes Himself as the Good Shepherd who cares for the sheep of His flock—leading, protecting, feeding, and loving them. Really, what Jesus is describing is the ministry of the local church.

But in verse 16, He speaks of sheep not in this fold: “I lay down my life for the sheep. But I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them [in] also, and they will listen to my voice. Then there will one flock and one shepherd.”

Clearly, Jesus is speaking of those yet to come into the flock of God. He is referring to what we have come to call the ministry of global missions—reaching those who have not yet heard of the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Throughout the Gospels, there is a constant sense of Jesus’ intensely missionary heart for these “pre-believing” sheep. And if for no other reason, because of the Good Shepherd’s passionate love for his sheep and his relentless pursuit to bring them into the safety of the fold—especially those yet reached, we, too, must become intensely missionary.

Theologian John Stott reminds us that, “Missions is the central feature of God’s historical purpose.” It’s true. That’s why Jesus was born...that’s why He died...that’s why He’s coming again! That’s why missions must be our central focus, too!

If you and I are to truly follow Christ as a devoted disciple, become like him, thinking as He thought, acting as He acted, then we must embrace this foundational conviction: Lost people must matter to us because they matter to God. Matthew 18:12-14 reminds us that this conviction is at the very core of God’s being:

“If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one wanders off, won’t he leave the ninety nine and go look for the one that’s lost? And if he finds it, he’s happier over the one than the ninety-nine that didn’t wander off. So also your Heavenly Father is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.”

If lost people matter that deeply to God, shouldn't they matter that deeply to us too? You can never look into the eyes of a lost person without seeing an eternal soul so loved by God that He gave His only Son for their redemption. It doesn't matter who they are, where they live, what they have done; they matter to God!

In light of that, here is another inescapable conviction that we must embrace if we are to be fully devoted disciples of Jesus: reaching unreached people, both near but especially far—not just geographically, but theologically—must be a driving passion. Why do I say that? Because you can't read the Bible without sensing "stay and share" must quickly morph into "go and tell."

What I mean by that is—that it is simply counter to God's heart that there remain those who have never even heard the Gospel once when we pour so much into those who hear it over and over yet continue to reject it. Do you realize there is a disproportionate amount of resources, financial and human, that is poured into reaching those who have already heard the Gospel while there are still thousands of people groups—Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, animists—without access to a gospel-preaching witness in their culture. That must sadden the Father's heart.

Jesus commanded us in Mark 16:15, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation." In Acts 1:8 he promised the Holy Spirit would enable our witnesses, "to the uttermost parts of earth." In Matthew 24:14, He said, "This gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

It's clear that God puts the highest premium on taking the Gospel to people who've never heard. In Isaiah 66:19, God promised to send messengers to "...lands beyond the sea that have not heard of My fame or seen My glory." That's why the church exists; that is the purpose of every believer. Romans 9:17 says, "I raised you up for this very purpose: to display my power in you so that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth." David prayed in Psalm 67:2 (LB), "Send us around the world with the news of Your saving power and Your eternal plan for all mankind."

Are you seeing what I am seeing? God's chief concern is that his name be known and praised by all the peoples of the earth. That's why Isaiah 12:4 says we're to, "make known His deeds among the peoples and proclaim that His name is exalted." When we proclaim His fame, we delight the heart of God. And when we do, God delights to satisfy our hearts.

Proclaiming His fame, especially to those who have never heard—that is our assignment. You might say that the greatest use of your redeemed life is making Jesus famous. Are you?

■ *"The spirit of Christ is the spirit of missions. The nearer we get to Him, the more intensely missionary we become." (Henry Martyn)*

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

God is most glorified in us when we're most satisfied in Him—and we're most satisfied in Him when we're proclaiming His glory and His fame. Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight yourself in the Lord and He'll give you the desires of your heart." We can have it all—success, significance, and most of all, satisfaction—if we will get addicted to making Jesus famous among the unreached. What can you do today to make Jesus famous?

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- What stands out about this lesson the most to you?
- Why would knowing Jesus more deeply lead to a more convicting drive for global missions work?
- What is God prompting in your heart today as you understand Jesus' instruction to us to be missions-minded Christians?

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