

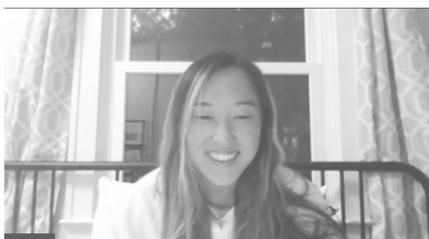
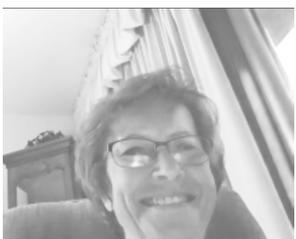


portland
communities

THE EXPERIENCE WORKBOOK

VOLUME 4

BY PASTOR RAY NOAH
WITH PASTOR MATT BLANKENSHIP



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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 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. 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!

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

I SURRENDER ALL—REALLY?

Read John 11:4

“But when Jesus heard about [Lazarus’ deathly illness] He said, “The purpose of his illness is not death, but for the glory of God. I, the Son of God, will receive glory from this situation.”

When I was a kid, there was a chorus that my little country church sang most every time we gathered for a service. It was called, “I Surrender All.” Though it is currently not used very much, once in a while, it gets dusted off and sang in churches today when attenders are being urged to some sort of higher commitment. The words go like this:

All to Jesus I surrender,
All to Him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust Him,
In His presence daily live.

I surrender all,
I surrender all.
All to Thee, my blessed Savior,
I surrender all.

I surrender all! Really? Here’s the question I have for you: How committed are you that God’s glory would be displayed in your life through whatever means, even unpleasant events? How surrendered are you—not willing to be surrendered, but actually are surrendered—to God’s purpose being worked out through all of your circumstances, especially the painfully ones? I’m not sure how you will answer that, but I know that when I honestly consider the implications of total surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in my life—not in theory, but right now, in the gritty reality of my current world—I have to nervously gulp a little bit.

You see, to be truthful, although I say I am surrendered to God’s glory and totally committed to His divine plan for me, I have some expectations about how I want Him to work that out. I have some investments I’ve made, some relationships I cherish, some possessions I like, and some plans that I want Him to protect and prosper. I want unchallenged, guaranteed wins in my life. No bumps in the road, please!

Of course, you and I realize that God doesn’t operate that way. Sometimes He allows challenges, losses and bumps; sometimes even the death of an investment, a dream or even a loved one. Don’t like my theology on that? Just talk to Mary and Martha; they’ll set you straight. They discovered here in John 11 when their brother was on his deathbed that Jesus doesn’t always operate according to our timeline. He can’t be rushed, coerced, manipulated, or diverted down our preferred path when He knows there is a better road leading to the glory of God that we must trod.

The truth of the matter is, Jesus is committed to the glory of God—period. And He knows that the greatest glory comes to God when people place total trust in Him through unconditional belief. Furthermore, He knows that the greatest and strongest trust is developed in the toughest trials of life. That is why He told His disciples that He was going to let Lazarus' illness end in death so that He could raise him up so that they could believe in Him so that God would be glorified:

“Our friend Lazarus has gone to sleep, but now I will go and waken him!” The disciples, thinking Jesus meant Lazarus was having a good night’s rest, said, ‘That means he is getting better!’ But Jesus meant Lazarus had died. Then He told them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead. And for your sake, I am glad I wasn’t there, for this will give you another opportunity to believe in me.’” (John 11:11-15)

In his book *Place of Immunity*, Francis Frangipane wrote that God made the Old Testament Joseph fruitful in the very things that afflicted him. He goes on to say that “in the land of your affliction, in your battle, is the place where God will make you fruitful. Consider, even now, the area of greatest affliction in your life. In that area, God will make you fruitful in such a way that your heart will be fully satisfied, and God’s heart fully glorified... God has not promised to keep us from valleys and sufferings, but to make us fruitful in them.”

That is a great truth, my friend. In the place of your affliction, not only will God make you fruitful—and I would add, He can’t make you fruitful apart from the painful pruning that takes place there—and not only will He will fully satisfy your heart, but He will fully glorify God’s heart. And, for our sake, I am glad that is what He does!

That is why you and I should willingly and joyfully say, “I surrender all—really!”

“Faith is not belief without proof, but trust without reservation.” (Elton Trueblood)



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

As an affirmation of your complete trust in Jesus’ Lordship over you, sing the chorus, “I Surrender All.” If you don’t know it, find it on the internet and listen to it. Then ask the Lord to give you the grace, courage, and resolve to live like you believe it.



DAILY RESPONSE

- Have you ever had to give up and surrender...maybe in a game, sporting event or even on a project or idea? How did that feel?
- Why do you think surrender is so hard?
- What does surrendering to Jesus do in us and for us?
- What does true surrender to Christ show the world around us?

DAY 2

FEELING GOOD ABOUT A FEELING GOD

Read John 11:33-36

When Jesus saw [Mary] weeping and saw the other people wailing with her, a deep anger welled up within Him, and He was deeply troubled. “Where have you put him?” He asked them. They told Him, “Lord, come and see.” Then Jesus wept. The people who were standing nearby said, “See how much He loved him!”

Jesus felt things very deeply—and I am so glad He did. Jesus was fully human, yet fully God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. His whole incarnational purpose was to live among us (John 1:15) in order to bring God close (Isaiah 7:14), reveal who God is and what God is like to us, His creatures (Colossians 1:15,19-20), and through His redeeming sacrifice, bring us back into a right relationship with our Father and Creator (Colossians 1:21-22).

In coming to Planet Earth to reveal God and redeem man, we do not find in Jesus an uncaring, distant, emotionless Deity; we find one who knew full well what it was like to be one of us. Therefore, He was the perfect bridge between the altogether Holy and the utterly fallen. In His earthly journey, God the Son experienced—and expressed—a wide range of emotions that were uniquely human. Just in John 11 and 12 alone, we see several occasions where humanity “leaked” from Deity:

He got angry and upset: *“When Jesus saw [Mary] weeping and saw the other people wailing with her, a deep anger welled up within Him, and He was deeply troubled.”* (John 11:33)

He expressed unmitigated grief and the free flow of tears: *“Then Jesus wept.”* (John 11:35)

He refused to be pacified when an issue was unresolved: *“Jesus was still angry as He arrived at the tomb, a cave with a stone rolled across its entrance. ‘Roll the stone aside,’ Jesus told them.”* (John 11:38)

He got fed up: *“Jesus replied, ‘Leave her alone. She did this in preparation for my burial.’”* (John 12:7)

He felt concern over the future: *“Now My soul is deeply troubled. Should I pray, ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But this is the very reason I came!”* (John 12:27)

In other Gospel accounts, we discover Jesus expressing other quite human emotion:

He was frustrated with His disciples’ thick-headedness: *“Jesus asked them, ‘Are you still so dull?’”* (Matthew 15:16)

He was overcome by the weight of responsibility: *“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.”* (Mark 14:34)

He felt irrepressible joy: *“At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, ‘I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.’”* Luke 10:21)

Jesus, the perfect God-man, was able to feel things uniquely human: Sorrow, anger, frustration, spiritual exhaustion, and a tremendous capacity for joy. But, are those emotions uniquely human? No, in truth, they are completely Divine. These feelings are not of just human origin; rather, they are feelings that originate within the very being of a feeling God, who has simply placed them within the genetic code of that part of His creation He holds most dear—human beings, which includes you and me.

The fact that you and I feel simply reminds us that our Creator feels. What that means, among other things, is that we belong to a caring, compassionate God. God the Father feels—He even dances over you with delight (Zephaniah 3:17); God the Son definitely feels, as we have just seen; God the Holy Spirit feels—He can be grieved and pleased (Ephesians 4:30, Galatians 6:8). That is good news, because it gives Him an unfettered capacity to relate to our feelings and gives us great confidence to come before a caring, understanding God to express our deepest feelings. Hebrews 4:15-16 says,

■ *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet He did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*

Yes, God feels. Jesus clearly demonstrated that. So, come confidently to a caring God to pour out your deepest, most innermost feelings. His great promise is that you can exchange your feelings for His mercy, your emotions for His grace, your tears for His comfort, your fears for His strength and anything else you are carrying, good or bad, you can turn over to a Father who can definitely relate.

Now that is something you can feel really good about!

■ *“Spiritual experience by definition is an internal awareness that involves strong emotion in response to the truth of God’s Word, amplified by the Holy Spirit and applied by Him to us personally.”* (John MacArthur)



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

This present moment might be a good time to take God up on the incredible offer He made to you in Hebrews 4:16! Simply, but boldly, and expectantly go to God in prayer and present whatever is on your heart. Remember, Jesus is actually the One helping your prayers make sense and your requests compelling before the Father.

DAY 3

THAT'S ONE ANGRY MESSIAH

Read John 11:38-39

Jesus was still angry as He arrived at Lazarus' tomb, a cave with a stone rolled across its entrance. "Roll the stone aside," Jesus told them.

Why was Jesus angry? His friend Lazarus had died. Perhaps it was as simple as that. He was upset at the loss of one with whom He had been close. Or maybe it was because Mary and Martha, Lazarus' siblings, were upset—not only at the death of their brother, but with Jesus, who didn't bother to show up to heal their loved one before he passed away from his illness. Or it could be that He was not happy with the people who had gathered to share this family's grief who likewise had questioned Jesus—and in doing so, had questioned if his "love" for this man had been real or if His supposed "powers" to heal the sick were actually real.

Whatever the reason for Jesus' emotions, He expressed them openly and unreservedly. First He wept (John 11:35) and then He got angry (John 11:38). In fact, the reading of this text indicates that His tears actually flowed out of an inner reservoir of anger over the loss of this special friend.

Author David Seamands writes, "Anger is a divinely implanted emotion. Closely allied to our instinct for right, it is designed to be used for constructive spiritual purposes. The person who cannot feel anger at evil is a person who lacks enthusiasm for good. If you cannot hate wrong, it's very questionable whether you really love righteousness."

Jesus loved righteousness—the uninterrupted flow and uncontainable overflow of the Kingdom of God in a person's life. When that flow got diverted or dammed up, either by religious systems or satanic harassment, Jesus got angry—good and angry.

Now that may blow your image of Jesus as the "Gentle Shepherd" right out of the water. I hope so! Not to be angry at a time like this would have been so ungodlike of Jesus.

To be sure, Jesus loved people, and that love especially came through in His compassion for the poor, widows and orphans, the sick and infirmed, and those who were held captive to sin by Satan. He was a man of love and peace who called people into a lifestyle of love and peace.

But, Jesus was no pushover. He had a large capacity for anger—just read about His encounter with the moneychangers at the temple in John 2:13-22 and see if Jesus didn't explode with righteous indignation every once in a while.

Jesus didn't go around trying to pick fights, but when He saw injustice, it really ticked Him off. We should be glad for that—both for what it tells us of our Messiah and what it tells us about how we should operate as agents of His Kingdom. J. I. Packer, in his book, *Your Father Loves You*, writes of the many times Jesus' anger flared at this sort of thing:

Jesus went into the synagogue on the Sabbath and saw a man with a crippled hand. He knew that the Pharisees were watching to see what He would do, and He felt angry that they were only out to put Him in the wrong. They did not care a scrap for the handicapped man, nor did they want to see the power and love of God brought to bear on Him. There were other instances where Jesus showed anger or sternness. He "sternly charged" the leper whom He had healed not to tell anyone about it (Mark 1:43) because He foresaw the problems of being pursued by a huge crowd of thoughtless people who were interested only in seeing miracles and not in His teaching. But the leper disobeyed and so made things very hard for Jesus. Jesus showed anger again when the disciples tried to send away the mothers and their children (Mark 10:13-16). He was indignant and distressed at the way the disciples were thwarting His loving purposes and giving the impression that He did not have time for ordinary people. He showed anger once more when He drove "out those who sold and those who bought in the temple" (Mark 11:15-17). God's house of prayer was being made into a den of thieves and God was not being glorified—hence Jesus' angry words and deeds. Commenting on this, Warfield wrote: "A man who cannot be angry, cannot be merciful." The person who cannot be angry at things which thwart God's purposes and God's love toward people is living too far away from his fellow men ever to feel anything positive towards them. Finally, at Lazarus' grave, Jesus showed not just sympathy and deep distress for the mourners (John 11:33-35), but also a sense of angry outrage at the monstrosity of death in God's world. This is the meaning of "deeply moved" in John 11:38.

Any form of spiritual manipulation, control, abuse, neglect, or enslavement that prevents the goodness of God from reaching people, no matter what form it takes, or who is perpetrating it, doesn't make Jesus very happy. Not then and not now.

Jesus, the Gentle Shepherd, the Prince of Peace, got good and angry over a few things. Maybe it is high time Christ followers got a little fed up with sin and its effects as well. Now just a caveat before you blow your lid: if you can't weep over the things that made Jesus weep, you probably shouldn't get angry over the things that made Jesus angry. Righteous weeping and righteous anger are two sides of the coin of righteous indignation.

If it is called for, go ahead and get angry. Just make sure you are good—literally—and angry.

*"He that would be angry and sin not, must not be angry with anything but sin."
(Thomas Secker)*

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

Offer this heartfelt prayer in response to your reading of the story of Jesus raising His friend Lazarus from the dead: “Lord Jesus, I want to have a heart like Yours. Cause me to laugh over the things that make You laugh, weep over what breaks Your heart, even to get angry over the kind of things that upset You. I want to live as You would if You were living in my stead.

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- After reading the Scripture in this devotional, what do you think Jesus was really mad at?
- Is anger an acceptable emotion for a Christ-follower? Why or why not?
- What is your response to sin and its effects on you, those you love, and the human race in general?
- What did you learn about anger, emotions, and Jesus through this study?

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DAY 4

GETTING ON GOD'S PAGE

Read John 11:47-48

Then the leading priests and Pharisees called the high council together. "What are we going to do?" they asked each other. "This man certainly performs many miraculous signs. If we allow Him to go on like this, soon everyone will believe in Him. Then the Roman army will come and destroy both our Temple and our nation."

This chapter is amazing on a couple of levels. First of all, the raising of Lazarus from the dead has to be one of the most dramatic miracles in the entire Bible, outside of Christ's own resurrection.

This is a perfect set up for the authentication of Jesus' Messianic ministry—and He knows it. He knows Lazarus' sickness will lead to death, yet He waits until the man dies to come and pray for him. He knows that God the Father has given Him authority and power over death, yet He prays anyway in front of the crowd that God will release resurrection power through Him to bring forth this man from death. He knows that the Jews are criticizing His inability to prevent this death. In their minds, He is just another so-called messiah—all hat and no cattle. He knows that everyone in this scene is thinking that after four days in the tomb, death has done its nasty business on the body of Lazarus—as the King James says, "He stinketh!"—and it is well beyond resurrection.

This is the perfect set up for one of the Most outstanding acts of God ever. God seems to operate at His best in these situations. Yes, Jesus could have gone to Bethany much earlier and healed Lazarus before it got to this point, but that miracle would not have even come close to the glory this miracle would bring. God had an agenda—He always does: to glorify Himself.

The Jewish leaders who opposed Jesus had an agenda, too. They loved the status quo—their positions of power, the religious monopoly they held over the people, the spiritual racket that kept them in their places of wealth and honor. They had come to despise Jesus because He was threatening their way of life. His radical message and rising popularity were making their cozy way of life vulnerable to a Roman crackdown, and the potential loss of that prevented them from seeing and accepting even an outstanding act of God like Lazarus' resurrection.

That is the second amazing thing about this story. It is almost as amazing as Lazarus' resurrection. The Jews had witnessed this incredible, undeniable miracle with their own eyes, yet rejected it because, at least in their minds, it threatened their way of life.

That is the problem with personal agendas: they keep us from seeing how far superior God's agenda is to our own. We do everything in our power to resist and avoid the short-term discomfort God may be allowing in our lives in order to preserve the comfort that we have come to prefer—even at the expense of a resurrection.

How do we do this? Just think about it—you will probably come up with plenty of examples. Have you ever stayed home from church because you had a headache? You didn't feel well enough to go to the very place that prays for the sick to be healed. Have you withheld a financial gift from God because that money was dedicated to something you wanted to do? Have you ever sat in your pew when the pastor called people forward for prayer because you were uncomfortable and worried about what people might think? Have you ever held back on an adventure of faith because you felt unqualified and ill-equipped for the challenge?

It is most likely that you have an agenda that is different than God's—perhaps more than a few. I know that I do.

What do you say we make a spiritual determination today that our agenda will no longer control our lives? If you will reject the status quo for the risky adventure of following God's agenda, you will be on the cusp of the adventure of your life—maybe even a resurrection!

Get on the same page with God—it will be the ride of a lifetime!

 *"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

Ask the Lord to show you where your love affair with the status quo is keeping you from a personal resurrection to radical faith, then, tap into the gift of courage He has given you to jettison you from your comfort zone for the risky adventure of faith.



DAILY RESPONSE

- How do you think Lazarus' family felt about Jesus waiting to come see him until after he died?
- We often allow personal agendas to keep us from seeing how superior God's power is. Can you think of ways you have done this in your life?
- What do you think will happen when we submit to God's agenda first and ours second?
- Have you ever been minding God's: agenda first and then noticed that what was important to you was taken of?

DAY 5

CHURCH-GOING DEVILS

Read John 12:8

“You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have Me.”

To call someone a “Judas” is to label them a betrayer of the worst kind. It is an accusation that is reserved only for the worst kind of relational offense, since to call someone “Judas” usually implies an irreparable breach in the relationship. After all, who wants to have anything to do with a backstabbing betrayer?

Judas’ betrayal of Jesus, to paraphrase Franklin Roosevelt, is an act that will forever live in infamy. But what Judas did to Jesus didn’t make him evil, it only revealed the evil that had, like cancer, been eating away at his character for a long time. The fact is, in Jesus’ own words, “one of you [disciples] is a devil!” (John 6:70). That is, Judas was a devil of the worst kind: a church-going one. As Joseph Hall has said, “No devil is so dangerous as the religious devil.”

As you might imagine of someone who would betray the Lord, this notorious disciple exhibited some other character flaws that mostly go unnoticed in light of his more famous sin. In this account here in John 12, we are told that Judas protested Mary’s act of anointing Jesus with expensive perfume because it could have fetched a handsome price at the market, and money from the sale could have been used to help the poor. Of course, Judas had a hidden motive. Since he was treasurer for this small band of disciples, he apparently dipped his hand in the till from time to time to fund His own needs. Judas was not only a betrayer, but according to John he was also a thief.

Yet as the Gospels are prone to do, there is another side to Judas that is uncomfortably close to so many people who sit beside you every Sunday in the pews of your church. They are the ones who, like clockwork, criticize everything from the room temperature to the sound level to the length and content of the sermon to the unfriendliness of the people to the call for financial commitment, ad nauseam. No matter what, they are never satisfied; there is always a better alternative—and although they are quick to protest, their solutions are never quite clear or doable. In truth, rather than wanting change, they simply want to gripe. They may smile and sing and put a coin or two in the offering plate, yet, they are unwitting tools of Satan. The great Swiss theologian Karl Barth was speaking of them when he said, “The devil may also make use of morality.” They are very spiritual devils!

It wasn’t only Judas that Jesus had in mind when He uttered this gentle but pointed rebuke, “for the poor you have always,” He was speaking to the legion of church folk who believe their gift to the church is the ministry of criticism. In truth, their chronic criticism betrays a deeper agenda and uglier issues of character.

Don't get me wrong—constructive criticism is not a bad thing, if offered in the right spirit, conflict that is resolved Biblically and in a Christ-like spirit can actually strengthen the church. It is chronic criticizers that I am talking about. In truth, they suffer from the Judas Syndrome: not betrayal, not thievery, but destructive criticism is their sin.

So, here's the deal: if you have to be around someone who suffers this sort of Judas Syndrome, lovingly confront them, as Jesus did. If they don't see their sin and change their ways, establish some boundaries with them. Don't let them poison you and cripple your church.

And most of all, don't be one! Just remember, no one has ever built a statue to a betrayer, a thief, or a critic.

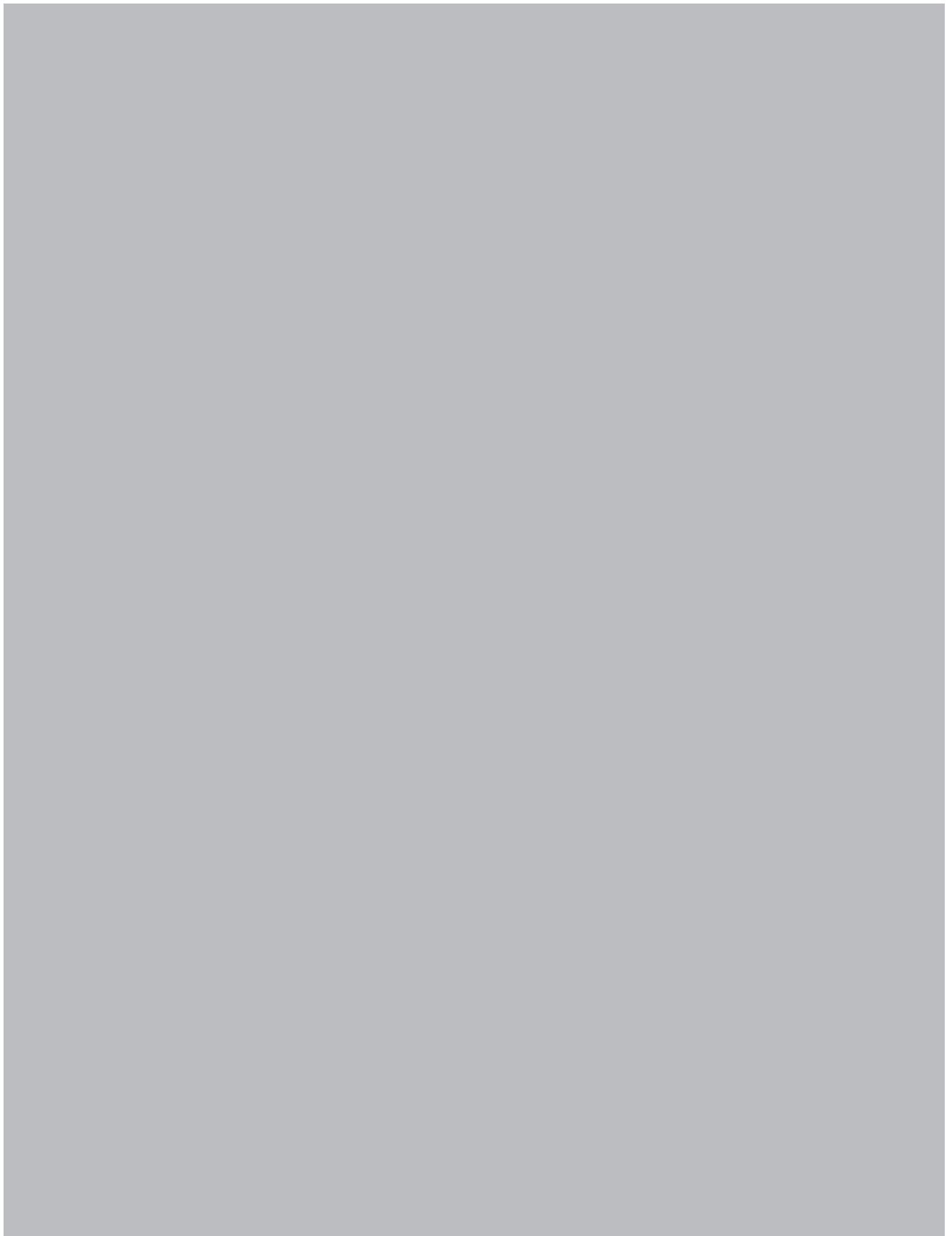
■ *"The devil loves 'curing' a small fault by giving you a great one." (C.S. Lewis)*

GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Are you guilty of covering your own character flaws and deflecting Holy Spirit conviction meant for you with destructive criticism of others? If so, you may be guilty of the Judas Syndrome. Ask the Lord to show you where you need personal reformation. Then ask Him to give you the courage to deal with issues that are keeping you from greater obedience and usefulness to Him.

DAILY RESPONSE

- **Have you ever had someone betray your trust in a very hurtful way? How have you handled that?**
- **Put yourself in Jesus' shoes. How do you think Judas' betrayal felt to Jesus?**
- **How do you think Jesus feels now when we betray Him in the ways listed in this devotional?**
- **How can we avoid carrying a "Judas Spirit" and how can we lovingly confront and guide those who do?**





WEEK

2

DAY 1

THE POLARIZING JESUS

Read John 12:37 & 42

Even though He had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in Him... Nevertheless, many did believe in Him, even among the rulers...

Historian Kenneth Scott Latourette wrote, “As the centuries pass, the evidence is accumulating that, measured by His effect on history, Jesus is the most influential life ever lived on this planet.” His was also the most polarizing life ever lived. Now in our day, perhaps in His day too, to be polarizing is neither an endearing trait nor a winning strategy to get you to the top. But Jesus didn’t care; His mission was to save souls (Mark 10:45), which required Him to unflinchingly preach the truth, prove His ministry by mighty miracles that often collided with the established rules of religion, confront sin, and ultimately die as the only sacrifice that could redeem fallen man and set Him right with Father God.

To that end, Jesus pulled no punches. In response you either loved Him or Hated Him. That was the case here in John 12:37-50. Some people heard His teaching and discerned a level of grace, truth, love, and spiritual authority they had never witnessed in human teachers before, and in Jesus, this was the Messiah they had been waiting for. Others heard His teaching and saw his miracles and believed He was the Messiah, but because they were more concerned with maintaining their standing with the Jewish leaders who opposed Jesus, kept it a secret. And then, of course, there were those who hated Him so much they were willing to do anything to kill Him off—despite the outstanding miracles they had seen with their own eyes.

Love Him or hate Him, Jesus forces that choice upon you. 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.”

While people are still curious about Jesus in our day, far too many are still trying to ride the fence about a man who did His best not to give us that option. I have heard people say, “Oh, Jesus, yeah...He’s a great prophet...He is a marvelous teacher...He’s really something. The guy turns water into wine, feeds thousands with a few loaves and fishes, cures sick people. Man, this guy is something.”

Untold thousands of people, the rich and famous as well as the poor and unknown wear the cross as their jewelry of choice, the symbol that identifies Him more than any other. Athletes, politicians, movie stars, and rock and roll icons whose lives are incongruent with His teachings

invoke His name without a second thought about who He claimed to be. I've talked to young men dressed in starched white shirts and ties at my front door who come in His name yet deny His deity. I see raunchy entertainers spew filth in one breath and claim Jesus as a good buddy in the next breath. I have good friends and close family members who acknowledge the historical Jesus, yet ignore His teachings and claims. I have witnessed to people who claim to believe in Him as a great moral teacher, worthy of deep respect and honor, but certainly not worthy of the Lordship of their lives.

It is amazing what we have done with Jesus! Dorothy Sayers, a brilliant writer and Christian thinker, once mournfully remarked, “[We have] very efficiently [clipped] the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified Him...as a household pet fitting for pale curates and pious old ladies.” That He is not, by His own claims:

To know Him was to know God. John 8:19 says, *“If you knew Me, you would know My Father also.”*

To see Him was to see God. In John 12:45, *“Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father.”*

To believe Him was to believe God. In John 12:44, Jesus taught, *“When a man believes in Me, He does not believe in Me only, but in the One who sent Me.”*

To receive Him was to receive God. Mark 9:37 says, *“Whoever welcomes Me does not welcome Me but the One who sent Me.”*

To hate Him was to hate God. John 15:23 says, *“He who hates Me hates My Father as well.”*

To honor Him was to honor God. John 5:22-23, *“Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent Him.”*

When you consider these claims Jesus made about Himself, you have to eliminate most of the nice-sounding, politically correct things people say they believe about Him. In other words, He cannot be just a good teacher, just a great moral leader, just a respected prophet, just a great figure of History. There is no “just” with Jesus. It is true, He is the most polarizing figure ever—and He wants it that way. You either love him, Hopefully, or hate Him. There is no middle ground.

Jesus cannot be de-clawed, nor can He be tamed or even be contained! No matter how people may try, He is still the Lion of Judah! As Josh McDowell wrote, the evidence of His life and teachings demands a verdict: He is either Lord of all...or He is not Lord at all!

“A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman

or something worse. You can shut Him up for 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 open to us. He did not intend to.” (C.S. Lewis)

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

Is Jesus Lord of all your life? If He is, then affirm that before Him in prayer and before the people with whom you will interact today. If He is not, then bow before Him now and surrender your life to Him as your Lord and Savior.

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- How is Jesus still a polarizing figure today?
- Have you found yourself polarized from others when you strive to live the principles that Jesus taught?
- Read the first C.S. Lewis quote above and write/comment about where you land on “who Jesus is.”

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DAY 2

THE DIVINE LEVERAGE OF WILLFUL UNBELIEF

Read John 12:40

“God has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts so that they can neither see nor understand nor turn to Me to heal them.”

John 12 is a pivotal point in this Gospel that marks Jesus’ last public movements before His arrest, crucifixion, and post-resurrection appearances. It is one of the most stunning accounts you will find in Scripture because of the unbelief of the characters in this chapter.

Jesus has just performed the greatest miracle you could ever hope for: the raising of Lazarus from the tomb four days after he had died. Yet, the reaction of Judas, the priests and the Pharisees, respectively, to this outstanding miracle is flat-out rejection of Jesus’ deity, if not blind hatred. This unbelief is stunning, given the fact that the now-resurrected Lazarus is standing before their very eyes.

Fortunately, this story is more than the sad history of the Jewish establishment’s reject of Jesus. As is always the case with Scripture, there are some valuable lessons we can learn from this about the willful unbelief of man and the unstoppable purposes of God.

The first lesson we learn is that miracles alone will never lead people to the full surrender of their lives to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. People often demand a miracle before they will place faith in Christ, but the record of the Gospels indicates that miracles alone won’t wash away willful unbelief. They should—but they don’t. Time and again, Jesus performed a miracle, only to have people turn around and in the very next moment demand another sign, —as if the one He had just given hadn’t been given at all. Such is the utter blindness of illogical unbelief. Beware, the next time you find yourself insisting that God grant you your miracle.

The second lesson we learn is that the motives of sinful man will always irreconcilably conflict with the purposes of a holy God. When man’s agenda collides with God’s agenda—and it always does, sooner or later—something’s gotta give. The Jewish leaders were more interested in protecting their religious and political way of life than in discovering the life of abundance that the Messiah had come to reveal, and in this case, unbelievably, man killed his Creator! Keep in mind that early and often in your voyage of faith you will be called to untether from the shores of comfort.

But, the third lesson we learn here is that even the inflexible unbelief of man always gets leveraged for the irrepressible glory of God. That is why Jesus quotes Isaiah in John 12:40, “God has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts—so they can’t see, can’t understand, can’t turn to Me and have Me heal them.”

This is one of the Bible's hard saying that seems to say God destines some people to unbelief, But understand that Isaiah's complaint springs from the broken heart of a prophet who is bewildered that his message and his calls to repentance, made men worse, not better. Yet in their painful and willful rejection of the Word of the Lord, Isaiah knew that even this could not take place outside God's purpose nor thwart His unstoppable plan. Nothing can—which means we best get on board with God's agenda. So in that sense, even when men rejected Isaiah's message, their unbelief was still contained within God's purpose.

That is not to say that man's unbelief is God's purpose; rather, it is to say that God sovereignly uses even man's unbelief for His sovereign purpose. For instance, in Romans 11 the Apostle Paul said that God used the unbelief of the Jews for the conversion of the Gentiles. God didn't predestine certain people to unbelief, but He used their unbelief to further His agenda. In John 12, the Jews' unbelief isn't God's fault; it's the Jews' fault. Yet, even then, God is so great that not even this sin of stunning unbelief is outside His power, so He leverages it to bring about the cross and the redemption of all who believe.

If all this is theologically true, what does it mean for you practically? Simply this: God will leverage man's unbelief for His ultimate glory—even yours. You have a choice: You can either stubbornly hold on to your unbelief—that is, where your agenda conflicts with God's—or you can surrender it to Jesus so that you can get on board with God's glorious plan.

What is your area of unbelief; the place where you are holding on to your agenda? Have you ever withheld money from missional work because it was dedicated to something that you "needed" to do?

Have you ever held back from an appeal to serve in your spiritual community because you felt unqualified or too busy or frankly just didn't want to make the commitment? Have you ever criticized change in the church the pastor felt necessary to reach more outsiders because it conflicted with your comfort and your preferred style of worship? There are a hundred ways we hold on to our unbelief—with spiritual justification—but here's what Jesus said in John 12:24-25 about letting go of your agenda for God's:

"Listen carefully: Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it's never any more than a grain of wheat. But if it's buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over. In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it is destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in your love, you'll have it forever, real and eternal."

If you hold on to what you want, you'll kill any chance of what God wants for you! To experience the resurrected life—not just in eternity, but now—you have to die to your unbelief.

Before you finish this devotional, I would implore you to determine that your agenda, your unbelief, will no longer control you.

“Disobedience is the root of unbelief. Unbelief is the mother of further disobedience. Faith is voluntary submission within a person’s own power. If faith is not exercised, the true cause lies deeper than all intellectual reasons. It lies in the moral aversion of human will and in the pride of independence, which says, ‘who is Lord over us? Why should we have to depend on Jesus Christ?’ As faith is obedience and submission, so faith breeds obedience, but unbelief leads on to higher-handed rebellion. With dreadful reciprocity of influence, the less one trusts, the more he disobeys; the more he disobeys, the less he trusts.” (Alexander Maclaren)

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

Where are you stubbornly holding on to your own spiritual agenda—and thus, expressing willful unbelief? Ask God to reveal to you where you need to surrender your preferences to His ways. Then be ready to ruthlessly obey Him.

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- Have you ever longed to see a miracle? Have you ever seen or experienced one? How did it or how do you think it would impact your faith in Christ?**
- Write and talk about how God led you from unbelief to belief. Tell a bit of your story here.**
- As you think about your life now, what areas do you need to trust God in more? Where do you need to grow in your belief?**

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DAY 3

UNCONDITIONALLY LOVED

Read John 13:1-2, 38

Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus... “Very truly I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!”

It is hard to fully fathom and completely embrace God’s immeasurable, inexplicable, crazy love that is revealed in this moment as Jesus washed His disciple’s feet. The story, which connects us to Jesus’ final hours before His sacrificial death on the cross, begins with this shocking statement in verses 1-2: *“Just before the Passover Feast, Jesus knew that the time had come to leave this world to go to the Father. Having loved His dear companions, He continued to love them right to the end.”*

What makes that so shocking is that Jesus knew full well that not only would His love for these disciples not be reciprocated, but there were also two in the group who would publically deny Him and actually betray His love: Judas and Peter. Verse 2 goes on to say, “It was suppertime. The Devil by now had Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, firmly in his grip, all set for the betrayal.” Verse three adds, “Jesus knew...” what the Father had put before Him. In verse 38, Jesus responds to Peter’s promise to stand with Him through thick and thin, “Actually Peter, the truth is that before the rooster crows, you’ll deny Me three times.”

Now with that in mind, let’s go back and explore what “full extent of Jesus love” looks like in what Jesus did in that intimate setting for His disciples—and more importantly, by extension what He did for you.

For one thing, the full extent of His love means you are fully loved, when from a human perspective, you aren’t fully lovable. Verse 2 says, “It was time for supper, and the devil had already enticed Judas to carry out his plan to betray Jesus.” Verse 11 adds, “Jesus knew who’d betray Him”; that Judas would hand Him over to the Jews later that night. I don’t suppose we could think of anyone any more unlovable and unworthy than Judas—yet Jesus loved him nonetheless.

He humbly knelt as Judas’ servant to wash his feet, knowing everything in his past, present, and future, yet Jesus still showed him the full extent of His love! What that means is that if Jesus loved Judas, then knowing everything about you—past failures, present junk, future sin—He’ll still stubbornly love you. If Judas was worthy of love, then certainly you’ll always be the object of Christ’s unstoppable love. In fact, you don’t have enough sin or darkness to even slow His love down! You are fully loved!

That leads to another thing that you ought to know about the full extent of Jesus’ love for you:

It is a love that is rooted in His nature, and is not dependent on yours. Verses 4-5 say, “Jesus got up from the table, took off His robe, wrapped a towel around His waist, and poured water into a basin. Then He began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel He had around him.”

Now think for a moment about those whose feet He washed. Of course, there was Judas, whose betrayal Jesus knew was just moments away. But there was also one He knew would deny Him—in spite of that one’s insistence otherwise. And of course, there were ten others around that room He knew would desert Him in His hour of greatest need before the night was out.

Not their character—nor yours—motivated His love; no, it flowed out of His. That’s why you can always depend on being the recipient of the full extent of His love.

Finally, what you ought to know about the full extent of Jesus’ love is that it will transform your worst nature so radically that you, yourself, will become a conduit of His love. Jesus said in verses 34-35, *“So now I’m giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I’ve loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you’re My disciples.”*

That’s what the “full extent of His love” will do—if you let it! Again, that love flows from His character, not yours, but when you surrender to it, you can then enter what will be your most satisfying experience in life—to yourself becoming a conduit of His full love to others.

That is the answer to the deepest longing of your innermost heart: To know the full extent of God’s unconditional love and become the conduit of that inexhaustible love to others!

If nothing could stop Jesus from loving Judas and Peter, certainly nothing will prevent Jesus from showing you the full extent of His unconditional love.

“We should be astonished at the goodness of God, stunned that He should bother to call us by name, our mouths wide open at His love, bewildered that at this very moment we are standing on holy ground.” (Brennan Manning)



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Take some time today to enjoy God’s love. If that is hard to imagine, just visualize in your mind Jesus, arms stretched wide as He hangs on the cross, saying to you, “I love you this much!”



DAILY RESPONSE

○ What makes Jesus’ love for His disciples “right up until the end” so special?

DAY 4

THE DELIGHTFUL DEMAND OF DISCIPLESHIP

Read John 13:14

“Since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet.”

If you are going to be a fully devoted follower of Christ, you will have to think, do, and live like Jesus thought, did, and lived—not the least of which is to take on the attitude, exhibit the actions, and live the lifestyle of a servant. Yes, you will have to serve as Jesus served!

Serving is what Jesus did because servanthood was at the very core of who Jesus was and why Jesus came. The Gospel of Mark, the first written biographical account of Jesus, sums up the life and ministry of Jesus with this simple, clear, and compelling mission statement:

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)

Fleshing out this mission statement, John 13 presents the servanthood of Jesus in action in the most unusual and unforgettable way: He washed His disciples’ feet. Then, as He completed this humbling task, He said to them, *“I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.”* (John 13:15) It is abundantly clear from this passage, along with other Scripture, that serving is an unmistakable, unavoidable demand of discipleship. Not only is serving a demand, but when we look at Jesus’ example, we find that serving is also a delight. It is what makes us blessable: *“Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.”* (John 13:17)

Think about it: Serving like Jesus is what puts you at your Christlike best!

You are called to serve! Paul writes in Philippians 2:5-7, *“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who being in very nature God...took on the very nature of a servant.”* Galatians 5:13b says, *“Serve one another in love.”* If you are serving, you are fulfilling your basic Christian calling. If you are not, then you are not!

You were created to serve! Like a fish swims and a bird flies, a Christian serves! Ephesians 2:10 states, *“We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”* Before you were even conceived, God laid out specific plans just for you. You are not an after thought; you do not just exist; you are on this earth not just to be a potted plant; you were born not just to consume, but to contribute. God deliberately shaped you to serve His purposes, which means that He has placed an important responsibility on your shoulders that only you can fulfill.

You contribute to the Body of Christ when you serve! God specifically created you, converted you, and called you to contribute to the life, health, and mission of a local church. Paul taught in I Corinthians 12:27, “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” Verse 12 says, “The body is a unit, though it’s made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.” Verse 18 says, “God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be.” Why? Verse 7 tells us it is “*for the common good.*” I Peter 4:10 says, “*Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.*” Perhaps you didn’t realize this, but as you and others serve in your church, serving becomes the primary means of others receiving God’s grace. Your serving is the conduit of God’s grace to those around you.

You capture the world’s attention when you serve! Our humble, authentic acts of service put God in a good light. Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, “*Let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.*” (Matthew 5:16) Jesus said John 13:35, “*By this will all men know that you are my disciples: That you have love for one another.*” It is by authentic servanthood that you become living proof of a loving God.

Jesus ended the washing of His disciples’ feet by issuing this very simple challenge “*Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.*” (John 13:17) Is doesn’t get any clearer than that!

“When God wanted sponges and oysters He made them and put one on a rock and the other in the mud. When He made man He did not make him to be a sponge or an oyster; He made him with feet and hands, and head and heart, and vital blood, and a place to use them and He said to him, ‘Go work.’” (Henry Ward Beecher)

GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

I have one simple question for you: Where are you serving?

DAILY RESPONSE

- In what ways do we “Wash each other’s feet” in the body of Christ?
- How have you served others through the church you attend and call “home”?
- How can you serve your family and neighbors in a way that will attract their attention toward Christ?

DAY 5

WHAT MAKES YOU BLESSABLE

John 13:17

“Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.”

If we are going to be the kind of Christ-followers that God can bless, our behavior will have to align with our beliefs. What we “know” must become what we “do.” Specifically, we will have to live like Jesus lived, which means serving like Jesus served. Jesus made that perfectly clear when He said,

“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you are right, because that’s what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. (John 13:13-15)

How did Jesus serve? Well, an entire book could be written on that, but among the many characteristics of the servanthood of Jesus, He was simply available to people. Thinking about my own life and the lives of most people I know, my sense is the critical need for most of the people who will read this devotional is reorienting their busy schedule to make serving Jesus by serving others the top priority in their life.

Think about how Jesus did that. Matthew 20 tells the story of Jesus walking to Jericho when some blind men start yelling at him: “‘Lord, have mercy on us!’” And it says, “Jesus stopped and asked. ‘What do you want me to do for you?’”

Now think about that: Jesus stopped! God turned aside to make Himself accessible to those society had cast aside. Jesus did that a lot! Do you realize that most of Jesus’ miracles were interruptions? What we see as intrusions, Jesus saw as invitations—an opening in His schedule to serve God’s purpose by serving God’s people. If you and I are to grow into a Christ-like ministry mindset, that is the attitude we will have to cultivate. And here is what that means:

First, we will have to realign our crowded calendars. Matthew 6:33 says, “More than anything else, put God’s work first and do what He wants. Then the other things you want will be yours as well.” What that means is that if you will make God’s concerns your priority, He will make your concerns His priority. In other words, that will make you blessable.

Second, we will have to refocus off of ourselves and onto others. Philippians 2:4 says that in becoming like Christ, you have to, “forget yourself long enough to help other people.” That is truly the preeminent attitude of Christ-likeness. It is one of the things that leads to a truly satisfying experience of life: giving yourself to others. Again, that is what will make you blessable.

Third, we will have to relax our perfectionism. Too many Christians wait for perfect circumstances to serve: when life isn't so hectic; when the right ministry comes along; when other stuff gets done first. Ecclesiastes 11:4 says, "If you wait for perfect conditions, you'll never get anything done." Christ-like servants do the best they can with what they have for Jesus today. Like Jesus, they are available when the opportunity presents itself! By definition, a servant makes himself available at all times to his master, and that is what will make you blessable to the only Master that matters.

Jesus served because at the core of who He was there was a consuming desire to connect people with the grace, mercy, and love of His Father. Serving was the primary means of that. Since, as a Christ-follower, you are being transformed into His character, that must be characteristic of you, too.

God has made—or, more accurately, remade you—to serve Him by ministering to others. Actually, "you are God's workmanship, made to do good works that God himself has prepared in advance specifically for you to do." (Ephesians 2:10)

Interestingly, and quite deliberately, the Greek word in that verse the Apostle Paul chose for "workmanship" is *poiema*. We get our English word poem from that. You are God's poem, and when you serve in the mindset of God's Son, you're poetry in motion.

And when you do, you are at your most blessable!

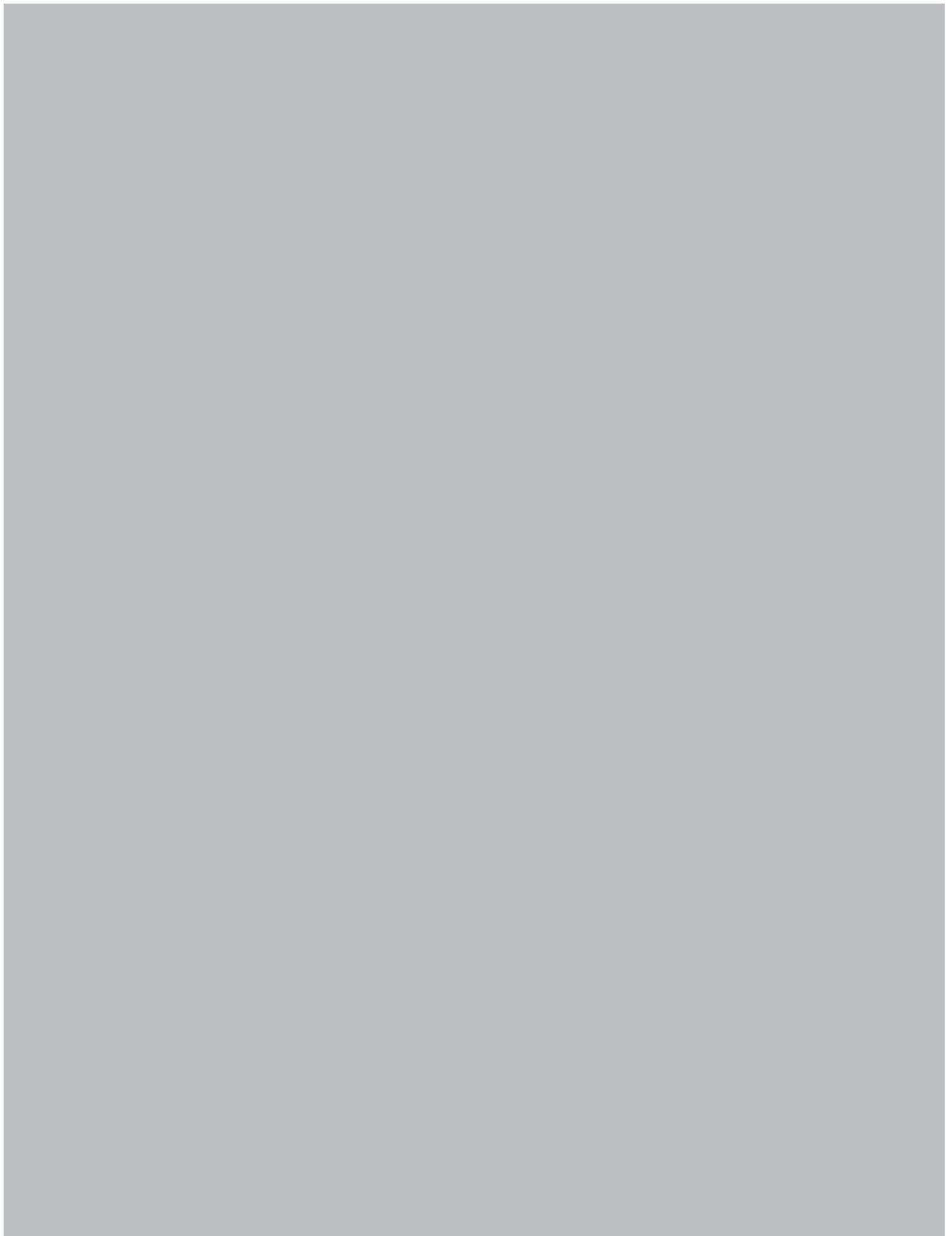
"Just as a servant knows that He must first obey his master in all things, so the surrender to an implicit and unquestionable obedience must become the essential characteristic of our lives." (Andrew Murray)

GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

There is one vitally important question you must answer after you have been saved: Where are you loving God by serving others?

DAILY RESPONSE

- Stop and ask, "What do you want me to do for you" to follow in Jesus' footsteps of service?
- As you think about your calendar, would you say it is too crowded for "stop" moments, or just right for these opportunities?





WEEK

3

DAY 1

THE BLESSED DISTRESS

Read John 13:21

Now Jesus was in great anguish of spirit and exclaimed, “Yes, it is true—one of you will betray me.”

I have always had an easier time accepting Jesus’ divinity than His humanity. I suppose that’s because I tend to think of human emotions—anxiety, disappointment, temptation, fear—as flaws and weaknesses. How could the Son of God be flawed or weak? No way; not my Messiah! Jesus in “great anguish”! How could this be?

Jesus was God, so He knew all things in advance. He knew what He would face, but He also knew the outcome was pre-set, so there would be nothing but victory and glory for Him at the end of the day. Even though He would allow hurtful and harmful things to happen to Him in His assignment as the world’s Redeemer, He had power over those things; He would turn them toward His Father’s ultimate purpose. How then, would He ever be upset, feel overwhelmed, and weep over things that didn’t go His way?

Yet, over and over again in the Gospels, we see Jesus expressing a variety of emotions that we mistakenly attribute to humans only: tiredness, hunger, anger, grief, disappointment, distress. The truth is, those emotions are resident in the Creator, and we, made in His image, simply are able to feel and experience what He felt and experienced, too. We feel because God feels. In fact, the writer of Hebrews tells us that not only does He feel what we feel, we ought to be supremely grateful for that since that makes Him our empathetic High Priest:

“But Jesus the Son of God is our great High Priest who has gone to heaven itself to help us; therefore let us never stop trusting him. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses since He had the same temptations we do, though He never once gave way to them and sinned. So let us come boldly to the very throne of God and stay there to receive his mercy and to find grace to help us in our times of need.” (Hebrews 4:14-16)

In the case of His betrayal, knowing in advance that Judas would hand Him over, for a price, to the Jews, having deliberately selected Him with that knowledge in advance, Jesus was still distraught as He announced to His disciples that one of them would stab Him in the back. His distress was not hidden behind a stiff upper lip. The disciples were very aware that Jesus was terribly upset, so much so that Peter tried to counteract these messianic emotions with some bravado of His own: “Don’t worry Lord, I’ll be with you through thick and thin!”

Many times during my two daughters’ growing-up years, they would come to me for comfort when they had experienced fear, frustration, disappointment, and hurt in their lives. Being a little

thick-headed father (I know, that’s a bit redundant), it took me a while to realize that they didn’t always want me to fix their problems, they simply wanted me to listen to their upset and offer an emotional response that assured them I identified with their hurt. They wanted me to feel their pain. They wanted, and needed, an empathetic father. To be sure, they sometimes needed me to fix things; but most of the time they just needed to know that I cared. Here’s the thing: They didn’t care how much I knew, they needed to know how much I cared.

The fact that Jesus cared so much about Judas’ betrayal—even though He knew in advance it would happen and that God would leverage it for His eternal plan—proved to His disciples that He cared for them, too. They knew how much He cared, and that made Him a perfect, empathetic High Priest they could come to for anything they were facing.

What a drag it would be to serve an uncaring, unfeeling Messiah. Thankfully, that is not the Messiah you serve. Jesus was distressed—but what a blessed distress! It proves that even as one who is fully God, He is still perfectly capable of feeling emotions for you, too.

“When all is said and done, people may admire how much you know, how well versed you are in your field (doctor, mechanic, lawyer, engineer, community leader, etc.), but they will remember you for the ages for how much you cared for them... When [people] know how much you care, you have begun building the foundations of trust-based relationships.” (John Maxwell)

GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Where are you hurting today? Boldly—with unmitigated fear, anger or hurt, if necessary—go to Jesus and pour out your heart to Him. He cares! And He knows what to do for you, too!

DAILY RESPONSE

- **Read Hebrews 4:14-16 again. What stands out to you most in that passage?**
- **How does knowing Jesus went through the same kinds of feelings and experiences we do help you through hard moments?**
- **How does understanding verse 14 of Hebrews 4 help us follow through on verse 16?**

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Handwriting practice area consisting of 20 horizontal dotted lines.

DAY 2

GOD'S NEW TEMPLE ON PLANET EARTH

Read John 14:12-14

"I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in Me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father. You can ask for anything in My name, and I will do it, so that the Son can bring glory to the Father. Yes, ask Me for anything in My name, and I will do it!"

"You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it." That is a pretty amazing promise Jesus made to His disciples—and by extension—to you and me!

Jesus was laying out His succession plans for God's Kingdom. He told His disciples that He needed to go back to the Father, and in His absence, they would carry on His works in the world, extending the Kingdom wherever they went. Although He would no longer be with them physically, He would be with them, and more importantly, live in them and work through them, by the indwelling Holy Spirit:

"And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you know him, because He lives with you now and later will be in you. No, I will not abandon you as orphans—I will come to you" (John 14:16-18)

Literally, to His followers who would completely yield their lives in obedience to His word, commitment to His purposes, and availability to His work, Jesus promised, "My Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with each of them." (John 14:23) Make His home in them!

What a thought: through the initial infilling and ongoing indwelling, the Holy Spirit—the third person of the Holy Trinity—would actually take up residence within Christ's followers, making their lives, body, mind, and spirit the new Temple of God on Planet Earth.

Those words are from the lips of Jesus Himself, and they are meant for you! As you go about your life—wherever you go, whatever you do, whoever you are with—you are God's Temple on Planet Earth, the dwelling place of God's presence. Do you believe that? If you do, Jesus' words will transform you to the core of your being. They will radically alter the way you perceive yourself and interact with your world. They will lead you to have the kind of impact for Christ in this world you have always dreamed of having.

The story is told of a private in the army of the Greek General, Alexander the Great, who ran after and retrieved the general's runaway horse. When this lowly soldier brought the animal back, Alexander offered his appreciation by saying, "Thank you, Captain!"

With one word the private had been promoted. When the general said it, the private believed it. He immediately went to the quartermaster, selected a new captain's uniform and put it on. He went to the officers' quarters and selected his bunk. He went to the officers' mess and had a meal. Because General Alexander had said it, the private took him at his word and changed his life accordingly. He was simply now doing life in the authority of Alexander.

Why don't you take the word of Someone far greater than Alexander and change your life accordingly? If you will, greater works will you do!

"We are Jesus Christ's; we belong to Him. But even more, we are increasingly him. He moves in and commandeers our hands and feet, requisitions our minds and tongues. We sense His rearranging: debris into the divine, pig's ear into silk purse. He repurposes bad decisions and squalid choices. Little by little, a new image emerges." (Max Lucado)

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

Offer this prayer for radical alteration: "Jesus, I believe what you said. On this day, I ask the Father, as You have commissioned me to do, to empower and embolden me to do the very kingdom works that you would do if you were in my place. And may all glory go back to You!"

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- **Think about Jesus' promise here...that no longer would man go to a temple to be with God, now God would be with man, who is the temple. How does the promise of God's Holy Spirit dwelling in us and working through us, impact our lives?**
- **How does doing life in the authority of Jesus change the way you act?**
- **Can you think of a time that God's Spirit within you impacted the way you acted or responded? Share some stories here.**

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DAY 3

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE—WITH CONDITIONS

Read John 14:15, 21, 23-24

“If you love Me, obey My commandments...Those who accept My commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love Me, My Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal Myself to each of them...All who love Me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with each of them. Anyone who doesn’t love Me will not obey Me.”

Three times as Jesus speaks to the disciples about His going and the Holy Spirit’s coming, He repeats this phrase: Your love for Me will be indicated by your obedience to Me. Obviously, it was very important to Jesus that His disciples understood this.

It still is. In an age where love has become a very squishy concept, Jesus still wants those who claim to follow Him to demonstrate their love not just in language, but in action. Now the fact that love calls for proof in no way diminishes the doctrine of unconditional love—love with no strings attached. It simply clarifies what “unconditional” means. To love unconditionally means the love you have and express toward another is not dependent upon their worth or the work. Rather, that love emanates from the core of your being. That love is there—it is the subject; but a noun needs a verb as well as an object to tell the full story of what love is. What love is cannot be told without showing what love does.

The Apostle Paul taught that in I Corinthians 13, the great love chapter, when he writes “love is...” But Paul defines “love is” by demonstrating what love does: It acts. It works. It affects. It produces an outcome.

Jesus says the outcome of love for Him is obedience: The one who loves Him will obey His commandments. If they accept His demands, they will prove it by obedience to those requirements, thus authenticating their love for Him. They will do what He says. Jesus can’t be any clearer than that: love for God has conditions—it obeys.

Furthermore, the God who loves us unconditionally sets some conditions upon His love for us and our loving response to Him; some “if...then’s”: *I love you, and if you love Me by doing what I say, then I will give you another Advocate (John 14:16); If you obey my commandments then my Father will love you and I will love you, too, and reveal myself to you (John 14:21); If you love me then my Father and I will come and make Our home with you (John 14:23).*

Love doesn’t work to be love; it works because it is love. That is very clear when you look to the source of love, the Being who defines what love is by demonstrating what love does. God is love. His love is not the sloppy, vague, anything-goes-kind of love our world knows. It is not

the ever-changing love that rises and falls with one’s current emotional state that far too many people today understand love to be. It is not the selfish kind of love that loves to the degree that love is required. No God’s love is an unconditional, sacrificial, proactive love that seeks out unworthy objects. It is a holy and righteous love; it is a tough love; it is an unchanging love. It is this love that is the essence of God’s being; it is energy of what God does. It is the outcome of where God has been and is. God is love—not just love the noun, but love the verb.

And when you have truly embraced God’s love, it then goes on display in you. It can’t help it. Like God, you love with no thought of love in return; you go out of your way to love; you love in response to hurtful and hateful actions; you suffer, but patiently love; when everyone else has given up, you stubbornly love anyway. When that kind of love in action is displayed in you, it is obvious that God’s unconditional love got to you.

When it comes to your love for God, love is as love does. It obeys. It does what He says. Not to earn more of His love, but to express love in response to what you can never earn. That is the condition of true love: it loves unconditionally.

■ *“When love and skill work together expect a masterpiece.” (John Ruskin)*



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Express your love for God by loving someone else today—surprise them with love. Do it generously and in a way they cannot repay, perhaps even doing it anonymously to ensure they can’t. Love in a way that leaves a definite imprint that God has been there.



DAILY RESPONSE:

- **How do you see the tie between love and obedience as Jesus describes it here?**
- **Think about and discuss this statement, “Love doesn’t work to be love; it works because it is love.”**
- **Is there an area of disobedience in your life that you can flip to obedience and show your love for Christ all the more?**

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DAY 4

RECEIVING REVELATION

Read John 14:22-24

Judas (not Judas Iscariot, but His other disciple with that name) said to Him, “Sir, why are You going to reveal Yourself only to us disciples and not to the world at large?” Jesus replied, “Because I will only reveal Myself to those who love Me and obey Me. The Father will love them too, and We will come to them and live with them. Anyone who doesn’t obey Me doesn’t love Me. And remember, I am not making up this answer to your question! It is the answer given by the Father who sent Me.

Why do some people seem to get more insider information about God than others? I’m not talking about those who claim to have special revelation but within seconds of being with them you realize they only have half of that equation—for sure, they are “special” but they have zero revelation! No, the kind of people I am speaking of have greater insight into Scripture, get more profound insights out of their daily devotions, display a special connection to the Holy Spirit, and day by day seem to grow more profoundly, deeply connected with God than the average believer.

Does God love them more than others? No, but for a select few of these types, it may be that God has sovereignly selected them to reveal Himself more clearly for the purpose of ministering to others the deeper things of the Lord. Is it because they are spiritually smarter than the rest of us? Probably not. Do they have more faith than you and me? I doubt it.

So, what is it? My sense is that, except in special cases where God has uniquely marked certain individuals for a greater download of divine information, those with deeper revelation have simply and consistently exercised their faith more than the rest of us. The exercise of their faith has been met with greater revelation. It is as St. Augustine said: *“Faith is to believe what we do not see, and the reward of this faith is to see what we believe.”* The surest way to a greater faith—which, remember, is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen, according to Hebrews 11:1—which leads to a closer relationship with God and greater revelation of who God is, is to exercise the faith that we have.

That seems to be Jesus’ answer to Judas, who asked the Lord, “why don’t you just go ahead and prove yourself to the whole world? Wouldn’t that make things a lot easier for you?” It almost seems as if Jesus sidesteps that question when He begins to talk about love and obedience: *“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.”* (John 14:23) But what Jesus is getting at is that deeper revelation comes by way of our receptivity, and receptivity is conditioned by our love, and our love is displayed by our obedience to Jesus’ commands, and our obedience comes from the exercise of our faith. If we don’t exercise faith, revelation would be wasted. Thomas Aquinas, a brilliant

church leader in the thirteenth century, made this profound observation: “To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary. To one without faith, no explanation is possible.” So why would God waste revelation on someone who has been unwilling to exercise faith?

But when we exercise faith, our faith grows. As our faith grows, greater love flows from us toward God. And as love flourishes, obedience becomes our willing offering of response to God. It is our growing faith, flowing love and willing obedience that acts as our invitation for God to make His home in us. And when God takes up residence in our lives, deeper insight, special revelation and spiritual familiarity will come to characterize our relationship with God.

■ *“Faith fills a man with love for the beauty of its truth, with faith in the truth of its beauty.” (Frances de Sales)*

GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Do you desire greater revelation of God? Are you willing to exercise your faith? Are you ready to love God more and obey Him with greater willingness? Think about the following challenge from Martin Luther: “What you do in your house is worth as much as if you did it up in heaven for our Lord God. We should accustom ourselves to think of our position and work as sacred and well-pleasing to God, not on account of the position and work, but on account of the word and faith from which the obedience and the work flow.”

DAILY RESPONSE

- **Try to think of a time when your faith was measurably lifted. What was happening in your life at the time? What contributed to your strengthened faith?**
- **Why do you think Jesus talks again here about love and obedience when asked about revealing Himself to the world?**
- **Where do you think you can exercise your faith today and this week in order to watch your faith grow?**

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DAY 5

ABIDE!

Read John 15:5

“I am the Vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing.”

As a society, we are busier than ever, and with that, we have much less capacity to experience and enjoy what’s most important in life. Cardiologist Meyer Friedman, a respected authority on the Type A personality, says that modern America suffers from what he calls hurry sickness.” We might define hurry sickness as the relentless drive to do more, have more and be more in less and less time.

That’s not new; it has been the steady march of fallen humanity asserting independence from God. Even 200 years ago, Soren Kierkegaard said, “The press of busyness is like a charm. Its power swells ... it reaches out, seeking always to lay hold of ever-younger victims so that childhood or youth are scarcely allowed the quiet and the retirement in which the Eternal may unfold a divine growth.”

Even believers have fallen prey to uncontrolled, purposelessness. We have elevated intensity of living over intimacy with God and, predictably, that is stunting the fruit-bearing, joy-filled, abundant life described in John 15 that Jesus died to provide—and which is the most compelling witness, arguably, to a hurried, stressed-out world that desperately needs the Christ-follower to be an oasis of unforced centeredness in a sea of chaos.

As believers, we have been called to abide. Jesus, who perfectly balanced the relentless demands of people and mission with quietness and solitude, is a great mentor for us. He knew how to make space in His life for what was most important in life: abiding with His Father. Mark 6:31-32 is a great example of how Jesus practiced abiding in His Father:

“Because so many people were coming and going that Jesus and His disciples didn’t even have time to eat, He said to them, ‘Come with Me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.’ So they left in a boat to a solitary place.”

We are not told what they did when they got there. They may have enjoyed a season of prayer. Maybe Jesus led them in a devotional. Perhaps they took a nap, or had a potluck, or played tag—all legitimate activities when you are with Jesus. We don’t know for sure, but we do know they did this:

- They ceased their normal activity
- They retreated from the demands of people

- They set aside a specific time and place for quiet
- They were with Jesus in an undivided way.

That experience of abiding resulted in rest. Now that same practice of abiding will work for us, too: pausing from our normal routine; scheduling time and place for solitude and reflection; giving full and unfettered access into our lives to Jesus. That's a simple but sure template for abiding in Christ if you are looking for one.

Without a regular and fiercely guarded time for abiding in Christ, life will constantly remind you that this world demands your blood, sweat and tears. But by abiding in Christ, you will be reminded that your eternal soul belongs to Someone and someplace else.

John 15:4, Jesus says, "Abide in Me, as I abide in you." That is not only a command, it is an invitation that requires a choice on your part. Jesus invites you to come away with Him from the busyness of life and the bondage of hurriedness for a satisfying renewal of your soul. "Come with me" Jesus says, "to a quiet place and get some rest." (Mark 6:31)

Will you? If you want to really live the fruit-bearing, God-honoring, joyful life Jesus came to give you, you have to make the choice to abide.

■ *"It is the responsibility of every believer to carve out a satisfying life under the loving rule of God, or sin will start to look good!" (Dallas Willard)*

GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

For most of your life, you are required to "wrestle with the world, wringing profit from the earth" (Abraham Heschel), but Jesus calls us to carve out a regular time where we get away with Him just to abide. Do that today...and every day this week. While you are with Him, simply reflect on who you are and to Whom you belong and why He put you on this earth. In those moments, gratefully remember intimacy with Him is greater than anything else in life!

DAILY RESPONSE

- Have you ever experienced or do you ever experience "hurry sickness?"
- Where have you elevated the intensity of living over intimacy with God? What is one step you can take this week to adjust that?
- How can you abide in The Vine today and this week? Write out a few ways that come to mind and commit to do them.

Handwriting practice area consisting of 20 horizontal dotted lines.





WEEK

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DAY 1

HOW TO GET WHAT YOU NEED—AND WANT

Read John 15:7-8

“But if you remain in Me and My words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! When you produce much fruit, you are My true disciples. This brings great glory to My Father.”

Have you ever been around fruity Christians? Perhaps fruit-filled would be a more serious way of putting it. I’m talking about the believer who seems to enjoy more of God’s blessings than the ordinary Christian? They tend to get more prayers answered than you, live in a greater degree of Divine favor than you, appear to have more of an inside track with the Almighty than you, overflow with a lot more joy and definitely produce a ton more spiritual fruit than you.

They’re fruity—their lives produce much fruit.

In my younger days as a believer, I had a friend who was the most spiritually passionate person I had ever met. She talked about Jesus constantly, lived in complete dependence on God, and prayed about everything. I mean everything—all her needs and even every single one of her wants. She prayed about things I wouldn’t have bothered the Almighty with. When she wanted a better car—she was even specific about the year, make, model, and color of the exterior and interior—she asked God. And she got it—the year, make, model, and color car she prayed for miraculously showed up one day not long after—I kid you not. When she decided a trip to the Holy Land was in order, she prayed for the funds to go. Guess what—she got it. She went on an all expense paid trip to Israel—and I stayed home. That was just her life as a believer—she was a fruity disciple.

Perhaps you wish you could live her kind of blessed life, but secretly feel a little selfish in asking God for it. Don’t feel selfish one second longer. God wants you to experience that kind of abundant life, too. In fact, Jesus said the God-blessed life is arguably the best proof that you are His disciple. Furthermore, He pointed out that your fruitfulness as His disciple is what brings much glory to His Father. The fruitier you are, the greater glory that goes to God. The more God answers your prayers, the more He receives the praise. That’s how you make God look good!

Wanting to live the God-blessed life is not selfish at all. It is no more selfish than God wanting to be glorified by giving you your blessings. It is simply the rule of God’s kingdom to ask for His favor and to live in His blessing. And remember, it is preceded by “remaining in Him”...so it’s not like you are in it for yourself. When you are in it to remain in Him, then you may ask away!

That’s what God wants for you. So stop feeling weird about asking and start asking expectantly. What do you desire for your life? Ask for it. If you are connected to Jesus—and make no mistake,

that is the key to receiving—the Father will allow you to bear not just a little, but a whole bunch of fruit. That’s what He wants for His disciples, and that includes you.

Now, the proviso is, of course, use the fruit He grants you to glorify Him. This isn’t about satiating your flesh. It is about reflecting the abundance of God’s grace in your daily life. Make sure that is your organic desire.

If you are not at the level of fruitiness that you would like to be, that ought to be your first prayer today.

“Beware in your prayers, above everything else, of limiting God, not only by unbelief, but by fancying that you know what He can do. Expect unexpected things, ‘above all that we ask or think’. Each time, before you intercede, be quiet first, and worship God in His glory. Think of what He can do, and how He delights to hear the prayers of His redeemed people. Think of your place and privilege in Christ, and expect great things!” (Andrew Murray)

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

Speaking of asking the Father for anything you want, why not ask Him for much fruit!

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- Have you ever asked God for something totally outlandish?
- What has your experience been in asking and receiving from God?
- What does it mean to abide in Him and He in you?
- How can you boldly, and without shame, ask God for what you need today?

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DAY 2

THE SECRET TO UNCONTAINABLE JOY

Read John 15:11-14

“I have told you these things so that you will be filled with My joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! This is My commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are My friends if you do what I command.”

Several times throughout this Gospel, Jesus has tied true discipleship and authentic love for Him to our obedience to His commandments. That is a message our current brand of Christianity needs to hear—and frankly, it is some tough medicine. The truth is, you cannot claim love of Christ while doing whatever feels good to you. Real faith requires the surrender of your will to God’s. It is this simple: if you love Jesus you will obey His commands.

By our definition of love that doesn’t seem too loving. Love and obedience or love and commands usually aren’t terms we link together. What we must realize about Jesus is that his commands are not oppressive. In fact, the Apostle John reminds us in 1 John 5:3, *“Loving God means keeping his commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome.”*

On the contrary, Jesus’ commands are the gateway to our joy. And not just joy, but Jesus described the gladness that would well up within us as overflowing. Jesus’ equation for authentic faith was that obedience to Him would equal organic, unstoppable, spilling over joy in us.

But, there was a particular kind of obedience that Jesus said would lead to this special kind of joy: Loving one another. And not just a brotherly love, but it was to be the same kind of love that Jesus demonstrated for His disciples. What kind of love was that?

It was proactive. Jesus actually searched out His disciples to be the object of His love. He didn’t wait to see if they were loveable or even if they would love Him in response. His love went out of its way to find them, and then He poured out His love upon them—even on one of them He knew would end up betraying Him.

It was unconditional. His disciples did nothing to deserve His love, and they certainly could do nothing to earn His love. In fact, they often did just the opposite. They fought with each other. They selfishly jockeyed for position with Him. At times, they didn’t listen to him and often they didn’t understand what He taught them. They left Him in His hour of trial. They even betrayed Him. Yet He stubbornly loved them.

It was sacrificial. Jesus laid down His life for them. Yes, He ultimately died for their sins, but He also died to His own rights in order to serve them. He told them that even as the Lord of all creation, He didn’t come to be served, but to serve and give His life to redeem them. Nowhere

do we see a more powerful and clear demonstration of sacrificial love than in Jesus giving up in order to give to His disciples.

It was inexhaustible. Nothing in their past, nothing they did when they were with Him, nothing they could ever do in their future (because as the Omniscient Sovereign Lord of life, Jesus knew what was in their future) could or would diminish His love for the disciples. Since God is love, and since Jesus was God, we find in Him that true love cannot be extinguished.

Jesus said that if we would decide to act toward one another with that kind of love—and make no mistake, Jesus made it clear by His life that divine love was a choice, an act of the will—it would unleash from deep within us an inextinguishable flood of uncontainable joy. While our flesh, along with the Evil One, supported by the philosophies of this world that continually lie to us that joy comes from what is done for us, Jesus says it comes by what we do: proactively, unconditionally, sacrificially and inexhaustibly loving others!

Who can you love like that today—and every day from here on out? What person can you seek out to love as Jesus has loved you? What would be a way to love them unconditionally—in a way they did not deserve and could never repay? How might you offer love that is costly to you—and not necessarily in terms of the money you spend? As you love them, can you—or will you—do it with a commitment to sustain that love indefinitely?

Fair warning: Choose to love like that and you are choosing to unleash the unstoppable joy of Jesus in your life. Good luck!

“Real love is an unconditional, sacrificial, proactive love that seeks out unworthy objects. It is a holy and righteous love; it is a tough love; it is an unchanging love. It is this love that is the essence of God’s being. And it is especially visible when it is on display in you. When you love with no thought of love in return; when you go out of your way to love; when you love in response to hurtful and hateful actions; when you suffer, but patiently love; when everyone else has given up but you stubbornly love anyway...when that kind of love in action is displayed in you, there God is seen.” –Ray Noah



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Not that your love should be limited to one person, but who are you being led to love as Jesus has loved you? Specifically identify that person.



DAILY RESPONSE

🕒 How is following Jesus’ commands a gateway to joy in our lives?

DAY 3

HATED BY THE WORLD—LOVED BY GOD

Read John 15:18-19

“If the world hates you, remember that it hated Me first. The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you.”

It is a real dilemma for Christians: God loves the world so much that He gave His Son to die for it, but the world hates God (they didn't like His Son too much either) because it belongs to the Evil One. But wait, there is more: the story that He has commissioned His followers to bring to the world, called the Good News, is received most of the time as bad news because it first has to deal with the problem of human sin—which kind of makes sinners a bit uncomfortable.

Hold on, I'm not through yet: You and I belong to God, and since Satan, the current strong man who dominates this world and its inhabitants, hates God and everything of God, we are included in that hatred. Jesus couldn't have put it in any clearer terms:

“Since I picked you to live on God's terms and no longer on the world's terms, the world is going to hate you.” (John 15:19)

Now that is tough to swallow, especially in our culture, where Christians have been brought up for the last couple generations on a steady diet of positive mental attitude pabulum, seeker sensitive evangelism, and a church growth movement that tries everything in its power to make the unbeliever want to come to church. For the last thirty-plus years, a great many churches in the Western world have placed more emphasis on making sinners comfortable than making committed disciples, which requires preaching Christ and Him crucified. More energy and resources have been devoted to creative messaging and capturing the “cool factor” than cross-bearing discipleship.

Don't believe me? Just walk into any number of church lobbies, and you will feel like you are in a Starbucks rather than a sanctuary's vestibule. When the service starts, listen to the music and you will think you are listening to America's Top 40 in a sea of fans enjoying a rock concert rather than among engaged worshipers offering up the sacrifice of praise to please their God. Sit through a sermon and you will think you have just listened to a cross between a late-night talk show host and a self-help guru, they will help you to smile your way in seven easy steps to your best life now. Check out the altar call at the end of the message, if there even is one, and you will think people have just signed up for a thirty-day free trial of Netflix rather than surrendering the rest of their lives to Jesus Christ.

What you are unlikely to find, though, is any talk of sin—it just makes people feel too uncomfortable. You may not hear words like “repentance” or “surrender” or “obedience” or “Lordship”—it may

just scare the pre-Christians away. What you are going to hear, however, is what I would call a Burger King Christianity—you know, the kind that says, “special orders don’t upset us...have it your way.”

Now listen, I am not a grouchy, out-of-touch, aging pastor—okay, I am at least one of those. I don’t think preachers ought to go out of their way to be offensive. I do believe that churches ought to think creatively about reaching the disinterested and hostile in their community. I love excellence, and think the church service ought to be a first-class affair—we are worshiping the King of kings after all. And, by all means, believers ought to do what that can to build bridges to the lost people in their lives.

But, our job is neither to impress the world by trying to be a cool version of it or to tell it that everything is mostly okay with it—except for a few minor adjustments. Our job is to talk about the Good News that Jesus died for our sin—sin that separates us and makes us hostile to a holy God. Once we deal with the sin issue through proclaiming the truth in grace and love, inviting sinners back to God through the repentance of sin and calling them into a surrendered lifestyle of committed, cross-bearing discipleship, both we and the sinners we help to rescue will realize that what we have found is something more satisfying, more valuable, more positive by far than anything this world can provide—the pearl of great price!

Quit worrying about whether the world will like you or not. It won’t—that is guaranteed. If you belong to Jesus, you will be hated, but that is okay, because you will be loved by God. And that is all that matters.

■ *“Jesus Christ did not say, ‘Go into the world and tell the world that it is quite right.’”*
(C.S. Lewis)



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

How much have you bought into the mentality that your job is to get the world to like you? Ask God to help you jettison that unhealthy need from your life. Take a moment to meditate on I John 2:15: “Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you.”



DAILY RESPONSE

- Have you ever felt hated by the world? How so?**
- Do you feel pressure to get people to like you as a Christian or to like Christ? What are some ways you have tried to do this by yourself?**
- What are some ways you can express the truth and love of Christ today to someone else, regardless of how they might like or dislike you?**

DAY 4

WHAT DOES GOD THINK ABOUT TERRORISM?

Read John 16:2-3

“Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor Me.”

Not only the threat, but the daily reality of terrorism has occupied the twenty-four hour news cycle, dominated water-cooler conversations at work and planted fear in the hearts of ordinary Americans since the turn of the millennium. And now, daily debate in our political discourse focuses on what terrorism is (I’ve heard some even dismissively say, “Hey, one country’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter”), what to call or not call it (so as not to inflame the terrorists), why terrorism is on the rise (are our Western values and lifestyles really to blame for the rise of terrorism around the world?), and how to combat it (do we send in the Special Forces to wipe them off the face of the earth or send the terrorists to the corner for a time out?).

Often, the what, why and how in our conversations about terrorism turns absurd on both ends of the discourse.

What is not debatable or absurd is what God says about terrorism—as well as those who carry it out and those who perpetuate it through educational, philosophical, financial, and spiritual support: Anyone who diminishes, hurts, or kills another in the name of their god does not know the one true God or His Son, Jesus Christ, whom He sent.

“There will even come a time when anyone who kills you will think he’s doing God a favor. They will do these things because they never really understood the Father.” (John 16:2-3)

Thomas Carlyle said, *“Violence does even justice unjustly.”* Make no mistake, violence of any kind done in the name of faith—in the home, at the church, in the community, between political belief systems, and countries—is terroristic, morally bankrupt, and evidence in and of itself that those who inflict it (or stand by in tacit approval of it) are as far from God as can be.

And God will judge it! Jesus said, *“those who live by the sword will die by the sword.”* (Matthew 26:52) Death will come—spiritually, relationally, perhaps even physically—likely in this life from the irreversible law of sowing and reaping, or in the next life as people, people groups, nations and world systems stand before the Great White Throne judgment of Almighty God. (Revelation 20:11-15)

Jesus spoke of the threat of religious violence to give His disciples a heads-up that it was coming. And His forewarning was to serve the purpose of settling them in their faith when that awful reality was upon them. We, too, would do well to simply acknowledge the reality that religious terrorism will increase as the final days of Planet Earth draw to a close. Jesus still doesn't want His followers to be unsettled in their faith—either to begin doubting God or getting carried away in unproductively debating terrorism—by the rise of evil and violence done in the name of religion. Mark it down and get prepared.

Yet, I can't help but think there is a more practical application we should latch onto from Jesus' insights into religious violence. In a sense, is spiritual terrorism occurring in our homes when violence or the threat of violence or some other form of intimidation is used to control others—and justified by the Bible? Do we commit spiritual terrorism when we can fling incendiary, hateful and hurtful words via social media—all justified by our spiritual point of view, of course—in ways for which we are not held to account? When we speak critical and judgmental words anonymously, isn't that akin to throwing an emotional grenade into someone's life without having to stick around to view the damage that it does—that we have done?

I have a feeling that violence—not just physical, but more likely, through emotional attacks, financial coercion, and spiritual abuse—justified Biblically, happens more often, is inflicted more subtly and is carried out more creatively than we are either conscious of or care to admit. But from here on out, with the help of the Holy Spirit, the Chief Conviction Officer in our lives, let's soberly remember that if we resort to spiritual terrorism, that in itself is evidence that we do not know Jesus like we think we do!

■ *“Violence is the last refuge of the incompetent.” (Isaac Asimov)*



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Ask God to reveal to you where you might be inflicting pain on another in ways that you have justified by your faith. You might want to ask those close to you as well. And where there is evidence that you are guilty, repent of it, repudiate it, and change!



DAILY RESPONSE

- What stands out to you most about this lesson?
- Think about the ways “Spiritual Terrorism” is mentioned in this devotion. Where have you been guilty of this in your own life?
- How can you commit to a loving, Christ-like response to people instead of a religiously violent one?

DAY 5

CHIEF CONVICTION OFFICER

Read John 16:8

And when He comes, the Holy Spirit will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment.

Have you figured this out yet? You do a horrible job at being the Holy Spirit in other people's lives.

Yet, how tempting it is to do His work for Him. It is easy to do when you are passionate about truth. It is easy to do when you see how someone you care about is living counter-productively to a blessable life. And frankly, it is easy to do when people aren't fulfilling your vision for their lives. Yes, God loves them and you have a wonderful plan for their lives—and it is your job to make sure they live up to your high calling. Right?

Wrong!

Spiritual maturity demands that we take care in observing the fine line between serving as the voice of reason for people and allowing the Spirit to transform their thinking. We step into the Spirit's territory the minute we assume the role of CCO—Chief Conviction Officer. To be effectively used by the Holy Spirit in the lives of others, we must figure out the difference between sharing the truth in love, respectful persuasion, and passionate debate—all of which are good and necessary to being the influencer Jesus calls us to be—and without being argumentative, rude, nagging, arrogant and flat out irritating. We have been called to lead the horse to water, so to speak, but only the Holy Spirit can create the unquenchable thirst that makes them want to drink deeply from Truth.

It takes real discernment and sensitivity to figure out what to say, how much to say, and when to say it and when to just shut up and let God go to work. Oswald Chambers said, "One of the hardest lessons to learn comes from our stubborn refusal to refrain from interfering in other people's lives. It takes a long time to realize the danger of being an amateur providence, that is, interfering with God's plan for others."

The truth is that God, indeed, has a wonderful plan for people's lives, but we need to allow Him convince them of how that plan needs to play out. By all means, we ought to take the role of encourager, exhorter, and at times, admonisher, but only the Holy Spirit can bring the change of heart, the right thinking, and the right steps that will lead them to the incredible life God has envisioned.

Chances are, in this season of time, you are being tempted to tell certain people how to think, how to feel, and what to do about life. Perhaps it is your child, maybe it is your spouse, or it

could be a friend or a co-worker—it is just part of the human equation. So let me suggest in that particular situation you simply take your foot off the gas pedal, pray a lot more, and let the Holy Spirit work. My guess is the transformation in that person’s life will happen a lot more quickly, deeply, and enduringly if you take that approach.

Try to remember at all times: you are not the Holy Spirit!

■ *“There is no better evangelist in the world than the Holy Spirit.” (D.L. Moody)*



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Ask God to reveal where you have been doing the Holy Spirit’s work for Him. When He shows you, first, repent, then second, ask for greater discernment and sensitivity to fulfill the role of influencer God has called you to play.



DAILY RESPONSE

- Have you ever tried to be the Holy Spirit in others’ lives? Where has this played out?
- Write about and/or comment on the three areas of the Holy Spirit’s job as listed in this passage. What stands out to you most?
- Are there areas in your life that you need to allow the Holy Spirit to mold, shape and convict you today?

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WEEK

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DAY 1

LOOKING FORWARD!

Read John 16:19b, 22-23

Jesus went on to say, "In a little while you will see Me no more, and then after a little while you will see Me. ...Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. In that day you will no longer ask Me anything. Very truly I tell you, My Father will give you whatever you ask in My name."

People who have followed Jesus throughout the ages did something that Christians don't do as much in our day: They thought a lot about heaven.

They were right to do so. Perhaps they had a more balanced theology than we do, possibly their spiritual leaders taught more often on the future world than ours do, or it could be that since life was so hard and following Christ came at such a high price looking forward to eternity was simply the natural thing to do. Maybe it was all of the above.

Whatever the case, heaven was on their minds. Not so much for us. Earth has become so good to us that we almost see the approach of eternity as a rude interruption to our pursuit of the good life in this present world. Some believers almost think and act as if heaven is a cheap substitute for Planet Earth. It is not. It is our true home, our Divine destiny purchased by the blood of Jesus when He died on the cross, the place where our full potential will be perpetually, increasingly, uninterruptedly released as we rule and reign with Christ. As the old timers used to sing,

"This world is not my home I'm just a-passin' through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from heaven's open door. And I can't feel at home in this world anymore."(Jim Reeves)

We would do well to practice dwelling on our eternal dwelling more. Doing so is not wishful thinking or pain avoidance or escapism. It is what Jesus instructed His disciples, and by extension, you and me, to do. The fact was, Jesus was going to leave and, at first, it would be a pretty painful leaving. He would die on the cross, according to God's eternal plan. Then He would ascend back to His Father. In his absence, He would send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who would be with the disciples, and in them continually. The Spirit would constantly abide with them, empower them for Christian living and witness, would lead them into truth and reveal the deeper things of God to them. Even still, life would be tough for them because they followed Jesu. They would be persecuted, rejected, and killed for their faith. But, one of the things Jesus said they needed to do to endure the hardships of this life and thrive in the midst of pain was to dwell on the good things to come.

What are those good things to come? For starters, there will be fullness of joy. The grief of the present will turn to joy (John 16:22), and the joy will be so great in heaven that the grief of the past will pale by comparison until it fades in to oblivion. Pain, disappointment, and heartache will be forgotten and joy would be their new reality—for all eternity. Furthermore, there will be fullness of life. (John 16:23a) Christ’s disciples will not even need to ask Him for anything; they will already have everything. And finally, there will be fullness of relationship. (John 16:23b) The disciples will be able to go directly to God for anything they want because of what Jesus has accomplished. We will no longer wrestle with the image of God being a distant, immovable, uncaring deity in a galaxy far, far away; He will be up close and quite personal.

Jesus seems to be saying that we should continually keep those future realities in our present thoughts as we face the harsh conditions of our current lives. And, by what He then says in verse 24, by practicing this type of “heaven-thinking” now, we will be so filled with confident assurance that asking for what we want and need right in this present world will be our faith response to whatever comes our way:

 *“Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.” (John 16:24)*

Looking forward to your eternal future on a regular basis is one of the best things you could do for your faith. In one of his letters, C.S. Lewis wrote, *“Good and evil when they attain their full stature are retrospective. That is why, at the end of all things, the damned will say we were always in Hell, and the blessed we have never lived anywhere but in heaven.”*

Why not go ahead and imagine your future home right now, because when you finally get there, you will realize that Jesus made sure it was always pretty close.

“A continual looking forward to the eternal world is not (as some modern people think) a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do.” (C.S. Lewis)

GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Carve out some time and schedule a place where you can be alone with God this week—perhaps even today. Take your Bible and open it to the very last book and chapter of the Bible, Revelation 22. Slowly and gratefully read it and let that picture of your future reality invade your present world.

DAILY RESPONSE

-  **Have you ever taken time to stop, think about heaven, and really dwell on what it will be like? If not, take some time right now and just imagine being in the eternal presence of God in heaven.**

DAY 2

PEACEFUL TRIALS

Read John 16:33

“I have told you all this so that you may have peace in Me. Here on earth, you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.”

I hate to be blindsided, and I am sure you do, too. Nobody likes to be caught off guard by bad news or troubling circumstances. The shock and surprise of such experiences makes these difficulties doubly devastating.

That’s why Jesus gives us a divine heads-up in John 16. Standing at both ends of this chapter, like bookends, Jesus gave His followers an FYI on some of the challenges they would certainly face. In verse 1, He says, *“I have told you these things so that you won’t abandon your faith.”* Then again at the end of the chapter in verse 33, He reminds them of this insider information so that when bad things happen, they won’t be unsettled.

Just what insider information did Jesus provide? Simply that your faith is going to get you into a fair amount of trouble in this life. People are not going to like you because you follow Jesus. You will be persecuted not only for the stand you personally take on moral issues, but just for the position your Christianity represents. In fact, some people will even hate you with a murderous zeal disguised as religious passion simply because of the Christian life you live:

“Indeed the time is coming when those who kill you will think they are doing God a service.” (John 16:2)

Without even trying, your lifestyle of faith will bring them under such conviction that they will find it intolerable and want to do away with you. Things may get a bit rough, so be ready for it, Jesus says.

The good news, however, is that you will never have to face these difficulties alone. The fact is, through Christ, you will overcome each challenge victoriously, even the most extreme challenge of staring into the abyss of martyrdom. You will overcome because you know what is coming. (John 16:1,4, 33) You will be victorious because Jesus has already been victorious under these same pressures. (John 16:33) You will be able to face these situations with courage and grace because of the presence of the Divine Helper, the Holy Spirit. (John 16:7) You will win in the hour of trial because the Sovereign Father who loves you (John 16:27) will hear and answer your every prayer. (John 16:23-24)

Knowing ahead of time what is coming, and knowing that your victory has been secured already, you can go about your day, and come what may—trouble, hardship, disappointment, failure,

persecution, hatred, even death—live in the wonderful reality of what Christ promised: *“In Me, you will have peace!”*

Peaceful trials—that is what Christ has promised you.

“God knows our situation; He will not judge us as if we had no difficulties to overcome. What matters is the sincerity and perseverance of our will to overcome them.” (C.S. Lewis)



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

You and I do not know what tomorrow holds, but we know Who holds tomorrow. And we know Who holds our lives in His hands. So, why don't you join me in thanking God ahead of time for His peace that will guard our hearts and ease our minds tomorrow, no matter what circumstances tomorrow may bring.



DAILY RESPONSE

- Has your faith ever gotten you into trouble in this life? How so?
- As you survey the landscape of our current culture, where do you see your faith getting you into trouble in the future?
- What do you plan to do when it does?
- How do Jesus' words here help you plan?

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DAY 3

PRAYING LIKE JESUS

Read John 17:1

After Jesus said this, He looked toward heaven and prayed.

For so many Christians, prayer is a very private matter. But often, Jesus offered His prayers to God in a very public way—never to show off how great He was as an intercessor or to showcase how impressive His prayers were, but simply to model for His disciples how to connect simply and powerfully with His Father. Through Jesus, we come to understand that authentic prayer is in no way about overcoming any reluctance on God’s part to hear and answer our prayer, but rather it is about tapping into God’s desire to graciously give us what we desire and what He wills through our praying.

Jesus gives us several examples of how we can Pray like He did. Obviously, the most famous example is what we call the Lord’s Prayer—a brief but powerful, simple yet profound way to effectively connect our needs with God’s will. Another touching example of prayer is this one found in John 17, what we now call Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer. This is His final prayer before going to the cross. He knows full well that He will have to suffer unspeakable pain, take the sin of mankind into His sinless spirit, and die the death of a common criminal to redeem mankind, yet facing that, He still focuses His prayer on us. And He leaves us a beautiful template for how to pray.

Let me encourage you to take a moment to pray through Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer using the guide that following. Read the verses aloud as a prayer to God, then using the prayer focus, rephrase Jesus prayer in your own words.

Prayer Focus: Glorifying God through your praise—verses 1-5

“Father, the time has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may glorify You. For You granted him authority over all people that He might give eternal life to all those You have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent. I have brought You glory on earth by completing the work You gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in Your presence with the glory I had with You before the world began.”

Prayer Focus: Acknowledging God’s Word and who You are in Him—verse 6-11

“I have revealed You to those whom You gave Me out of the world. They were Yours; You gave them to Me and they have obeyed Your word. Now they know that everything You have given Me comes from You. For I gave them the words You gave Me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from You, and they believed that You sent Me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those You have given Me, for they are Yours. All I have is

Yours, and all You have is Mine. And glory has come to Me through them.”

Prayer Focus: Interceding for unity and protection for Christ’s church—verses 11-12

“I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to You. Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your name—the name You gave Me—so that they may be one as we are One. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name You gave Me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.”

Prayer Focus: Asking for joy and sanctification—verses 13-19

“I am coming to You now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them Your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that You take them out of the world but that You protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.”

Prayer Focus: Lifting the world-wide church of Christ to God—verses 20-23

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that they may be one as we are One: I in them and You in Me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.”

Prayer Focus: Ask that the love of God will be revealed in You and through You—verses 24-26

“Father, I want those You have given Me to be with Me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory You have given Me because You loved Me before the creation of the world. Righteous Father, though the world does not know You, I know You, and they know that You have sent Me. I have made You known to them, and will continue to make You known in order that the love You have for Me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

This may take a few extra minutes, but it will be well worth Your time as You enter into the same kind of praying that Jesus did. And as you do, You can have this confidence that if the Father listened to the Son, He will listen to you as You come to Him in the name of his Son.

“Our prayers matter to God—all of them. They rise up to heaven as pleasing incense before his throne. God will not answer every prayer according to our desires, yet each prayer is an act of worship offered in faith that blesses the

very heart of God. Prayer is practicing the presence of God. It is entering his very throne room in the great court of heaven. It is exercising faith in the One who rewards those who believe that He exists and diligently seek Him. It is placing your needs, concerns and hopes into the hands of a loving Father who delights in your dependence and is pleased to provide for your needs according to His gracious will. Never forget, your act of prayer does far more in the unseen realm that you will ever realize this side of eternity. So pray—and let God.”

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

Use this prayer guide every day this week, and notice the results in your life. You will be pleased with the things that happen for you and, more importantly, in you.

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- Just as personal inventory, have you practiced prayer as a more private enterprise or a public one?
- Based on Jesus’ examples in Scripture, where do you think you need to grow in your understanding and practice of prayer?
- Which prayer focus of Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer above stands out to you most and why?

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DAY 4

THE UNCEASING DOXOLOGY

Read John 17:1-5

After Jesus said this, He looked toward heaven and prayed: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may glorify You. For You granted him authority over all people that He might give eternal life to all those You have given Him. Now this is eternal life: that they know You, the Only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent. I have brought You glory on earth by finishing the work You gave Me to do. And now, Father, glorify Me in Your presence with the glory I had with You before the world began.”

Let me listen to the content of Your prayers and I will describe Your theological grasp of God as well as the level of Your spiritual maturity. Not that I want to throw a wet blanket over Your access to the throne room of Your Heavenly Father nor make You second guess the kinds of things You are praying for.

Obviously, we have been invited to “ask for what we wish” in prayer (John 15:7), to “approach God’s throne of grace with confidence” (Hebrews 4:16) and to freely “pour out Your hearts to God, for He is our refuge.” (Psalm 62:8) Nothing, no one nor any teaching should ever cause us to shrink back from the privilege of openly and authentically connecting with our loving Heavenly Father in prayer.

Nevertheless, the kind of prayers we consistently pray reveals the kind of Christian we are. So if You are concerned about becoming more like Christ in Your spiritual journey—as we all should be—then the content of Your prayers over time must turn toward the kind of focus Jesus had every time He prayed.

In this prayer recorded in John 17—what we call Jesus’ “High Priestly Prayer”—the last recorded prayer He offered right before His arrest, trial, and crucifixion, we see an intense, passionate yet calm, centering supplication being lifted to God. We get a glimpse of that which was most important to Jesus—His priorities—of how clear He was about the Divine plan—His submission to God’s will—and of what He understood about His Father’s character—His theology.

As important as anything in this important prayer was Jesus’ passion for the glory of God. He uniquely understood the glory that emanated from the eternal God, for He had shared in that unfettered glory from the beginning of time (*“the glory I had with You before the world began”*, John 17:5). He was fully committed to His own life—and death—reflecting that glory to the world (*“Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may glorify You”*, John 17:1) He had perfectly and completely testified to the glory of God through his thirty-three years as an earthly man (*“I have brought You glory on earth by finishing the work You gave me to do,”* John 17:4). And now Jesus rightly expected that the Father would restore all the past and future glory of the of eternally existent Son, second person of the Holy Trinity, to Him as He submitted, body soul

and spirit, to the cross for the sin of the world (*“Now, Father, give Me back the glory that I had with You before the world was created.”* John 17:5).

Yes, what Jesus prayed revealed who Jesus was, how He believed and what was most important to Him. His final prayer tells us that He believed there was no greater theology than the glory of God. It also shows us that there was no more important focus in life than the glory of God. And it reminds us that there was no greater commitment, no greater expenditure of energy, no greater sacrifice for Jesus than to use His one and only earthly life for the glory of God alone.

What do your prayers reveal about you? Your anxiety about God’s competence to care for the details of your life or your desire for the temporal things of this world or your passion for quick fixes, pain avoidance, comfort, and prosperity? Over the course of the next few days, pay attention to the content of your prayers to get an honest assessment of what they reveal about your theology and your spiritual maturity. Like me, you will probably realize that your trust, obedience and understanding need to go much deeper in God.

What if you and I began to shift the focus of our prayers (and our lives) to the glory of God alone? Truly, there is no greater theme in all creation than God’s glory. And if we will begin to passionately invest our praying and our living toward that end, we will not only fulfill the purpose for which we were created, we will be well on our way to sharing in the glory of the One who rightly deserves it all.

At the end of the day, may it be said of us that the glory of God alone was our unceasing doxology.

“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.” (Henri Nouwen)

GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

The early church father, Irenaeus, wrote in his magnificent work, *Against Heresy*, “The glory of God is the human being fully alive, and the life of the human consists in beholding God.” Spend some moments in prayer asking your Father to make you a living example of a fully alive human being bringing glory to God alone.

DAILY RESPONSE

- As you think about how you pray, where does your focus lie when you go to God?**
- Are there areas of prayer that you have longed to grow in? Write down how you would like to be closer to God in prayer.**

DAY 5

IN IT BUT NOT OF IT

Read John 17:15

“I’m not asking You to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one.”

I cannot think of a more difficult assignment that you have today than to live in the world but not be of it. Yet, that is the exact calling that God has placed upon your life. You must live as a light on a spiritually dark planet yet not be absorbed by the darkness; you are to be Gospel seasoning in a tasteless world without losing your God-flavor.

To get out of balance on either end of that assignment, which is an easy thing to do, by the way, is a recipe for spiritual uselessness at best, and spiritual offensiveness at worst. Some Christians have assumed their assignment is to retreat from the world so far that they are insulated from sin. Great—all they have succeeded in doing is making themselves weird and forfeiting any ability to attract people to the joy and abundance of the Kingdom Life. Other Christians, much larger in number, have gone so far the other way and have so blurred the lines between believer and non-believer that the world has no way of seeing in them the attractive beauty of Christ’s holiness. Not only that, but they have not made God happy in the process.

It is a tough act to pull off, to be in the world yet not of it, but Jesus, Himself, has prayed to His Father for you—so that gives you a fighting chance. Not only that, Jesus, Himself, has set for you an example of how to live in the culture and not be absorbed by it. It’s called the incarnation.

The truth is, wherever Jesus went, not only was He untainted by the sinful world, His life was so compellingly different that He drew unbelievers to the Father like bees are drawn to flowers. Furthermore, Jesus, Himself, promised to send you the Holy Spirit to lead you, guide you, walk with you every step of the way, and empower you to live in this world but be set apart from it as living witness of the grace of God.

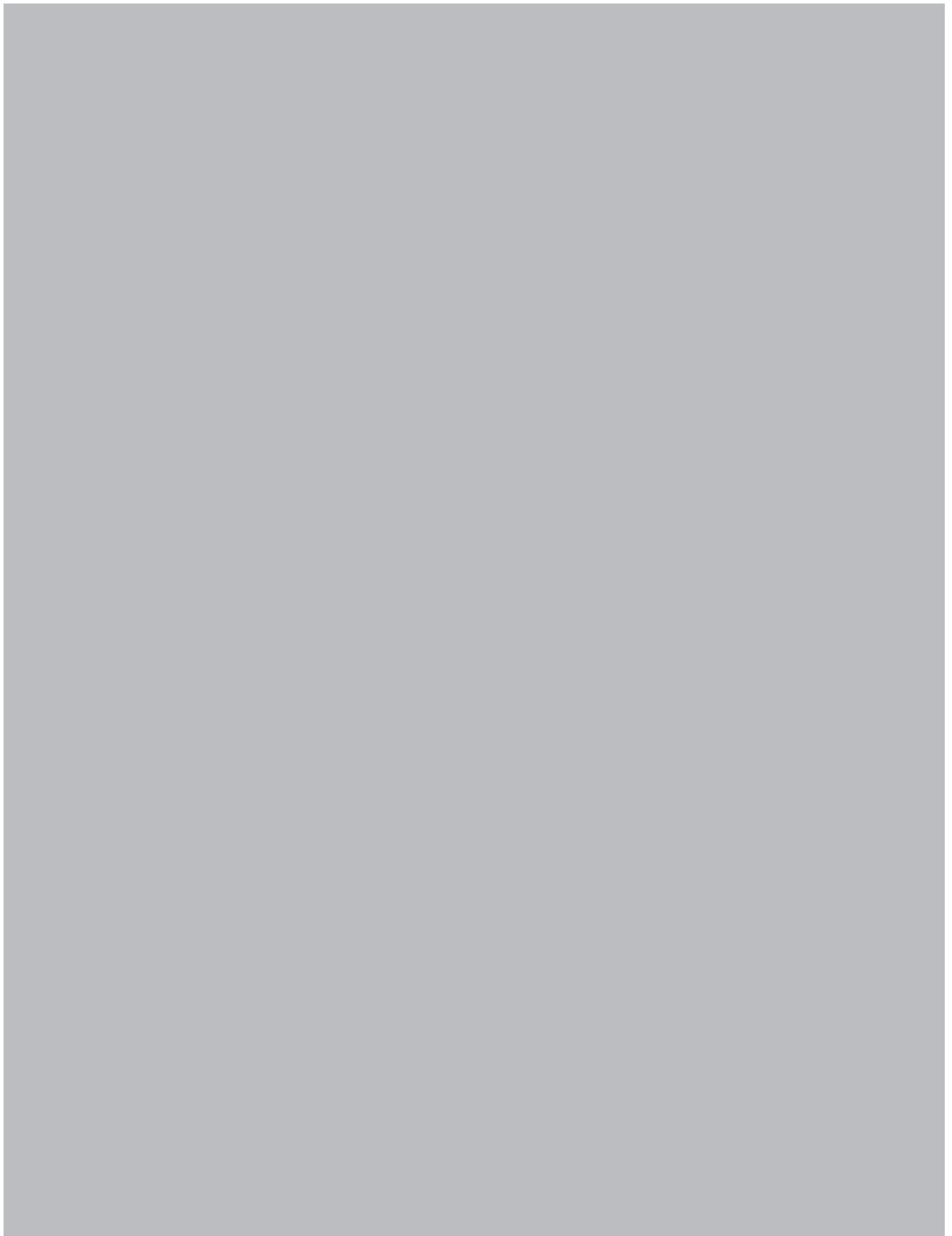
It sounds like your assignment, as difficult as it may be, is completely doable since Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are on Team You!

■ *“Our witness - good or bad - is the overflow of our lives.” (Allistair Begg)*



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Read John 17 out loud today, and absorb the words as Jesus prays for you. You will be encouraged.





WEEK

6

DAY 1

WORTH THE EFFORT

Read John 17:20-21

“I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in Me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as You are in Me, Father, and I am in You. And may they be in us so that the world will believe You sent Me.”

Jesus spent his last hours on earth praying desperately for the unity of his church. He knew that without unity, the Church would fall apart. With unity, however, Jesus knew that nothing could stop His people from accomplishing the mission of reaching the world with the Gospel.

That is the power of unity. The great preacher Vance Havner once said, *“Snowflakes are frail, but if enough of them get together they can stop traffic.”* So it is with the church. If we get together in unity, we will stop the traffic in our community.

The question is, since we all agree that unity is a powerful and a necessary thing, how do we move from agreement to action? How can we practice unity? The Apostle Paul provided some powerful insights in his words to the church in Ephesus:

“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:1-3)

Did you notice that word “effort”? Paul says we are to “make every effort” to attain and maintain unity in our church. Frankly, it takes hard, focused, continual, intentional, and strategic effort individually and corporately to keep the church united as one.

The word “effort” means to be diligent, to be zealous, to make haste to do something, in this case, being eager and fully dedicated to maintain the unity of the Spirit. It refers to a holy zeal in guarding our Christian unity. Why do we need holy zeal? To counter Satan’s unholy zeal in dividing us. Satan’s number one goal for the Church is disunity. That’s why each Christian needs to take personal responsibility for the spiritual unity of his or her church.

James Hewitt tells the story of one woman’s unforgettable experience teaching Vacation Bible School with her primary class. The class was interrupted one day about an hour before dismissal when a new student, a little boy, was brought in.

The boy had one arm missing, and since the class was almost over, she had no opportunity to learn any of the details about the child’s disability or his state of mind. She was afraid that one of the other children would make a comment and embarrass the poor little guy, and there was no time to warn them to be sensitive.

As the class time came to a close, she began to relax. She asked the class to join her in their usual closing ceremony. “Let’s make our churches,” she said. “Here’s the church and here’s the steeple, open the doors and there’s...”

Then the awful reality of the situation hit her like a ton of bricks—the one armed boy couldn’t make a church with his hands. The very thing she’d feared the kids would do, she’d done. As she stood there speechless, however, the little girl sitting next to the boy reached over with her left hand and placed it up to his right hand and said, “Hey Davey, let’s make the church together”

That is what we need to do—give every ounce of energy to keep the unity of the Spirit with other believers. As we do, we will make the Church together. Believe me, it will be worth the effort!

■ “We must all hang together or assuredly we shall all hang separately” (Benjamin Franklin)

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

There is nothing more important to the Father than the unity of His family. Do you give much thought to that? What strategic and intentional part can you play to attain, maintain, and increase the unity of the spirit through the bonds of peace in your spiritual community?

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- What stands out to you most in today’s devotional?
- What kinds of actions can constitute your effort to maintain unity in the body of Christ?
- How can you contribute to unity at PCC specifically?

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DAY 2

THE FAMILIAR PLACE

John 18:1-2

After saying these things, Jesus crossed the Kidron Valley with His disciples and entered a grove of olive trees. Judas, the betrayer, knew this place, because Jesus had often gone there with His disciples.

We know this grove of olive trees was called the Garden of Gethsemane. By the other Gospel accounts we also know that when Judas showed up with the guards to arrest Jesus in this very place, He was in deep and agonizing prayer. What may be lost amidst the greater drama of Judas' betrayal and Christ passion, however, are the words, "Jesus had often gone there with His disciples."

This was a regular place for Jesus. The disciples were familiar with Jesus' garden retreat; so was the devil, since he knew to inspire Judas to betray the Savior there. Jesus had gone there often enough that those who knew Him knew that would be the very place where He prayed.

Have you ever wondered why John took this small, seemingly insignificant detail and tucked it away within the more obvious storyline of Jesus' arrest? Perhaps he wanted us to see what was plain to Jesus' disciples: That even the Son of God carved out the time and made room and even found a physical place in His life for regular communion with His Father. Furthermore, Jesus had purposely included His disciples in his private times with God to leave an example for them to show that if He, the very Son of God, needed quiet time, so did they.

So do I—and so do you.

Do you have that regular place? Do the people in your life know where you spend time with God? Does the devil know where to find you? The place itself is not important. The fact that people know that you are regularly in that place is not important. What is important is that you are in that place where you can touch God and God can touch you with His love and grace.

It is said that early African Christians were dedicated and regular in their personal devotion to God. Each one reportedly had a separate spot in the thicket where he would pour out his heart to God. Over time the paths to these places became well worn. As a result, if one of these believers began to neglect prayer, it was soon apparent to the others. They would kindly challenge anyone neglecting their prayer life, "Brother, the grass grows on your path." (George Whitten)

Keep the path to your garden well worn!

"Prayer is the acid test of devotion." (Samuel Chadwick)

What If God Took Over?

Perhaps making this very moment of devotion a regular part of your life that you fiercely guard will be the beginning that “familiar place” for you.

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

One of the key indicators of a disciple of Christ is a disciple who prays. Prayer is God’s gift to us to spend time with Him, hear from Him and talk to Him. Our greatest breakthroughs in life will come through prayer. What do you need to hear from God, speak to Him and receive from Him today?

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- Where are your favorite places to pray and spend time alone with God?**
- As you think about the time you spend with God, would you say the grass is well worn or is it growing on your path?**
- How is God calling you to spend more time in His presence today?**

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DAY 3

THE SECOND AMENDMENT—OR THE GREAT COMMANDMENT

Read John 18:10-11

Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"

Responding to the mass shooting—apparently targeting Christians—at a community college in Roseburg where nine people were murdered and scores were injured, Tennessee Lieutenant Governor Ron Ramsey encouraged fellow Christians who are serious about their faith to consider getting a gun.

Is it time for believers to arm themselves? After all, Jesus said that increasingly the world will hate us because of our faith in Him. Just read John 15:18-25 as well as all of John 16 for that bit of cheery news. Things are going to get rough for believers as the time for the Lord's return draws close (By the way, Christians around the world have known all along. We in America are just discovering, much to our dismay, that this may include us, too!)

But, when Jesus predicted this rise in hostility—and even violence—against His people, did He anticipate that they arm themselves to the teeth to push back against the persecution? Did He foresee the Second Amendment would be our Constitutional right, and therefore we should use every legal means to defend ourselves as American Christians? For the Christian, does the Second Amendment trump the Second Commandment (Matthew 22:39)...or does the call to lay down our lives override the right to take up arms? Is this an either/or conundrum or can the believer in Jesus grasp the one without letting go of the other (Ecclesiastes 7:18)?

Seriously, these are questions American Christians need to grapple with. Now I say "American" because for Christians in other countries, these options aren't even in the realm of possibility—which is probably both a blessing and a curse. In our nation, as citizens we have Constitutional rights, and as Christians, we have Kingdom values. Most of the time these rights and values peacefully coexist, but at times, the earthly and the heavenly kingdoms are in conflict. Sometimes, what may be Constitutionally legal may not be eternally blessing. At those times, to be both a good citizen and a good Christian, the believer must be willing to do the hard work of "thinking Christianly" about such matters. That is, the follower of Jesus must be completely open to the original meaning and full intent of God's word, allowing Scripture to impose its unfettered rule over everything in the believer's life.

Having said that, I think it is fairly clear here that Jesus wasn't thinking His followers would lock and load in the face of opposition and hostility. In fact, He says as much: *"Put away your*

Weapon Peter. Do you think for a minute I'm not going to drink this cup of suffering the Father has assigned to me for the redemption of the world?" Later in the chapter (John 18:36) as Jesus is standing at trial before the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, He said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."

Back to the issue at hand in our modern American culture: should a Christian take up arms to defend themselves against the coming hostility? I will leave that to you to come up with your own answer, but I would ask you to allow what Jesus says here in John 18 to inform your opinion. Do the hard work of thinking Christianly about this matter. At some point, as believers, we all need to remember that we have been called as citizens of another Kingdom to surrender our human rights—just as our leader did—for his eternal cause.

Yes, as citizens of the United States we have the right to bear arms. But as citizens of God's Kingdom, our calling is to lay down our lives!

"The whole point of the kingdom of God is Jesus has come to bear witness to the true truth, which is nonviolent. When God wants to take charge of the world, He doesn't send in the tanks. He sends in the poor and the meek." (N.T. Wright)

GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Your assignment this week is to think Christianly about your right to bear arms. Theologian Walter Wink offered this thought: "Jesus did not advocate non-violence merely as a technique for outwitting the enemy, but as a just means of opposing the enemy in such a way as to hold open the possibility of the enemy's becoming just as well. Both sides must win. We are summoned to pray for our enemies' transformation, and to respond to ill-treatment with a love that not only is Godly but also, I am convinced, can only be found in God." Agree or disagree with him, how will you balance the Second Amendment with the Great Commandment?

DAILY RESPONSE

- As you consider our Kingdom mandates and our U.S. rights, how do you see the two working together or being in contradiction?**
- How can you practice the Great Commandment in your own life this week?**
- What is God speaking to and refining in you personally?**

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DAY 4

PASSION OVER PERFECTION

John 18:25

Meanwhile, as Simon Peter was standing by the fire warming himself, they asked him again, "You're not one of His disciples, are you?" He denied it, saying, "No, I am not."

Peter usually takes a beating when evaluated alongside the eleven disciples. He gets labeled as the stumbling, bumbling, think-before-you-speak, foot-in-the-mouth, inconsistent goofball from Galilee, who, for reasons God only know, got chosen to be one of Jesus' first disciples. Good old Peter—the first century version of Gomer Pyle in the Lord's little band of foot soldiers.

But, let's give Peter some credit. He may not have been perfect—by a long shot—but he sure was passionate! And he was there at least give him that. In John 18, as Jesus was arrested and brought to trial, when everyone else but John had fled, Peter figured prominently. He was like a bull in a china shop—passionate, yes; perfect, no—but he was there:

He whacked off the ear of one who came to arrest Jesus. (John 18:10-11) Passionate—but misguided!

He surreptitiously followed as the High Priest's SWAT team took Jesus to jail. (John 18:15-17) Passionate—but fearful!

He stood among the soldiers as they warmed themselves by the fire. (John 18:18) Passionate—but silent!

He denied knowing Jesus when questioned, but at least He was there to be questioned. (John 18:25) Passionate—but weak!

He doubled down on his denial when questioned again. (John 18:26-27) Passionate—but fundamentally flawed!

Yes, Peter was all of those things we've said—there is no doubt about it—but passionate? You bet. Imperfect, but passionate to the core! Perhaps that is why Jesus gave Peter so much public attention and placed him so prominently on His leadership team. Like the very flawed King David, Peter had a heart after God.

God can use people like that. In fact, I suspect God prefers them over the perfect. Oh, and just a little a hint: there are no perfect people, only those who think they are. Of course, I am not excusing Peter's imperfection; only explaining it. But, I think the reason the Gospel writers

included Peter’s gaffes with regularity was not to put him down as the dunderhead we often think he is, but to remind us that God uses imperfect people, especially the passionate ones!

■ *“Passion, though a bad regulator, is a powerful spring.” (Ralph Waldo Emerson)*

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

Ask God to give you greater passion. Pray for self-control and wisdom, too—but if you are like me, you probably need more passion than the other two.

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- Where would you rate yourself on a scale of passion for Jesus?
- What kinds of things fire you up and make you passionate?
- Do you see where God might be able to use you in areas that you are passionate? If so, how? If not, how can you pray this week that God uses your built-in passions?

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DAY 5

FIGHTING FOR THE WRONG CAUSE

Read John 18:36

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, My servants would fight to prevent My arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now My kingdom is from another place."

Those around the world who claim Christianity as their faith would do well to think deeply on Jesus' response to Pilate: My kingdom is not of this world!

Jesus was standing before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, who, in a sense, had the power to set Him free or to crucify Him. So, it would have been expected that Jesus would lay down a defense for His life at this point. Yet, Jesus chose not to, instead informing Pilate that if it were about winning His freedom, or winning this turf war against the Jewish religious leaders, or throwing off the yoke of the Roman Empire to establish a new religious kingdom that would rule Planet Earth, His followers would be putting up a fight right about now.

But they weren't. And Jesus wanted it that way. He had bigger things in mind—like the spiritual revolution that would be set afoot throughout the world by His death for the sins of man and His victorious resurrection from the grave as Lord of life. Gaining and maintaining power in the current world order was not what Jesus was about. He knew that mankind had been so totally corrupted by sin that a whole new, recreated world would be the only answer. Now make no mistake, until the time for that arrived, there would be kingdom work to do, but with Jesus, it was never about political, military, cultural or philosophical domination.

Jesus' disciples struggled with that at first but they eventually got it. Following His death, resurrection, and ascension, they set out to take Jesus' message to the ends of the earth. In 300 years, without fielding an army, without financial backing, without a huge voting bloc, without academic systems, without TV networks, printing presses and marketing campaigns, they subdued the mighty Roman Empire when Emperor Constantine declared Christianity to be the religion of the very empire that had done its best to snuff it out. And all they did was do what Jesus did: loved fiercely, served humbly, proclaimed boldly, and died sacrificially.

It is too bad that around the world today, Christianity is known more for its politics than its love. We fight rather than die. We protest, leverage power and build a constituency rather than sacrificially serve and humbly surrender. In Eastern Europe, Christians wage war to cleanse their land from ethnic impurities. In the Middle East, Christians take up arms against the Muslims bent on destroying them. In the United States, Christians flock to a political party and a candidate friendly to their views and use all means at their disposal to tout their platform.

Am I saying that Christians should not use all means possible to influence their culture, to defend their wives and children against harm, and to get their guy elected? Not necessarily. But there is a fine line between fighting for a system that will soon be destroyed by fire and laying down their lives in the same manner their Savior did to redeem the world.

What I am saying is that true Christians need to think long and hard about what Jesus said—that His kingdom is of another place—and make sure they are not fighting for the wrong cause. What does that mean? It will mean different things in different places. But, in your place, like the early disciples, you have to figure that out and then begin to live within your culture as Jesus did.

And if the untold thousands of us around the world who claim Christ as Savior did that, we would set afoot a new wave of Christian influence that would capture Planet Earth in about three months, not three centuries.

The whole modern world has divided itself into Conservatives and Progressives. The business of Progressives is to go on making mistakes. The business of the Conservatives is to prevent the mistakes from being corrected. (G.K. Chesterton)

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

What are you putting your hopes in—a political party, winning an election, enacting certain laws? Think about that in light of what Jesus said: My kingdom is of another world. If it weren't, my followers would be putting up more of a fight. Are you fighting for the right cause?

DAILY RESPONSE

- As you think about how you fight for the Kingdom, where do you put most of your effort?
- Would you say any of these phrases define your strategy: love fiercely, serve humbly, proclaim boldly, and die sacrificially?
- Where is God calling you to put your spiritual fighting effort today?

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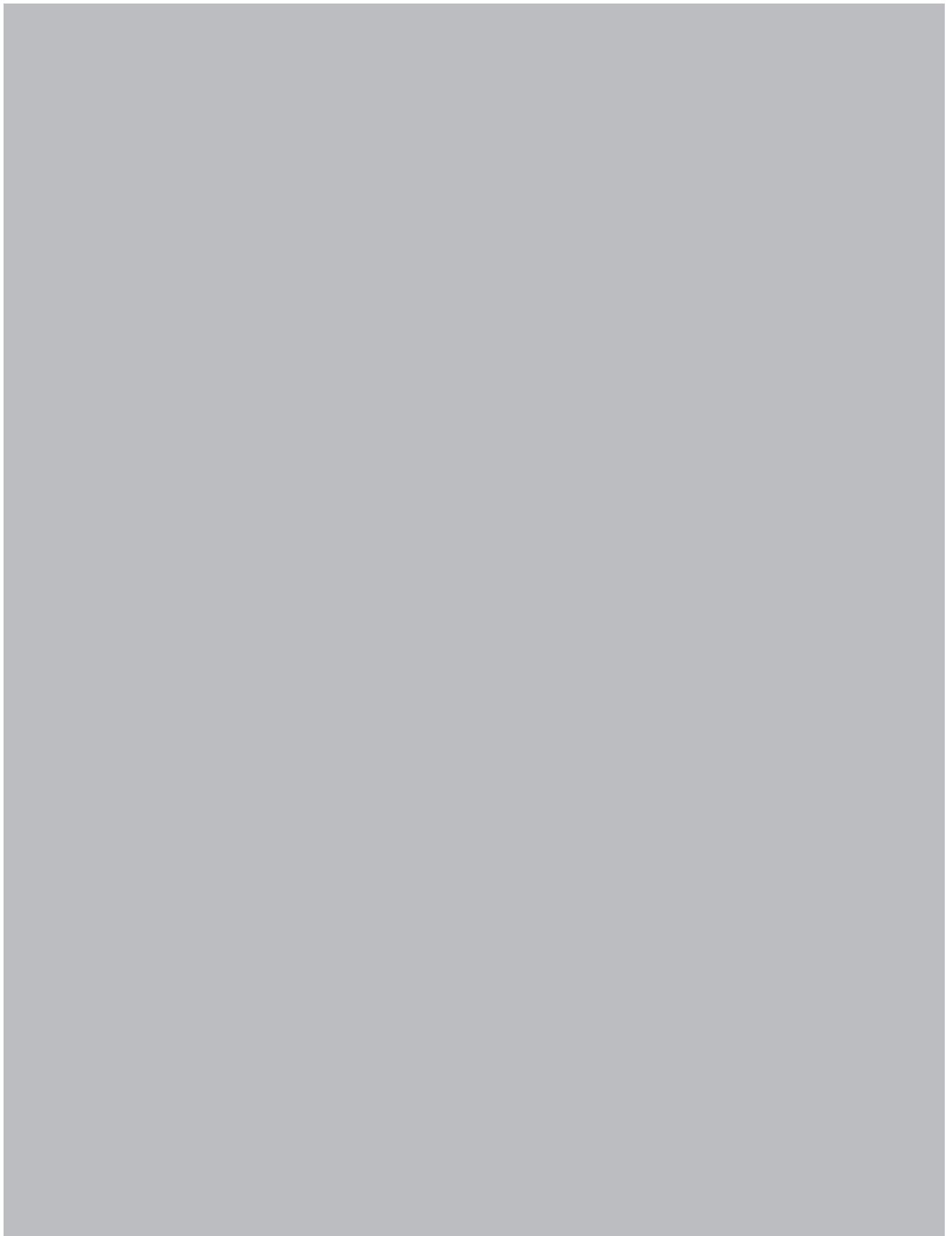
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WEEK

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DAY 1

WHAT KIND OF GOD WOULD ALLOW THAT?

Read John 19:1-3

Then Pilate took Jesus and had Him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head. They clothed Him in a purple robe and went up to Him again and again, saying, “Hail, king of the Jews!” And they slapped Him in the face.

The great essayist, Dorothy Sayers wrote,

“What does the Church think of Christ? The Church’s answer is categorical and uncompromising and it is this: That Jesus Bar-Joseph, the carpenter of Nazareth, was in fact and in truth, and in the most exact and literal sense of the words, the God ‘by whom all things were made.’ His body and brain were those of a common man; His personality was the personality of God, so far as that personality could be expressed in human terms. He was not a kind of demon pretending to be human; He was in every respect a genuine living man. He was not merely a man so good as to be ‘like God’; He was God.”

Yes, as Christians we believe that Jesus was God. But, why would a God “*by whom all things were made*” permit what He had made to treat Him thus: to brutally beat Him to within an inch of His life with the barbaric Roman cat o’ nine tails, to press into His brow the crown of thorns, to slap Him and spit upon Him? What kind Creator would give the created even one second to mock Him as they did? Where else could we find Deity submitting to the humiliation of the cross? What kind of God would allow that?

Only the one, true God! No other little “g” god would do that—could do that—not a god that had any power, or goodness or love or divinity. The fact that Jesus surrendered to the pain and shame of the cross is evidence itself that He was not merely a man so good as to be like God; He was God. What kind of God who would allow that? Jesus!

Jesus was, and is, a God of patience. The fact is, it should have been sinful man who was brutally beaten, mocked, humiliated, and publically executed like a common criminal. Our common sin made us offensive to a holy God. He had every right to wipe us out and begin anew—as He did in the days of Noah, or as He threatened with Moses on Mount Sinai—or to never make another creature with the freedom to choose. But, so great is the patience of this God that He would submit to our utmost defiance. Thank you, O Lord, that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness; one who relents sending the calamity we deserve. (Jonah 4:2)

Jesus was, and is, a God of mercy. Rather than giving us what we deserve, He took what we

deserved into Himself as He was punished on the cross. We deserved the cross; He became the crucified. Thank you, O Lord, that You were wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities and that the chastisement that brought our peace was upon you. (Isaiah 53:5)

Jesus was, and is, a God of justice. Sin requires punishment, or else God is not holy, righteous and just. Yet that sin was not atoned for by the guilty, but by the innocent. Jesus received the punishment, endured the humiliation of a trial, and hung upon the cross in our place not as a victim of man's anger, but to satisfy the wrath of God. Thank you, O Lord, that the Father laid on You the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:6)

He was, and is, a God of love. It should never cease to amaze us that God, the holy One, wanted us, unworthy, guilty sinners, to live so much that, in an act of extreme love, He provided a way of escape from eternal death into eternal life. Thank you, O Lord, that You loved a sinful world so much that You gave Your only begotten Son, so that by belief in Him, sinners would have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

Jesus was, and is, a God who is for us. What more could Jesus do to prove His love for us, and thereby convince us that He has set Himself to help us than by His substitutionary, sacrificial death on the cross. Should we ever again doubt that God is for us, that He will help us, that He will fulfill all His promises to us and bring us through the trials and tribulations of this life and one day bring us into His Eternal Kingdom? Thank you, O Lord, that You who did not spare Your own life, but delivered it up for us will also certainly and freely give us all things? (Romans 8:32)

What kind of God would allow His created ones to inflict the cross upon Himself? Jesus, that's who—the God of patience, mercy, justice, and love—the God who is for us and therefore, the One whom we should love, serve, trust, and follow shamelessly and without reservation now and every day until the end of the age.

"The heart of salvation is the Cross of Christ. The reason salvation is so easy to obtain is that it cost God so much. The Cross was the place where God and sinful man merged with a tremendous collision and where the way to life was opened. But all the cost and pain of the collision was absorbed by the heart of God!"
(Oswald Chambers)

GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Read Isaiah 53 today, and verse by verse, offer your gratitude to God for the gift of Jesus and His sacrificial, substitutionary death on the cross for you.

DAILY RESPONSE:

-  **What kind of patience, mercy and love did it take for Jesus to allow Himself to be treated the way He was in our place?**

DAY 2

GOD HOLDS ALL THE CARDS

Read John 19:11

Then Jesus said, “You would have no power over me at all unless it were given to you from above.”

There is nothing in this world that happens apart from God’s sovereign knowledge and by His sovereign permission.

Jesus understood that as He stood before Pilate, who nervously tried to impress upon our Lord that He held the power to either crucify Him or free Him: “*Why don’t You talk to me?*” Pilate demanded. “Don’t You realize that I have the power to release you or crucify You?” (John 19:10) That is when Jesus, who, up to this point, had held His peace, looked Pilate directly in the eye and informed him in no uncertain terms that even though He might be a high officer of the Roman court, He held no such power—only God did.

In the awful light of what Jesus had been through, and what He knew He was about to go through, what an amazing statement of not only understanding the sovereign will of God, but of complete trust and submission to it. That was the reason Jesus could so calmly and resolutely traverse the terrible way of the cross. And that is the reason you can walk through the difficulties of your life as well—even if your path takes you through the valley of the shadow of death. As King David said,

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.” (Psalm 23:4)

You can know what King David knew that our Lord knew: because of God’s sovereign control over all the affairs of this universe, and because of His immeasurable love for you, this world is a perfectly safe place for you—even if you are standing before your cross.

Before you begin this day, take a moment to read the Shepherd’s Psalm printed below. In fact, you may want to read it every day this week before you head off into the busyness and challenges of your world:

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely

goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”

What a great declaration: The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. Yes, God holds all the cards, so put your confidence in Him.”

Much that worries us beforehand can afterwards, quite unexpectedly, have a happy and simple solution...Things really are in a better hand than ours.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Memorize Psalm 23 from your favorite version, and pray it each day this week.



DAILY RESPONSE:

- How does it make you feel knowing that God truly has all the authority?
- Does God’s mastery and ownership of all things help you navigate through your current situations? How so?
- Read and recite Psalm 23 every day this week as a discipline to remind yourself of God’s sovereignty and care for you. Also, recite it aloud together in your community group.

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DAY 3

IT GOT UGLY

Read John 19:15-16

“Away with Him! Crucify Him!” yelled the Jewish leaders. “What? Crucify your king?” Pilate asked. “We have no king but Caesar,” they shouted back. Then Pilate turned Jesus over to them to be crucified.

From our perspective as Christians, nearly two thousand years after the event, the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus has become a thing of redemptive beauty. This was God at His best—his love, grace, mercy, redemption, and sovereignty on display as Jesus was beaten, mocked, and nailed to a cross for the sins of the world.

Yet, on that exact day Jesus was forced to endure this suffering, it got ugly—beyond description. So brutal was His treatment, we would have averted our eyes in horror were we to witness it first hand. So disgusting was Pilate’s cowardly desire to placate the rabid hatred of the Jewish leaders we would have shaken our heads had we witnessed it for ourselves. So unhinged was the hatred of the Jewish leaders for their Messiah, we would have dropped our jaws in disbelief had we witnessed it with our own eyes.

The prophet Isaiah described the physical horror that Jesus endured as so graphic we would have had to turn away, unable and unwilling to grasp what Jesus actually experienced: “He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces He was despised, and we held him in low esteem.” (Isaiah 53:3).

John 19:1-3 tells us, *“Pilate had Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip. The soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put a purple robe on Him. ‘Hail! King of the Jews!’ they mocked, as they slapped Him across the face.”*

Thirty-nine times the whip, crafted for maximum damage to a human body, was brought down upon Jesus’ back, ripping open the flesh, tearing at the nerves, muscles and sinew, laying Him open to the bone.

Amazingly, Jesus survived a trauma no human should ever—perhaps could ever—have to endure, but only to have a crown of long, sharp Judean thorns forced upon His brow, penetrating down to the skull. Then the soldiers who had mockingly crowned Him began to beat the defenseless Jesus, punching time and again with full force in the face.

It got ugly the day God died—so bad was the physical violence that Isaiah 52:14 says, *“Many who were appalled at Him—His appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and His form marred beyond human likeness.”*

Then Jesus was brought before Pilate, the Roman governor, who was to hear His case. After the Jews brought their trumped up accusations against the Lord, and after Pilate had interviewed Him, he tried to release Jesus: "I find him not guilty." Pilate said. "Take him yourselves and crucify Him. (John 19:6) Not guilty—that usually secures freedom for an innocent man, yet Pilate was more afraid of man's opinion than dispensing deserved fairness. And in that moment, Pilate secured his dark place in history as the one who could have freed an innocent man, yet sent him as a lamb—the Lamb—to the slaughter.

It got ugly the day God died—the innocent dying for the guilty: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away. Yet who of His generation protested? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people He was punished." (Isaiah 53:7-8)

What of the Jewish priests and officials! Here we find misguided religion at its worst. The long-awaited Messiah was finally among them—his life of love on display in every action, every miracle, every word—yet they were so blinded by hatred they stopped their ears and cried all the louder, "crucify Him" as Pilate weakly plead for Jesus' release.

It got ugly when God died—those who were His own people willingly, knowingly, viciously sent their Eternal King to his death by claiming loyalty to a temporal king.

Yet for all the human ugliness inflicted upon Jesus, Isaiah tells us that it was "the Lord's will to crush him and cause Him to suffer...to make His life an offering for sin." (Isaiah 53:10) While man's darkness was being exposed, God's sovereignty was powerfully moving events toward a glorious end, the redemption of sinful man.

Yes, it got ugly the day Jesus died, but Jesus had to take the ugliest of human darkness and sin into Himself so that He could crush to death what would crush Him to death. It got ugly for Jesus, but it became a thing of beauty for you and me.

■ *"Upon a life I did not live, upon a death I did not die; another's life, another's death, I stake my whole eternity." (Horatius Bonar)*



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Read through Isaiah 53, taking time to pause after each thought to offer gratitude to God that in Jesus' death, sin met its match and you found your freedom.

DAY 4

DEATH IS BURIED IN THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST

Read John 19:30

Jesus drank the wine and said, "It is finished!" Then He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

Mission accomplished! The purpose for which God became man was complete! Jesus, the perfect God-man, had just offered Himself as the only atoning sacrifice to the Heavenly Father for the sin of the world. He then proclaimed for all of heaven—and hell—to hear: it is finished! Having done that, Luke, one of the other Gospel writers, tells us that Jesus cried out in a loud voice then surrendered His spirit to God.

What I find profound about this is that a man in the final throws of death doesn't cry out in a loud voice, unless he is a courageous soldier—a war hero dying in battle to defend his cause, liberate his people and defeat an enemy. No, a dying man usually whispers hoarsely, or whimpers pitifully, or expulses a cry of pain—or perhaps just gives up and quits breathing.

But Luke carefully chose the Greek phrase, (*fone megale*) —mega-phone—to capture Jesus' final word. This was a shout of triumph, an outburst of victory! As He hung on that cross, Jesus had in His sites sin and death—those evil twins that had thwarted God's original intent and tormented humanity since the fall of humanity back in the Garden of Eden.

Now, Jesus had defeated sin. He had offered Himself as the once-and-for-all sacrifice for sin, He had forgiven the repentant thief, He had extended forgiveness to the ignorant who had sent Him to the cross. Jesus had won! It was finished and Jesus knew it. Not His life; not His future; but His work was finished—complete, mission accomplished.

Yet, there was one more thing He needed to do; one more enemy to defeat—Death. As Jesus' life quickly ebbed toward death, the spirit of death appeared out of the invisible realm, ready to claim yet another victim, this time, to crush the life of the One who claimed to be the Resurrection and the Life. But just as the death demon reached out to take hold of Jesus, the Lord of Life laid hold of Death instead.

Death was grasped and dragged until it was absorbed into the bosom of the Eternal One...and so, in that moment, all things were crucified —every last thing! Sin, sickness, and suffering along with hell, the grave, and yes, death, were crucified—all things!

But wait, there was one more thing: you and I—we were crucified with Christ. Yet nevertheless, in dying with Him, we live in Him.

That was the loud voice—the fone megale—the shout of triumph. Our victory had been forever won! And having won the greatest of all victories—our eternal salvation, He bowed His head and surrendered His spirit. And the very next thing He heard on the other side, I imagine, was “well done, good and faithful Servant!”

“The death of Jesus Christ means the death of death itself. The death of death in the death of Jesus Christ also means victory over death for those who trust in Christ as their God and Savior.” (Thabiti Anyabwile)

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

Find a hymnal—you might have to look long and hard these days—and sing the him, “Christ Arose” as a prayer of gratitude to God for Christ’s atoning sacrifice for you.

 **DAILY RESPONSE:**

- What do the words “It is finished” mean to you?
- What was Jesus finishing as He breathed His last breath on the cross?
- How was His death a defeat for death itself and in turn, our victory?

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DAY 5

FOLLOWING CHRIST WITHOUT ANY IF'S

Read John 20:3-6

Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn't go in. Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside.

You've got to give Peter credit—he was never one to hold back. John outran him to the tomb, but nervously stopped at the entrance to peek in. Not Peter! When he finally arrived, huffing and puffing, Peter, ignoring graveyard protocol, pushed past John right into the place where Jesus was buried.

Of course, the greatest part of this story is that Jesus wasn't there! He had risen from the dead, the Victor over death and sin, and now was alive forevermore. If Peter had found Jesus' body still sealed behind the stone entrance of that tomb when they arrived, nothing else about this story would matter. But, Jesus had risen, indeed, and that is why the other details of this story matter. Even small, seemingly insignificant details become both interesting and instructive—like Peter pressing in past John to witness the reality of the resurrection first hand.

Peter's spiritual pushiness is what endeared him to Jesus. His personal deficiencies are well documented, of course; the entire world knows of them thanks to the Gospel writers. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John pulled no punches in their accounts of this braggadocious, foot-in-mouth, leap-before-you-look, think-before-you-speak disciple. Yet it is was Peter's reckless abandon when it came to spiritual expectancy that led Jesus to declare,

"Peter, on your kind of faith, I am going to build this small team of disciples into a world-wide force called 'the church' that will take back Planet Earth from Satan and return it to its Rightful Owner." (Matthew 16:18)

Sure, Peter got into trouble more than his fair share, but he was the only disciple to actually get out of the boat to walk on water—albeit a walk that was short-lived and ultimately very wet. He was the first to go into the empty tomb—Ground Zero of the Christian faith. And he was the first one called upon in Acts 2 to give the inaugural sermon of the Christian era—where two thousand people responded to his altar call.

Jesus loved Peter's brassy boldness. That was the kind of raw material the Lord could work with. It was certainly raw, but it was ready. It didn't take much to light a fire under Peter; he was a tinderbox waiting for combustion.

I think we could learn something from Peter’s example. Peter didn’t have it all together in his life, but he was always willing to offer all that he had, raw as it was, and press into Jesus with full expectancy of what could happen when raw readiness met with resurrection reality.

■ *“Faith takes God without any ‘if’s.’” (D.L. Moody)*

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

Be Peter-like today in your journey with Jesus: a bit bold, daring to go so far as to be a little spiritually pushy. Chances are, you will encounter some resurrection power. Word has it that it’s still floating around out there.

 **DAILY RESPONSE:**

- What stands out to you most about this gospel account?
- Like John, we sometimes have some “ifs” stopping us from running head-first toward Jesus. What would these be for you?
- Where can you commit to be spiritually brassy like Peter was?

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WEEK

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DAY 1

WHAT CHRIST RESURRECTION DOES FOR YOU

Read John 20:19-23

The disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! "Peace be with you," He said. As He spoke, He showed them the wounds in His hands and His side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! Again He said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, so I am sending you." Then He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

It was the evening of resurrection Sunday, and the disciples were abuzz with the resurrection. A few of them had encountered the living Lord but others of them had only heard rumors of resurrection. They were about to get the surprise of their lives—and this would be a game-changer.

No man had ever risen from the dead, and if this were indeed true, it would prove beyond all reasonable doubt that Jesus was who He said He was—God come in the flesh. And if He was who He claimed to be—the living Lord of life and Savior of the world—He therefore had it within His authority and power to do what He said He would do: forgive sin, heal the sick, set those in bondage free, provide His subjects with a real experience of the Kingdom life, and in fact, grant them eternal life.

This was truly the Good News!

Yet, for all their anticipation of a resurrected Jesus—and all that it implied—these disciples were still huddled in fear behind closed doors. They were still intimidated by the religious leaders who ruled the day with an iron fist and the religious system that had sent their Lord to the cross in the first place. There was still a major disconnect between what they intellectually accepted and their emotional reality. Fear and concern dominated their better judgment.

Before we get too far down the road on this, perhaps we ought to admit that fear and concern often dominate our emotions, our behavior, our thinking as well. We accept that Jesus is risen, that He is Lord over all, yet we easily get intimidated by circumstances, get set back on our heels by the system, whatever that might be for us, and give into fear in our emotions. We are really no different than the disciples—their story is our story.

But, thank God for Jesus! While He suddenly appeared among those first disciples—one of the benefits of having a resurrected body—He no longer needs to do that with us. Why? He doesn't have to; He is already among us. In fact, His promise is that He will never leave us nor forsake us. (Hebrews 13:5) Moreover, He shows himself to us, not necessarily by opening His

wounded hands, but by holding our hands all along the way. (Isaiah 46:3) It's true, that as we look back over the course of our journey with Jesus, our testimony has to be, *"the Lord has led us all along the way."* (Deuteronomy 8:2) Then to neutralize our concerns and fears, He grants us His peace—the peace of Christ that rules our hearts. (Colossians 3:15, Philippians 4:7) And He makes all of this not only possible, but sustainable by placing the Father's gift within us—the precious Holy Spirit, who infuses us with both the authority and power of God Almighty to do His will and work. (John 19:23)

So, rather than living our lives huddled in fear and paralyzed by worry, like the disciples, as we act in faith upon what Jesus has done, we can live in inner confidence and spiritual power—we, too, like those first disciples, can change the world. At the very least, our corner of the world can and should look radically different now that the resurrection has rocked our world.

This truly is and always will be the Good News!

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

"If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that He said; if He didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what He said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like His teaching but whether or not He rose from the dead." (Timothy Keller)



GETTING TO KNOW

Take a moment to invite the Holy Spirit to remind you of the full power and real authority that is now within you to live in the reality of Christ's resurrection.



DAILY RESPONSE

- **Have you ever been afraid to represent or stand for Jesus? Have you likewise ever been emboldened by God's Holy Spirit to overcome that fear? Tell some stories here.**
- **How can you act in faith by what He has done today instead of cowering in fear?**
- **If you struggle with fear to boldly proclaim the good news of Jesus, take time to pray today for some Holy Spirit power and divine appointments to put it into practice. Just watch what happens!**

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DAY 2

BELIEVING IS SEEING

Read John 20: 29

Jesus said to Thomas, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

We get it backwards, understandably. The advancement of the scientific method in our day has taught us that empirical proof must come first, then we can place belief in the certainty of something. There is no room, or even need really, for faith, which requires trust rather than evidence. We have been steeped in that dogma for generations now, so it is no wonder that we wrestle with not having physical, visual proof for our faith in Jesus Christ.

According to our line of thinking, Peter, John, Mary, and Thomas were most fortunate. On that first Easter Sunday, Simon Peter ran with John to the tomb, and seeing that the stone had been rolled away, he pushed past John and went straight in, where he saw the strips of linen lying where a body should have been, just as if the corpse had magically risen through them, leaving them to float silently back to earth, *sans* body. Then John, who had reached the tomb first, followed Peter inside. He then saw what Peter saw, and he believed. Mary Magdalene was at the tomb as well, and after Peter and John left, she encountered Jesus. Mary then went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" Later that day, the disciple Thomas, responding to the dubious news that Jesus was alive, said, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." A week later, Jesus suddenly appeared before his very eyes, and Thomas exclaimed, "*I believe!*" (John 20: 6, 8, 18, 25)

They had literally, physically visually seen the resurrected Lord. No wonder they all believed!

Yet, their belief is not met with the highest praise that Jesus would offer in that encounter. Rather, He said to them, "*You have seen Me—and for that, you have experienced something most blessed. Now I want you to go and tell others what you have seen. And those who hear and believe will in turn tell others. But here's the deal: Those who believe your eyewitness testimony will be telling My story not based on their own visual proof; their witness will be on the basis of pure faith. They have not visibly seen, yet they have spiritually believed. And for that, they are even more blessed than you who have literally seen.*"

Did you catch that? You and I want so badly to hold the literal evidence of resurrection in our hands, believing that physical proof will somehow make our case for Christ even more rock solid than it already is. Jesus begs to differ. He says the strongest proof of all is to believe, for out of believing faith comes indisputable knowledge of the resurrected Lord, evidenced in the transformed life of the one who has believed.

In the eleventh century, St. Anselm, arguably the most brilliant Christian thinker of all time, wrote, *“Credo ut intelligam”*; that is, *“I believe in order that I may understand.”* Two centuries later, Thomas Aquinas said, *“In order that men might have knowledge of God, free of doubt and uncertainty, it is necessary for divine truth to be delivered to them by way of faith, being told to them as it were, by God Himself who cannot lie.”* In the seventeenth century, Blaise Pascal wrote, *“Reason’s last step is the recognition that there are an infinite number of things that are beyond it. The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know at all.”* But it was another brilliant thinker in the fourth century, the North African bishop, Augustine, who best captured the essence of what Jesus meant when he said, *“Faith is to believe what we do not see; and the reward of this faith is to see what we believe.”*

After Jesus revealed Himself to His disciples, He said to them, *“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you.”* (John 20:21) He sent them out with the story of His life, death, and resurrection, and with the commissioned authority to invite those who would believe their message into an experience of the Kingdom life, both in time and for all eternity.

Since you have believed their message, you, too, have been commissioned to tell the story of the resurrected Jesus. While you did not see the risen Lord with your own eyes, you have something even more powerful: indisputable faith evidenced in a transformed life. You are a satisfied customer, and there is nothing more indisputable—and blessed—than that.

You have believed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now tell your story. As you do, your faith will be increasingly rewarded with the evidence of things not seen.

“A good witness isn’t like a salesman, emphasis is on a person rather than a product. A good witness is like a signpost. It doesn’t matter whether it is old, young, pretty, ugly; it has to point the right direction and be able to be understood. We are witnesses to Christ, we point to Him.” (John White)

GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

How has Jesus changed your life? Tell someone about!

DAILY RESPONSE

- If you could see any of the life of Jesus first hand, what would it be?**
- According to Jesus, it is believing first that triggers greater spiritual sight. Have you ever experienced this to be true?**
- Where do you need to believe in order to see more in your life?**

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DAY 3

A RESURRECTED LORD FOR REAL LIFE

Read John 21:1

Afterward Jesus appeared again to His disciples, by the Sea of Galilee.

John 21 is a rather strange chapter. In a sense, it almost seems unnecessary. John 20 could have easily been the conclusion of this amazing Gospel, for it more than adequately tells the resurrection story (John 20:1-10), more than adequately offers proof that Jesus was alive (he visibly appears four times to His disciples in John 20:11-29), and more than adequately summarizes the purpose of John's account as well as the core of salvation (John 20:30-31).

But then, like a man who wears both belts and suspenders, as if we really needed any more, here comes chapter 21 offering even more stories that Jesus is alive indeed. Yet these stories are a bit strange in that they are not so much grand appearances of the Resurrected Lord in His empty tomb splendor, à la chapter 20, they are more of the garden variety insertions of Jesus into the everyday life of His disciples:

- Jesus shows up at work during the graveyard shift and offers some helpful advice: *"Hey fellas, try throwing your nets on the other side of the boat. I betcha there's a bunch of fish over there!"* (John 21:6)
- After work, He has breakfast with His team: *"Hey guys, I got a fire going, so bring some of those fish you just caught. Let's eat before you head home."* (John 21:9-14)
- Before they leave, He offers some challenging but encouraging professional direction to Peter, discouraged from failing the Lord in His moment of need: *"Hey Peter, I know you denied knowing Me at my trial, and you probably think that's a deal breaker for Me ever using you as team leader to this band of disciples, but chin up, I've got a big job for you."* (John 21:15-23)

Much has been made in this chapter about the disciples going back to what they previously knew—the fishing business—as if they were giving up on their call to ministry. But, after the grand appearances of the Resurrected Lord in chapter 20, certainly these guys weren't giving up on Jesus—they were more than convinced He was alive, and there for Lord over Death and Author of Life. No, they were simply doing what men did in those days—work. They were bi-vocational pastors, so perhaps they were just being responsible.

Much has been made about the miraculous haul of fish—153 large ones, to be exact. But, was it a really a miracle, or was it the result of Jesus seeing from the shore what the disciples a hundred yards into the water couldn't—a school of fish on the opposite side from where they were looking. In commentary on John, William Barclay offers this interesting insight into this

incident, quoting H.V. Morton, a well-known nineteenth century travel writer who extensively wrote on the Holy Land,

“It happens very often that the man with the hand-net must rely on the advice of someone on shore, who tells him to cast either to the left or the right, because in the clear water he can often see a shoal of fish invisible to the man in the water.’ Jesus was acting as guide to His fishermen friends, just as people still do today.”

Much has been made about Jesus’ interaction with Peter—a difficult conversation where the Lord presses him on the depth and strength of this disciple’s love. Many preachers have highlighted the different Greek words for love used by Jesus (agape) and Peter (philos), as if there were some veiled secondary conversation going on between the two. But perhaps this was nothing more than the Lord showing a struggling disciple, embarrassed and discouraged that he had failed the Lord, that Jesus indeed had big plans for a future of ministry impact.

For certain, John 20 is about the spectacular, undeniable miracle of the Resurrected Lord walking out of an empty tomb, but chapter 21 brings to us the spectacular, undeniable miracle of a Resurrected Lord walking into our ordinary moments. As I ponder the purpose of this addendum to the resurrection, it seems to me that more than anything, this chapter is simply, yet thankfully, showing us how Jesus goes out of His way to come to us in our mundane moments—difficult slog of our daily work, the banal of our breakfast, the harsh reality of redirecting our failure into building blocks of a future usefulness in service to Him. John 21 is the ongoing miracle of the Lord in the details of our dull dailyness.

Thank God John included this postscript of a Risen Savior who goes out of His way to be the Resurrected Lord for real life.

“The whole life of a Christian should be nothing but praises and thanks to God; we should neither eat nor sleep, but eat to God and sleep to God and work to God and talk to God, do all to His glory and praise.” (Richard Sibbes)



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Write down three ordinary moments of the day that is ahead of you—a stop for coffee on the way to work, a trip to the post office, taking out the trash when you come home, etc. Now, thank God in advance that Jesus will be with you in those moments, and anticipate how He will help, encourage, and direct you as you go about your ordinary day.



DAILY RESPONSE

○ Which post resurrection story about Jesus is your favorite and why?

DAY 4

SOLI DEO GLORIA

Read John 21:19

Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then He said to him, "Follow me!"

The disciples were reeling with the resurrection—in both delightful and disappointing ways. That Jesus rose from the grave was the ultimate game changer for them. This proved beyond all doubt that Jesus was who He claimed to be—God in flesh, the Lord of life and Savior of the world—and it removed any question that He would do what He said He could do—forgive sin, cure disease, deliver the demonized, give abundance, and in fact, grant eternal life. For them, this was the truly greatest news ever!

Yet, Jesus wasn't quite fulfilling their expectations of a resurrected Lord. He wasn't throwing off the yoke of the Roman Empire and reestablishing Israel as the world's super-power. He hadn't wiped out sin and instituted the rule of God's kingdom on earth. He didn't set the disciples up as ruling governors in His ascending government. To their disappointment, the disciples woke up post-resurrection to the mundane realization that they needed to go back to work to make a living—and even that wouldn't be easy:

Simon Peter told his fellow disciples, "I'm going out to fish." And they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. (John 21:3)

Even while Jesus kept appearing in the banal grittiness of their post-resurrection reality, both proving His sovereignty over life and death as well as providing fresh miracles in their daily toil, He also kept forcing difficult conversations on them. Jesus was continuing to ferret out their selfish desires, and false expectations, and limiting ideas of what was next.

Peter, in particular, was getting roughed up. In order to restore Peter after he denied Jesus three times on the night of His arrest, Jesus sat with Peter and point blank asked him three times if he truly loved the Lord—much to Peter's discomfort. (John 21:15-17) Then, when Jesus was satisfied with his response, He revealed to Peter the cheery news that he was going to die a very undignified, unpleasant death:

"When you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." (John 21:18)

Then we are told something that is most unusual, although, which at this point, should come as no surprise, either to Peter back then, or us right now: Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.” Then Jesus followed that difficult statement up by saying to Peter—and to you and me, by extension: *“Follow me!”* (John 21:19)

As we have seen all along in the Gospel of John, the glory of God was the most important theme in the life and message of Jesus. There has been no more passionate pursuit, no greater focus, no greater investment than to use His earthly time to promote God’s glory. And it is clear that He expects His disciples to take up this very theme in their lives, through their message and even in their deaths. Yes, even in the way that Jesus will arrange for them to die, with their dying breath they will lift glory to Almighty God.

What we learn from this, among other things, is that sooner or later, to be an authentic follower of Christ, we must come to grips with the fact that God’s agenda is quite different than ours. Peter had to learn it; so must we. Truth be told, until our dying day, we will wrestle with a sin nature that continues to insist on our own way, that our will be done, that God fulfill our ideas of how His kingdom should play out

Yet, the Resurrected Lord will remind us, for as long and as often as it takes, that we are not the center of the universe, God is, and that God does not exist for our sake, but we exist for his glory alone. When we get that—as Peter ultimately did—we will be well on our way to living out the ultimate purpose for the transference of Christ’s resurrection power and life to us: for the glory of God alone.

The Gospel of John ends with the reminder that all the books in the library of human language can never contain the story of Jesus—not by a long stretch. (John 21:25) Truly, how could the glory of God ever be contained? It can’t—especially when untold myriads of fully devoted Christ followers every day throughout the world for the rest of time are living out their lives for the glory of God alone!

As Jesus said to Peter, He says to you and me, “Follow me—in life and in death—*soli Deo gloria!*”

“When you draw on God’s grace to put off your self-centered attitudes and act on His principles, you put His glory on display. Your life points to His vast wisdom, compassion, and transforming power, and as you look for God’s glory, the impact reaches far beyond yourself because you give everyone around you reason to respect and praise God. Glorifying God is not about letting others see how great you are. It’s about letting them see how great the Lord is.” (Ken Sande)



GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

Go about your day today with this purpose: To let others see through you how great God is. Make “*Soli Deo Gloria*” your life’s theme!

DAY 5

A LIMITLESS PURSUIT OF THE MANIFEST KNOWLEDGE

Read John 21:25

Jesus also did many other things. If they were all written down, I suppose the whole world could not contain the books that would be written.

The Apostle John ends his gospel account of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus with this remarkable commentary: *“What I’ve written here about Jesus, well you don’t know the half of it! In fact, since I’ve been with Him night and day for three and a half years, I’ve gotta tell you, this is just the tip of the iceberg!”*

Wow! As you read through the four Gospels, it is hard to imagine that much more could be added to what Jesus did and said. I suppose the Holy Spirit limited the inspired thoughts and pens of these men in order to present to us only what our finite minds could absorb.

Even then, we have trouble getting our brains around Jesus, don’t we! I mean, how do you top the incarnation, the immaculate conception, and His miraculous birth at Bethlehem? Then there is His sinless life—what do you do after that? What more can be added to the Sermon on the Mount? Can anyone illustrate Christianity better than Jesus did with His parables? What about His miracles—how could you improve upon the feeding of the 5,000, walking on the Sea of Galilee, calming the raging storm, the deliverance of the Gadarene demoniac, the healing of the blind man, or the raising of Lazarus? Is there any “wow factor” left after the crucifixion—and the empty tomb?

Even though we would love to know more, mercifully, we have been given Jesus in bite-sized chunks. Just with that, we will spend a lifetime in wonder, awe and gratitude for the life, love, death, and resurrection of this marvelous Savior and Lord. Even if all we ever had of Jesus was John 3:16, you and I would have enough to keep us undone with love for all eternity and then some.

What do you do for an encore with Jesus? Only one thing remains, which John alluded to back in John 14:3,

“When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with Me where I am.”

It is probably a good thing that we didn’t get any more details than that, because there is only so much the redeemed mind can absorb this side of Heaven! But Once we get to eternity—oh

my goodness! We will spend unending days in limitless pursuit of the manifest knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Son of God.

Lord, come and get us soon! We want more!

■ *“Only Christ could have conceived Christ.” (Joseph Parker)*

 **GETTING TO KNOW JESUS**

S.D. Gordon wrote, *“Jesus is God spelling Himself out in language that men can understand.”* To as much as our finite minds can handle, the incomprehensible God has made Himself comprehensible in Jesus. Get to know Jesus and you will get to know God. Spend some time meditating on John 3:16 today—I think you will appreciate God a whole lot more.

 **DAILY RESPONSE**

- Take a moment to imagine all the “other things” that Jesus did that weren’t recorded in the gospels. What do you suppose they were?
- As you think about your time on this planet, how do you want God to use you in ways like He did through His Son?

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