

# JESUS.

A FORTY DAY JOURNEY  
WITH  
THE KING OF KINGS



Dear Reader,

First and foremost, I'm proud of you. I'm proud of you for taking one of these journeys. I'm proud of you for opening it up to start reading. This is a 40 day journey that is solely focused on Jesus. Inside each day, you'll find a short passage of Scripture from one of the four Gospels.

Read these passages of Scripture first thing. Then, once you've read the passage for the day, check out some food for thought from one of the contributors to this project. Over the years, I've met many great people along my journey that I've asked to share some thoughts that can help bring out some further thought or help challenge you. There are Pastors, Youth Pastors, Missionaries, Counselors, Associate Pastors and many other walks of ministry found in here.

Ultimately, though, all of this is to help you gain a better understanding of who Jesus is, hear some of His teachings to challenge you, and follow Him. Take the journey. Enjoy the ride. Keep a pen and notepad with you so you can make notes of your own. Now start reading!

Ron Foster

General Editor and Contributor

## Day 1 (February 26<sup>th</sup>)

### John 1:1-18

*1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. 9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11*

*He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15 (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") 16 For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. – John 1:1-18*

Who was Jesus? When all is said and done, that is the real question, isn't it? So many wars, disagreements, and battles are surrounded by the question and agreement or disagreement of how people answer that question. If you believe that Jesus didn't exist, then you have a big problem with the person that centers their life on Jesus. I'm guessing that most people would at least acknowledge that there was a person named Jesus, that really did exist, and was some kind of a teacher. Beyond that, though, they might not go so far as to believe what the Bible says about him.

Regardless of where you currently fall on the "Who is Jesus?" question, I want to invite you for the next 40 days to discover some answers to that question. I want to invite you to be willing to hear and receive words about Jesus and words that came directly from Jesus. For that journey, we will have to use the Bible. You see, the Bible is the ultimate source for discovering Jesus. If I'm looking to answer this question, then I need to go to the best source for answering it. If I needed to learn about my Honda Accord, I would start reading a Ford Fusion owner's manual. Yes, I might get some vague "car" knowledge, but I won't get to know my car. I would need to read the Honda Accord owner's manual.

Here's what I love about this passage of Scripture to kick off our 40 Day Journey. I love the progression of it. The way it progresses requires the reader to go through a mental gymnastics floor routine. Let's see if we can walk through it quickly.

"*In the beginning was the Word,*" – Ok, so by beginning, it could either be talking about the beginning of the universe or just the earth. For today, let's go with earth. So, this is saying that

when the earth began (for the how, read Genesis 1 and 2), this “Word” was there. Word. Hmm, maybe it’s referring to God’s Words? The Bible? Let’s keep reading.

“*the Word was with God*” – Ok, we get a little more detail about this “Word.” So, this is saying that God was there at the beginning along with this, “Word” that we’re not quite sure about. Maybe read a little more.

“*the Word was God*” – Wait, what? I thought the “Word” was something outside of God, but now it’s bringing it around that this “Word” was God. Why not just say, in the beginning there was God? Well, to give a spoiler, it’s because the description is to help us identify that the “Word” is God, but the “Word” is also a distinct part of God, as if there are certain parts of God (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) to be named. Without getting into that whole discussion, what these verses reveal to us, with the climax of it happening with verse 14, when we hear that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”. The passage is saying that Jesus is the Word. Now, plug Jesus’ name back in there and re-read the passage and use the name, “Jesus” instead of Word. *In the beginning was Jesus. Jesus was with God and Jesus was God. Jesus was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Jesus, and without Jesus not anything made that was made.*

Here is what we need to know as we move through this journey. Jesus was 100% God. That was pretty much established in these verses. But He was also at the same time, 100% man. Yet, He was not a 200% being. He is unique. The only time and only one to be this...ever. Jesus was the God-man. 100% man and 100% God to make a 100% unique being. Now the question is, why did God become man? What does this God-man have to do with me? I hope you’ll stick with us on this journey to find the answers about this Jesus! Welcome to the journey!



Ron Foster grew up in several places because of his Dad being in the Navy for 25 years. Upon graduating from Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Missouri, he served as a Youth Pastor in Long Island, New York for several years and is now the Associate Pastor at Mariners' Church in Annapolis, Maryland.

## Day 2 (February 27<sup>th</sup>)

### Luke 2:41-52

41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. 42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. 43 And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, 44 but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, 45 and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. 46 After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 48 And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." 49 And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" 50 And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. 51 And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man. – Luke 2:41-52

There are very few accounts of Jesus as a boy in Scripture. Luke 2 captures a great moment in the life of Jesus where we get to see what he was like and how he acted. Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for Passover. When Jesus is twelve, he went with them. Jesus' parents return but he does not. A day goes by before they even start to look for him. What a different world! When I was twelve, if the streetlights came on and I wasn't home, my parents would go nuts. After 3 days they find the boy in the temple engaging with teachers. They walk in to see people listening and amazed at what he is saying.

A few Sundays back was our youth service, and one speaker was a senior named Chase. He did an amazing job. He was engaging and shared in a way that was well beyond his years. There was a similar reaction with many I spoke with, of amazed and impressed with him. Many asked if this was a glimpse of something greater to come from that student. I'm sure many asked that same question upon interacting with this twelve-year-old Jesus.

Jesus' parents arrive and in that moment at the temple Jesus speaks with authority, "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

There is often lots to learn for children and youth. I have been a youth pastor at my church for 8 years now and so often I learn about faith, loving Jesus and following him from my students. Also, as a parent my daughter and son help me learn so much about God's mercy, grace and relying on him. So, I am a big fan of looking at and learning from our children and students. Jesus tells us to do this as well, in places like Matthew 18 and Luke 22. He uses children as an example how to have strong faith and how to serve. I mention this because I think the challenge for us today is in Luke 2:52 - "*And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.*"

What a great challenge. What a great way to grow. None of us are perfect or beyond growth. So, in this season of Lent how are we growing in areas like wisdom and having favor with God and man. (Sadly, as much as we may want, many of us are done growing in stature!)

Today as you go through your day may you take time to grow in wisdom and find ways to grow in favor with God and man.



*Andrew Rollo grew up in Westbury in Long Island, New York. Upon his surrender for full time ministry, he attended Liberty University and has been the Youth Pastor at Cedarbrook Community Church in Clarksburg, Maryland for the last 8 years.*

## Day 3 (February 28<sup>th</sup>)

### Matthew 3:13-17

*13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. 14 John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15 But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. 16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." – Matthew 3:13-17*

Life is filled with the question, “What’s Next?” I accomplished my goal...what’s next? I finished the book...what’s next? I passed the test...what’s next? I graduated high school...what’s next? Our spiritual journey is no different. God is always at work in our life, trying to draw us and lead us to what’s next! As God opens our eyes to the, what’s next moment, He is desiring obedience from us. To trust Him and take a step! Jesus even modeled this for us, as God the Father asked of Him to take a step...

At this time in Jesus’ life, He was getting ready to start His public ministry; to start proclaiming the message as being the Messiah, the Savior of the world, and to start serving, healing, and performing miracles. But, before He does, God the Father wanted Him to take a step, the step of Baptism. Once someone repents and places their faith in Christ, they follow in baptism. Jesus is the Son of God, sinless...what does he need to repent of? Even John asks the question, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” Saying, I am a sinful man that needs repentance, you are the Son of God, the sinless Messiah...why are you coming to me to be baptized and repent?

Most of the time when we hear the word repentance, we think of turn or burn. You are jacked up, so you better fess up and change your ways. But repentance is more of an urgent invitation to change our values, habits, loves, thinking, and behaviors to be more in line with God’s. Repentance is all about becoming an obedient disciple/follower of Jesus. Repentance is about us saying, “ok God, what is the next step you need me to take”, and when He reveals it to us, we follow in obedience. Jesus was baptized to show His Father that He wanted to obediently follow after Him with this life He lived on earth. Jesus even said, “It is fitting...to fulfill all righteousness”. It is a step I must take to be wholeheartedly obedient to God the Father. After Jesus was baptized, God the Father had another Next Step for His Son, and that was to go fast in the wilderness for 40 days. Life is filled with “What’s Next” moments!

As you read this, I challenge you to think about what’s next for you? What is God working in your heart about? What is the next step He is wanting you to make? You may respond to that by saying, well, I really don’t know...I can’t think of anything. To that I would say that God is NEVER not moving in your life. He is always at work, trying to get our attention and move us to take steps in obedience. To become passionate followers of Him. But to truly FOLLOW, that would mean that we must be taking steps...because if we aren’t, then we

aren't following, we are just STANDING STILL. So, what's next for you? What is He moving you toward? Here are some questions that might get you thinking.

1. Part of being able to know what God is doing in your life, is to allow Him to speak into your life and to make sure you are listening. What spiritual disciplines are in your daily life that are allowing you the opportunity to hear from God? Maybe that is "What's Next" for you. Build those disciplines.
2. What is something that God is leading you to that maybe you have ignored, ran from, and avoided that you know you need to take a step of obedience in?
3. Who is in your life that God has laid on your heart to reach out to, to love on, ask forgiveness for, share your faith with, etc. that you haven't made steps to accomplish yet?

God's desire for us is to take steps of obedience to continually follow after Him in our life. To show that we trust Him and that He is truly our Leader and King. He isn't looking for disobedience or delayed obedience, but for us to see where He is leading and to take the step to follow. Every day God blesses us with, our prayer should be, "God, what's next?"



*Nick Olson grew up in the Denver, Colorado area. After serving as a Youth Pastor in Ohio, he returned to the area to Pastor Orchard Community Church. After several years there and getting the church to a healthy place, Nick returned to Ohio where he serves as the Executive Pastor of Lindenwald Baptist Church.*

## Day 4 (March 1<sup>st</sup>)

### Matthew 4:1-11

*1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." 4 But he answered, "It is written, "'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" 5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple 6 and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you,' and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" 7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" 11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him. – Matthew 4:1-11*

I had an interesting conversation with a dear friend at church who is a special needs teacher at a local high school. One of her specialties is teaching Art and she had mentioned a method of helping students who have difficulty in learning how to draw. She first asks a student to draw an inanimate object such as a chair or desk nearby. When they show signs of experiencing difficulty, she asks them to draw anywhere the object isn't, which works effectively for many of her students.

I thought about this same principle when it comes to discovering one's true identity. Often, in order to define what we ARE, it is helpful knowing what we are NOT. Finding the answer to "Who am I?" can be answered partially by asking "Who aren't I?"

We want to believe, and have others believe, certain things about ourselves. We do what we can to be seen by others in a favorable light and take great care in shaping and molding our identity that we project often at the expense of discovering who we really are according to what God says about us. If we don't look to God's word to help shape our identity, we will be tempted to default to what the devil tempted Jesus within the wilderness.

Matthew 4:3-4 - *And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'"*

Bread mentioned in this passage represents anything we consume, as in anything which comes to us by way of one of our senses: taste, touch, see, sense, hear and smell. Food, for example, is used in our bodies for the strength and nourishment we need but can also be used for pleasure. This bread was to be used for sheer survival but was rejected by Jesus as an example to us that we are not known by what we consume.

I am not what I consume.

*Matthew 4:5-7 - Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command His angels concerning You'; and 'On their hands they will bear You up, So that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'"*

This temptation Jesus experienced happened right before He would start His public ministry and Satan used this opportunity to tempt Him with some form of a publicity stunt as a way to get the people's attention. It would have been a boost for sure, but not the kind Jesus had in mind. In essence, Jesus was telling Satan that He is not what others say.

I am not what others say.

*Matthew 4:8-11 - Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me." Then Jesus \*said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.*

Satan's last failed effort at tempting Jesus to sin was a gift of all possessions. Having material things isn't a sin because they are gifts from God to be enjoyed. The problem is when identity is formed by what we possess. Jesus defeated this last temptation by revealing our true nature is not in what we possess.

I am not what I possess.

If you are not what you consume, what others say or what you have, then who are you?

## GOD'S ADOPTED CHILD

Ephesians 1:4 says we have been chosen "... in him (Jesus) before the foundation of the world so that we may be holy and without blame before him in love." Ephesians 1:5 says the reason for God's love is according to the "pleasure of His will". Simply put, because He wanted to.

## A NEW CREATION

2 Corinthians 5:17 says if you are in Christ Jesus, you are a "new creation" where all things have become new and the old discarded. Paul goes on in the same passage (5:18-21) saying we are "ambassadors (regal representatives) of Christ" and "ministers of reconciliation" whom God uses to make His loving appeal to others.

## THE BELOVED OF GOD

Just before Jesus was tempted, we find Him being baptized in a dramatic display of God's presence, which was experienced by all who were gathered there. Matthew 3:17 quotes the Father speaking from the sky which had just been split open like a broken suitcase, "This is

my Son, The Beloved, in whom I am delighted." Another translation says, "You are my beloved Son on whom my favor rests." If you are in Christ, you are also the beloved of God.

The next time Satan tries to feed you another lie about who you really are, you can respond by saying...

"I am not what I consume, what others say, nor what I possess. I am a child of the most High God. I am a new creation, and my life is hid with God in Christ. I am the beloved of God on whom His favor rests!"



*Tim Holman has been serving in ministry in different capacities for over 20 years. He is now serving as the Student Groups Pastor for Abundant Life Church in Lee's Summit, Missouri.*

## Day 5 (March 2<sup>nd</sup>)

### Matthew 4:18-22

*18 While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. 19 And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21 And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. 22 Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.* – Matthew 4:18-22

*Matthew 4:20 - They immediately left their nets and followed Him.*

What is the difference between a fan and a follower? The difference in these two words and what they represent can be described in the common term, Fair-Weather Fan. Or maybe you have heard the phrase used when describing a fan as a Bandwagoner. A Fair-Weather fan is only a fan when things are going well. A Bandwagoner is one who only became a fan when the team started winning.

A follower is someone who is committed no matter what. A follower is there when life is tough and when life is uncertain. A follower does not leave the team when the team starts losing. A follower is all in all the time.

Jesus had a lot of fans during His ministry but not a lot of followers. Peter, Andrew, James, and John left everything to be followers of Jesus. The true cost of discipleship is EVERYTHING. The follower of Jesus must deny himself daily and take up his cross and follow Him.

*Matthew 16:24 - Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Matthew 4:25a - Great multitudes followed Him...*

Jesus had a lot of followers but not a lot of fans. The multitudes were his fan because they wanted something from Him. They want the sick to be healed. They wanted their stomachs to be filled. They were a fan of the excitement and the experiences that surrounded Jesus. What we need is followers not fans.

Jesus is not interested in FANS. Jesus desires FOLLOWERS. The question seems simple then, Are you a Fan or a Follower?



*Jon Haley has been in ministry for 25 years serving in churches as a Youth, Associate, and Senior Pastor. He is now serving back at his home church as the Senior Pastor of Hallmark Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas where his dad had been the Pastor for many years.*

## Day 6 (March 3<sup>rd</sup>)

### Matthew 9:9-13

*9 As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him. 10 And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. 11 And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 12 But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 13 Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."* – Matthew 9:9-13

Have you ever felt like you don't belong? Most of us have felt that before. You probably know what it's like to be an outsider. Years ago, I got invited to play in a golf tournament. It was at a really nice country club. When I showed up, I was informed that I didn't have on the right attire. I needed a collared shirt. I had on a t-shirt and cargo pants. Someone let me borrow a collared shirt and I got to play. I started thinking "Why would a golf course have a dress code?" Then it hit me "to keep out the riff raff!" Then I started thinking "Is that the same reason some churches have dress codes, to keep out the riff raff?"

One time when I was in Bible College, I attended a very conservative church on a Sunday night. I didn't grow up in church and I had only been a Christian for a couple of years at this point. I was intrigued to see how different churches operated so I visited a wide range of churches during that time. It was summertime and I was dressed in shorts and flip flops. As soon as I walked in, I realized I made a big mistake. This was a dress up church, even on Sunday night. Everyone knew I was a visitor and looked at me like I had leprosy. I sat through the service and at the end the preacher gave an invitation to be saved and people in front of me literally turned around and stared as if to say, "we know you are a pagan and need to be saved." I was blown away at their treatment of me. I vowed to never treat people that way.

When we read this passage, it gives me a glimpse into how God feels about people. God loves people and especially the outsiders. When Jesus selected His disciples, He chose 12 men who were the least likely to be chosen by most. He picked the outcasts. He chose a bunch of fishermen and tax collectors, both of whom were not looked favorably by society. People in Jesus' day despised tax collectors and here Jesus makes him one of his followers.

Matthew was blown away at Jesus' love and wanted to give his friends an opportunity to meet Jesus, so he threw a party. He invited all his tax collector friends over so they could meet this guy who changed his life. The Pharisees, who were basically the church leaders of that day, were upset that Jesus associated with these people. They referred to them as "scum." Whenever we degrade a person made in the image of God, we are essentially insulting God. Jesus made it very clear that His heart is for the outsider. He cares deeply for those who have been pushed to the outskirts of society. It may be because of their poor choices or for some other reason. It doesn't matter to God. All God cares about is people. He loves all people. That is good news for

a person like me who made a mess of my life. I thought I had blown it. I didn't think God cared about me anymore because of the bad choices I had made with my life. When God found me, I was 22 years old and in prison for selling drugs. I knew I didn't deserve a second chance, but I'm so glad God gave me one. God specializes in giving second chances. All God requires is a humble and receptive heart. He loves to take a broken life and turn it into a miracle so others will see that there is hope for them too. Casting Crowns has a song that says, "I'm just a nobody, trying to tell everybody, all about Somebody, who saved my soul." No matter what you have done, God still loves you and wants to do incredible things in your life if you'll let Him.



*Joey Candillo went to prison in 1997 for selling drugs. While there, he decided to follow Jesus. After getting out, he grew in his faith, went to Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Missouri then planted a church in inner city Kansas City. After Pastoring this church for 12 years, he planted Grace Church in Independence, Missouri where he currently serves as the Senior Pastor.*

## Day 7 (March 4<sup>th</sup>)

### John 3:1-21

1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." 3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." 4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." 9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 10 Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? 11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God." – John 3:1-21

John 3:16-17. These verses are called "the golden verses" in the Bible. Because they reflect the deep essence and the basis of the whole Divine Revelation, recorded in the Bible.

They show the attitude of the Creator towards His fallen creation. God's love in these verses is not just pretty words. Behind them we find real sacrifice revealed through real actions. The Lord proved His love in the simple act of giving up the greatest jewel He had – Jesus Christ.

True love is always ready to give and sacrifice. That's why Jesus' disciples follow His example.

Once we truly experience the presence of God's love inside us, we gladly give Him whatever we possess: our efforts, time, talents, skills, and finances, so that as many people as possible could hear the Gospel and get saved.

These verses from John Chapter 3 are often quoted primarily to non-believers or new Christians. But they are also of utmost importance to mature believers, who have known Christ

for years and decades. They may have some Christian achievements, certain spiritual success, and fruit of their labor. All these may lead them astray into the false autonomous satisfaction of personal feats. This passage from the Scripture humbly brings us back to the crux of God's plan and realization that it is and has always been HIS desire, HIS means, and HIS way. It is good to often come back to the very basics of our faith and doctrine. And it is an exceptional honor to be His worker in His Kingdom!

As a pastor of a Ukrainian church, I would like to thank each of you personally and on behalf of our churches for showing God's love to Ukrainian people. You, as members of the "Mariners Church", may not have been to Ukraine and not know any people here. Yet you are proclaiming God's love to the Ukrainian people by contributing your prayers and finances to spreading the Good News for many years. It shows that God is living and working through you. Throughout these years thousands and thousands of Ukrainians have heard about Christ and hundreds of them have surrendered their lives to Him.

I would like to encourage you and thank you for your sacrificial love, which is found not in words, but in real actions. May God bless and reward each of you richly!



*Pastor Vasily Povorozniuk is from Ukraine and has planted 5 churches in Zhitomir and the area with your help. He continues to be an inspiration to those of us around the world!*

## Day 8 (March 5<sup>th</sup>)

### Luke 15:11-32

11 And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. 12 And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. 13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. 14 And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. 17 "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."'" 20 And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. 23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate. 25 "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 27 And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' 28 But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, 29 but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' 31 And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'" – Luke 15:11-32

"What an idiot..." I know, I know, I thought it too the first time I read this story. This spoiled brat slapped his sweet ol' dad right in the face and ended up completely getting his right reward for his willful disrespect: pig slop! This is the point in the movie where the bad guy loses and you as the viewer has this imparted sense of justice! But wait a sec... This parable isn't a look at some guy you knew back in the day that was the class bully. This story is your story. This story is my story.

Huh? Ok, Timeout (Saved By The Bell reference anyone?). It's easy to look around our world and point out all the "lost sons" that aren't living out their Christ-centered purpose. But the truth is we've all taken God's inheritance and run the opposite direction (Romans 3:23). WE are the prodigal. We were the ones who tried to find life in dead places. We were the ones who thought we knew the best path. We were the ones who ended up more lost than we knew possible. We are the bad guy in the story.

What if the story ended with the deadbeat son in the pigpen? Sometimes, it's the lowest point that God uses to remind us that He has been good the whole time. And when we mess up, isn't it so like us to come up with a sales pitch to "win" the affections back from the Father... as if our actions made Him stop loving us in the first place.

We are kind of like a penny. Some pennies are shiny, some are dirty. Some pennies have been thrown away, discarded, forgotten about... but the value of a penny never changes no matter its story. You and I were made in the image of God and because of this, our worth and value is never changing. The Father is ready to welcome us back at first sight of repentance because your heavenly Father knows you were never able to earn righteousness yourself.

I can't help but think often about this story. Every stumble, every wayward thought, every blind spot uncovered has the potential to remind me I have an inheritance that in my own power, I will squander. It's only through the provision of the Father that I can live out my purpose and call.

What a happy ending in verse 27: "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate."

What'd you say? That's not the end? There are a couple more verses in the story?? Oh yeah.... The brother -\_- It's like God knows the condition of our hearts because He totally includes the example of entitlement in this story. Have you been there? "God, I'm soooo good and I'm soooo obedient and I'm sooooo smart.... wHy YoU nO tHrOw Me nO pArTy...."

Romans 3:10-11 says this, "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God." Buuuut, the flesh exists even in the bought back children of God that we feel we have earned our right to entitlement. And when God doesn't do something the way we think He should, He's in the wrong, not us. The Christ-centered life is definitely a never-ending reminder that God is God, and we are not. We haven't and CAN'T do a single thing to earn what Jesus has freely given to us. And His ways are not our ways. This is a good thing because we were the squanders, remember?

So, as you look forward and prepare your hearts for this Easter season, don't forget: The Father has blessed you immensely with simply Himself. Live in this inheritance always remembering it's through His provision that we can live out what we were created for. And when you feel you "have arrived" in your faith, remind yourself that you are not God. The creator of the universe has a way better strategy to save the world than your finite brain can ponder. Welcome humility because your right reward was death before that same Creator made a way for you!



*Robb Hollifield grew up in Ohio, surrendered to the Lord for ministry and traveled with LIFT Ministries while in Bible College, and is now the High School Pastor at Cross Creek Church in Fountain, Colorado.*

## Day 9 (March 6<sup>th</sup>)

### Matthew 5:13-16

13 "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

- Matthew 5:13-16

I am one of those people who puts salt on everything. I mean, there is nothing worse than bland food. I think maybe Jesus would agree. As He continued teaching His followers how they should live in relation to the culture around them, He decided to use salt as an illustration. The bottom line, Jesus says, is that salt that has no flavor is not very useful.

When salt is mixed in with the other ingredients in a dish, it affects how the food tastes. As Christians, our lives should add the flavor of Gospel to the culture around us. We do this when we live with hope in the midst of challenges, and peace in the midst of uncertainty. We do this when we stand for truth even when it's unpopular. We do this when we extend grace and forgiveness even when it is difficult. What flavor is your life adding to the world around you?

Jesus continued to teach about the importance of influencing the culture around us by giving another example. He moved from talking about how salt permeates and changes the flavor of the culture, to talking about how a light is meant to shine into and brighten up the darkness around it. Lights are not meant to be hidden. However, many times followers of Jesus are guilty of hiding our light.

Why is it that we are afraid of shining the light of the Gospel? We sing songs that lift up the name of Jesus in the church building, but we don't want to talk about Jesus in our workplace or in our schools. Jesus tells us to let our light shine! Our lives should be lived in such a way that God is glorified through our attitudes and actions. Are you shining your light in such a way that others would notice the difference the Gospel is making in your life?



Dustin Janney grew up in Orlando with his dad as his Pastor. After graduating from Bible College and serving at another church, he has now returned to Orlando Baptist Church, where he grew up and is now the Senior Pastor!

## Day 10 (March 7<sup>th</sup>)

**Matthew 6:25-34**

### **"Remember the Birds"**

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

- Matthew 6:25-34

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, anxiety is the number one mental illness in the United States affecting over 40 million people. Though anxiety disorders, as they claim, are highly treatable, only 36.9% seek the help they need.

Let's be honest. Most, if not all, of us have struggled with anxiety. The what ifs, the unknown, the how tos of life can seem overwhelming at times. We can be faced with a barrage of unanswered questions that linger in our minds all throughout the day and become a heavy burden. Maybe even now, your mind could be plagued with questions like, "Am I a good parent? What if I don't get into the school I want? What if she doesn't like me? How am I going to tell my parents?" And the questions, fear and doubt go on and on.

Living in East Africa has made anxiety a constant struggle and almost a way of life for us. In a country that is on the brink of civil war, a woeful lack of medical care, and the everyday sight of people in need, can cause my mind to get away from me and soon worry and anxiety take over. The truth is that much of our worry comes from our minds playing out a scenario that will never go as bad as we think it will.

Jesus addresses our worry and anxiety. In Matthew 6:25-34, He lays out a few promises of assurance. In laymen's terms Jesus is basically saying, "It's ok, I got this." Though so much is packed in all the verses, focus in on verse 26. "Look at the birds, they aren't worrying". (Emphasis mine) Have you ever seen a bird worry? I've never heard a sad bird song as the sun rose. Why? Because our Heavenly Father takes care of their every need. Jesus finishes with a question that I would challenge you to repeat when anxiety and worry come at you, "Are you not better than the birds?" Throughout our house we have decorations of birds strategically

placed so that you can't go anywhere without seeing those birds. It gives us a constant reminder that God is going to take care of us and whatever we are worried about. A good friend once said to me as we were leaving for Africa many years ago, "Don't worry until God does." My friend, He cares for you and will take care of your every need. Seek Him first before the worry sets in.

My challenge to you this week is to write down or ask yourself these two questions.

1. What am I worried about? Identify the source of that worry and ask yourself, "Why am I worried about this?" Take it to your Heavenly Father. He is waiting to hear from you. Besides, He already knows and longs for those sweet conversations from His children.
2. What am I seeking? Christ ends out verses 33 by saying, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you." Have you gone to Him first? Or have you gone to a close friend, social media, or your pastor, etc. All of those can be great options, well maybe except social media, but ultimately, we have to go to Him first. We have to seek His will, but keep this in mind, His will may not be our will, but what we have learned from our time of serving Christ is when you seek Him first and follow His will, we have placed the consequences of our decisions into the Hands of an all wise, all loving all powerful God who will only do what is best for you.



*Dwayne Wright and his wife, Tammy have four children and are missionaries in Ethiopia since 2010. They met at Baptist Bible College Springfield, MO. Dwayne is originally from Ohio and Tammy from Nebraska. They have served on church staff in Oklahoma and Iowa before moving to Ethiopia. His ministry is called One Life Ministries: Impacting One Life At A Time.*

## Day 11 (March 8<sup>th</sup>)

### Matthew 7:7-12

7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? 11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! 12 "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. – Matthew 7:7-12

Have you ever seen the Disney movie 'Blank Check'? It was released in 1994 and pictured a kid named Preston Waters who received a blank check he proceeded to fill out for \$1,000,000. He purchased everything an eleven-year-old could ever want including toys, gadgets, electronics, and even a limousine service.

When it comes to bringing about kingdom life on earth, God has given us a blank check. This check is found in the form of prayer. We are given instruction on how to live and bring about God's kingdom on earth through these six verses.

First, we are to ASK. It is important for God's people to approach Him with requests in humility and consciousness of need. You're welcome to ask God for anything you would like but we must first understand what He desires us to ask of Him.

First John 5:14 says, "And this is the confidence that we have before him: that whenever we ask anything according to his will, he hears us." When we pray for God's will to be done, He will answer our prayer.

Are you actively praying for the righteousness of God to be made whole inside of you? Are you asking for help to rid yourself of sin? Are you asking for opportunities to preach the gospel? Are you asking for peace, love, joy, and other attributes that are found in Him?

Second, we must SEEK. It's one thing to talk to God in prayer. It's totally different to pray believing by faith that God will answer. Faith filled prayer is of utmost importance if we desire for our request to be made.

Hebrews 11:6 says, "And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."

This second charge from Jesus to seek connects your prayer with a responsible action to pursue the will of God. There is a connection between our belief and our behavior. If you believe God will answer, your behavior should change because of it.

Lastly, we are to KNOCK. Christ here is not only commanding us to pray for kingdom life on earth, but to pray persistently. The continual praying of His people seeking after righteousness shows our desire for it and God will honor that passion.

Do you feel like Preston Waters today? You've been given a blank check. Remember to ASK for God's will to be done. SEEK the will of God. KNOCK until the will of God is accomplished.

What are you asking, seeking, and knocking for when it comes to the will of God in your life?



*Blake Housley grew up as a student at Park Crest Baptist Church in Springfield, Missouri with his dad, as the Associate Pastor there. His dad is now the Senior Pastor and Blake is now the Youth Pastor back at Park Crest!*

## **Day 12 (March 9<sup>th</sup>)**

### **Matthew 7:13-14**

*13 "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. 14 For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. – Matthew 7:13-14*

Choices. Every day we make lots of them; what to do, where to go, what to say, what to wear, what to eat. The list might be endless. Some people have trouble with choices. Some people don't. Sometimes those choices impact a little but sometimes they impact a lot.

As part of His amazing “Sermon on the Mount,” the Lord Jesus speaks to choices. The Master declared, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13,14). In these verses, we read about two gates, two ways, two groups of people, and two eternal destinations/destinies. Jesus’ message about paths, gates, and destinies involves a choice, and that choice is ours to make. What does our Lord want each one of us to do? His message is clear, don’t follow the crowd!

Nowhere is this truer than in spiritual things. “Following the crowd” is a foolish policy. Just because “everybody” thinks something is true, does not mean that it is. In fact, you can pretty much count on it: if “everybody” thinks it’s true, it probably ISN’T! Following the crowd will not lead you to heaven.

Now someone may say: “But SURELY what virtually everybody thinks, cannot possibly be wrong!” Yes, it can!

The broad path is easy to find. In fact, unless you make a conscious choice to avoid it, that’s where you’ll find yourself walking. Most people like this wide road because it’s comfortable, fairly easy, and culturally acceptable.

What those who travel the broad road fail to realize is that it doesn’t lead to life. All the “promises” it gives of satisfaction and fulfillment end in disappointment because it’s a path without God.

The narrow way, however, follows the direction and desires of the Father. Here when Jesus Christ talked about our options, He said, “The way is narrow that leads to life.” And what’s the narrow way? It’s “the way and the truth and the life” – in other words, a relationship with Jesus Himself. Those who enter by the narrow gate of faith in Christ find the peace and joy of a relationship with Him, which truly satisfies the heart.

Which path would you say you’re traveling on today? The narrow way isn’t always easy, but it’s where we’ll find fullness of joy, peace, and righteousness. And if we choose Jesus, He

promises to be with us throughout eternity. The wide gate...not so much! There is no good future there. Choose wisely!



*Linzy Slayden is a "Happy husband, proud father, and grandfather." After serving as a Youth Pastor, then Associate Pastor, Pastor Slayden began his role as Senior Pastor at Friendship Baptist Church in Owasso, Oklahoma, and has been the pastor there since 1992!*

## Day 13 (March 10<sup>th</sup>)

### Matthew 7:24-29

24 "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. 26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it." 28 And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, 29 for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes. – Matthew 7:24-29

One of my all-time favorite movies is The Karate Kid. It was actually one of the very first movies I ever watched on our BRAND-NEW VCR back in the day! I was in 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade. I remember running around the house doing the "Crane Kick"! Everyone was Karate Kid crazy. I think one of the things that appealed to so many about this movie is that Daniel LaRusso had to listen to Mr. Miyagi's odd instructions and obey them. Mr. Miyagi was supposed to be teaching Daniel karate. The first few lessons felt far from a karate lesson though. Instead of going into a karate dojo, the first lesson is to wash a bunch of cars. Next, he had to sand the floor to Mr. Miyagi's massive amount of decks in his back yard. The next lesson is to paint the entire fence located in the back yard of Mr. Miyagi's house (both sides)! Finally, Daniel is told to paint Mr. Miyagi's house while Mr. Miyagi goes fishing!

What Daniel didn't know is that he was being taught through repetition different defensive moves that he would need to have down for karate. To his credit, even though he didn't want to, Daniel learned all of these lessons. Then, when the time came, he was able to put all of these lessons to use when he needed to defend himself.

You and I live in the age of information. We have access to more knowledge and information right at our fingertips. We have the Bible in more languages than ever. Don't want to carry it around? The Bible App has it available in multiple translations! With all of this access to the Bible, you would think we would have the majority of Christians reading the Bible and then aligning our lives accordingly. And yet, that's not the case.

Why is that? Why are we acting like the fool in the story that hears the words of our Lord, and then does nothing about them? I would argue that the real reason we do this comes down to trust. We trust our own logic, our own thinking, and our own desires over God's wisdom, knowledge, and plans for our lives. We hate to admit that, and probably won't do so out loud, but that's what our actions speak.

When we choose to do our own thing, as opposed to what God wants for us, we are assuming that we know what's best for our lives and the situations around us. Don't get me wrong. It's not easy to hear God's Words and instructions and then adjust our lives to match

what He says, but did you see what this passage calls you if you do? Wise. So, the question is, do you want to go through this life as a foolish person or a wise person?



*Ron Foster grew up in several places because of his Dad being in the Navy for 25 years. Upon graduating from Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Missouri, he served as a Youth Pastor in Long Island, New York for several years and is now the Associate Pastor of Mariners' Church in Annapolis, Maryland.*

## Day 14 (March 11<sup>th</sup>)

### Matthew 8:5-13

5 When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, 6 "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly." 7 And he said to him, "I will come and heal him."

8 But the centurion replied, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." 10 When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. 11 I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, 12 while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." 13 And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; let it be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed at that very moment. – Matthew 8:5-13

Our host dad – one of our closest friends – in our village here in West Africa passed away about four months ago. It has been hard. Death in the village is up in your face. If someone dies the next day, they have to be buried or their body will start to decay. Watching dirt piling up over those who have passed away reminds me from dust we have come and to dust we will go. But in that in-between time – while we have breath in our lungs – what will we be known for?

When looking through Scripture, there are few places that state the presence of great faith (Hebrews 11 is the most common reference). Thus, it is striking what Jesus states about the faith of the centurion in this passage, "I tell you the truth, I have not found any one in Israel with such great faith." Jesus was impressed with his faith, begging the question: What is great faith?

From this passage we can conclude that great faith comes from correctly understanding who we are in light of God's holiness and who God truly is in his nature. Understanding our sin and unworthiness before God is huge. The centurion said, "I do not deserve to have you come under my roof." This shows that the centurion understands his sinfulness and God's holiness. Not only did he understand it, but he lived it out. We do not deserve God's presence, healing, health, status, material wealth, or even salvation. The only thing we deserve is death! As descendants of Adam and Eve – the human race – we are all born sinners and deserve nothing short of death and separation from God. Now this is where the sweetness of God's abundant grace comes in; by grace you are saved through faith!

Once we understand God's holiness and our sinfulness it begins to change the way we live, just like the centurion. This truth never changes from the first day you believe in Jesus for salvation, to the last day of your life. The bottom line is this: I'm desperately in need of Jesus every moment because I'm perfectly underserving and in need of him. This realization creates a thankful heart within our souls that lifts our eyes heavenward in thanks for what he has done in us and enables us by his power to reach those around us with this same beautiful message.

What will you be known for? Will you be known as one who had great faith? Will you be seen as one who does not deserve – showing humility and your need for God? May we be aware of our sin, God’s holiness, and our need for a Savior with each new day! I will leave you with one of my favorite quotes from a missionary who died trying to bring the gospel to a people who had never heard before, “He is no fool who gives what he can not keep to gain that which he can not lose.” -Jim Elliot.



*Delwyn Griffith and his family serve with Ethnos360 in West Africa. They work with an unreached people group and desire to see them hear the Scriptures in their own language.*

## Day 15 (March 12<sup>th</sup>)

### Matthew 8:23-27

23 And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. 24 And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. 25 And they went and woke him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing." 26 And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. 27 And the men marveled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?" – Matthew 8:23-27

Going to college after spending 18 years in the same home, with the same people and having the same comfortable routine, was a storm that I never expected. My whole life up until that point had been vanilla! I had an amazing family, church, and group of friends that shared the same faith and lived similar lives to my own. Going to college shook my world. The new people, sin, and lack of faith community took a toll on what I thought was an unshakable faith. For a couple of months, sin and doubt became such a strong part of my life; when I previously had thought that I was the guy that it couldn't happen to! I literally had the nickname "Goody-two-shoe-Butler" growing up. After failing a few times by turning to worldly things instead of relying on Jesus to weather storms, I finally turned back to Jesus. And He, fortunately, got me through those storms and as a result, my life has drastically been changed.

It seems every person I talk to is going through a storm; some bigger, or more extreme than others. Ask yourself - When is the last time you saw someone who truly believed "Everything in my life is AWESOME right now!". Every time I talk to people and get beyond the small talk, I seem to find discomfort, discontentment, and pain; often related to brokenness of our culture right now. Being a pastor, I see how people are broken and hurting, and I can relate to how they feel. I have a heart for reaching lost and hurting people and being in a global pandemic in a crazy world isn't making it any easier. I can imagine every person reading this has had some level of difficulty, or some loss in the past year. The question every Christian needs to ask themselves is "What do I turn to for comfort and direction to make it through this storm?"

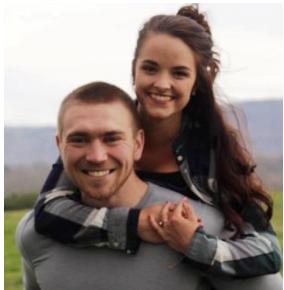
#### **1. Jesus is sleeping in the back of the boat.**

This is fascinating for a couple reasons. We can imagine that healing, loving, and saving people the way that Jesus did, must have been exhausting. That being said, one of the main things that I think we can learn from this story is that Jesus was relaxed. He was not troubled, anxious, or worried. Jesus had supreme confidence in His Father's plan that He was able to sleep during a storm. We all as Christians should have this same confidence in our Father and be less anxious and stressed because we should know and live as if God's plan will prevail.

#### **2. The disciples were surprised by the storm. (storms = trials in our life)**

Every Christian right now needs to do 3 things when it comes to storms. Expect the storms, prepare for the storms, and learn from them. Stop being surprised when bad things

happen to you personally and when bad things happen in our culture. Jesus warned us this would happen, and we deserve them. We can also prepare for storms and trials in our life. When they unexpectedly come, we prepare our hearts to turn to God in those moments. So often, Christians are surprised by storms and turn to things of this world for comfort, strength, and direction. Everyone will get to the point that I did and see that this world isn't fulfilling. Only Jesus fulfills. We also need to learn from the storms. Sometimes I truly believe God has purpose for storms, just as He did for Jonah. It was not by accident and I think that God puts storms in our lives to get our attention, to rightfully punish, or even to grow us. Looking back at all the bad in my life I can now confidently say my faith was grown from many of them. My hope for you is that the next time a storm comes in your life that you embrace it and turn to Jesus.



*Jordan Butler serves as the Youth Pastor along with his wife, Hannah, at Connections Community Church in Inwood, West Virginia. He has been there since 2017.*

## Day 16 (March 13<sup>th</sup>)

### Matthew 9:1-8

*1 And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city. 2 And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven." 3 And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." 4 But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? 5 For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? 6 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" – he then said to the paralytic – "Rise, pick up your bed and go home." 7 And he rose and went home. 8 When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men. – Matthew 9:1-8*

In this story, we see a group of men that brought a man who was paralyzed to the feet of Jesus. We see in verse 2, that Jesus recognized that these men had an active faith and knew that they needed to get him to the feet of the one who could change his life. We do not know much about these men or their stories. What we do know is they had an urgency to get their friend to Jesus. It is very possible that Jesus had changed their lives, or they could have seen what Jesus did to change the lives of others. What they did know was that Jesus could heal their friend. We also know, as referenced in Mark 2, that these four men saw that it was crowded so they made a hole in the roof to lower their friend down to Jesus. This act shows even more of their determination to get him to Jesus. We, as well, can carry those that are hurting and lost to the one who can forgive their sins; to the one who can heal their hurt.

When I was at Bible college, I worked at a fast-food restaurant. One night, one of my co-workers was talking to me and told me some of the problems he was having. Some of our other co-workers were hassling him a little and mocking some of the things he was going through. I started discussing with him how wonderful God is and how Jesus can change his life if he would allow Him to. My time had come to go home so I gave him my phone number. I was not expecting him to call me, but he did. We talked more for a while and I talked to him more about salvation. He prayed that night to accept Jesus as his Savior. I had lost contact with him for a couple of years, but one day I saw him at a Walmart and my co-worker recognized me. We talked for a while and he told me how much Jesus had changed his life and the problems he was having he no longer battles. We truly have a Jesus who can save and change the lives of those who trust in him. Jesus has the power to forgive sins because He is God.

Sometimes we may see someone who needs Jesus' saving grace but we lack the faith, or are too busy, so we don't show them that Jesus can change them. We fail to tell them that Jesus is the one who can change their lives.

Is there someone that you have on your mind today that could use Jesus' saving power? Has Jesus transformed your life? What can you do today to tell a person how much Jesus has changed your life?

What better way to show how much God loves them, than to show someone that Jesus cares for them and has the power to save them and transform their lives. May we show the same faith as these men that regardless of the circumstances we are willing to do anything to make sure that people are brought to Jesus.



*David Houghton is a graduate of Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Missouri. He is now serving as a Missionary with the Baptist Bible Fellowship International to the Deaf Community in Mexico. He currently resides in Ciudad Mante, Tamaulipas, Mexico.*

## Day 17 (March 14<sup>th</sup>)

### Matthew 9:35-38

*35 And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38 therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” – Matthew 9:35-38*

One of my favorite things about Mongolia is that the countryside is almost completely open. No borders or fences, you can hike or drive wherever you want. Our country is still in development, and though they are continually building the interstate highway system, eventually the pavement ends and all you have left are winding tire tracks cutting through the steppe. Mongolia is also a country in which herd animals outnumber people. The herdsman are nomadic and move their animals seasonally so they can graze freely. Something that always amazes me is that you will often find unattended herds gathered on the highways. They have miles and miles of beautiful grassland to graze on, but they prefer to pass time relaxing on the warm pavement! Time and time again as we encounter them, we have to slow down, honk our horns, and basically continue at idle speed through the crowd of sheep or goats until we pass through them on the other side. In the rearview mirror, you can watch as they gather again on the road, clueless to the fate they narrowly avoided, until their shepherd comes and leads them away from danger and back to pasture.

In our text, Matthew describes how Jesus travelled throughout the region, going to every city and village, telling people about the good news, and ministering to everyone who came to Him. Jesus certainly had a heart for people, He wanted everyone to have an opportunity to hear! When He looked at the crowds, His heart was moved with compassion, because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. He looked at his disciples and told them, “The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So, pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields.”

When sheep are without a shepherd, they tend to wander, lost, and confused, and wind up finding themselves in the most dangerous of places – like goats in the middle of a Mongolian highway. Where are the shepherds? Who is on the job, pointing them where they need to go? Just as we encounter the herds on the highway, driving past as quickly as possible on our way to something else, I wonder how many people we encounter in the same way every day? People in dangerous places trying to fill the spiritual void in their heart and soul, people searching for answers to their questions, clueless that what they are actually in need of is a shepherd. There they are, waiting, all they need is for someone to do the work; to slow down, notice them, and love them enough to direct them toward where they need to go – toward Christ.

Challenge: God has already been at work – the harvest is ready – all that's missing is the worker. How can you get on the job? Who can you point to Christ today?



*Chris Ballinger grew up in the Denver, Colorado, then surrendered to full time ministry. While at Bible College, he felt God's call to go to the foreign mission field. He now serves as a Missionary in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.*

## Day 18 (March 15<sup>th</sup>)

### Matthew 11:25-30

25 At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. 28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." – Matthew 11:25-30

As the oldest of three boys there was a lot of wrestling in my house growing up. We loved to wrestle with our Dad, we wrestled the dog and we daily wrestled each other. I even got pinned by my Aunt until I hit middle school. The goal of wrestling, at least how we did it, was submission. You wanted your opponent, usually your brother, to submit; to give up and declare you the winner. As the oldest and biggest, my brothers submitted to me many times but never voluntarily. In this passage Christ refers to the childlike. This is how we must come to Jesus and it is how we learn from Him.

Think about a young child wanting to be held or picked up by their parent. They reach out their arms in expectation. They do not fear being dropped. They are not concerned with what else is around. There is rest and contentment in the arms of a parent. This is what Jesus is calling us to; to reach out to Him; to lay down our burdens because we know that He can carry them; to find rest for our souls because we know He will lead us.

I have never put a yoke on an Ox, but I have put bridles on horses. Some horses fight and resist. They do not want to be led by the rider. A good horse is trained, they submit to being saddled and bridled. They enjoy the relationship between rider and horse. We too need to submit. Submit to the commands and teaching of Jesus. If we fight and resist God in our life we will never really learn and know Him. Jesus says that He reveals Himself and reveals the Father to those who throw up their arms as a child to a parent.

To submit to Jesus requires the faith to trust Him. We need to trust Him with your burdens, and to trust Him enough to rest in Him, then we can learn from Him. God reveals Himself and His great truths to those who trust Him enough to submit to Him!



Derald Gautier grew up in the Denver area attending Westland Baptist Church. He surrendered to full time ministry, served on staff in churches in Delaware and Texas before returning to the area where he now serves as the Pastor of Belmar Baptist Church in Lakewood, Colorado.

## Day 19 (March 16<sup>th</sup>)

### Mark 10:46-52

*46 And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. 47 And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48 And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49 And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart. Get up; he is calling you." 50 And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. 51 And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Rabbi, let me recover my sight." 52 And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.* – Mark 10:46-52

A blind man, Bar-Timaeus ("Bart"), asked Jesus to heal him. Jesus blessed his faith and Bart received what he needed. How did this happen? What can be learned from this story?

Being blind is tough. In his culture, Bart lived in social isolation, considered unclean, an outcast, unable to be with family or take part in community, synagogue, or temple life. His blindness put Bart at the mercy of others. There were no self-help agencies, no schools for the blind, no Braille books, no Seeing Eye dogs, or no digital readers.

Spiritual blindness also describes man's helplessness. Blindness makes the strong become weak and vulnerable. Vision is limited. Efforts are in vain. One sin or bad circumstance can reduce the powerful to humility, pain, fear, despair, failure, and emptiness. Like Bart, they need to see.

How did Bart move to faith? Jesus praises his faith and persistence, but how did Bart come to faith?

He had help! Someone told him about Jesus. Bart heard the stories of a prophesied Messiah. In his isolation of darkness, he still heard that Jesus heals. Jesus cares. Jesus changes things. Jesus forgives. Jesus is the Son of David. He did not know everything about Jesus, but he knew a little. He received information and evidence about Jesus and faith arose in his heart. He asked Jesus to help him because he believed Jesus could do it.

Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." What Bart was hearing about Jesus went deep inside and birthed into faith that Jesus could do something about his situation. But someone had to pass on that truth to him. And someone had to come alongside of him to guide him to Jesus.

Do the spiritually blind around you have enough information from you in their time of need and of crisis? What do they perceive and know of Jesus through you? Do they know He loves them, will forgive them, and heal them? They need to know what you know about who Jesus is and what He does. You don't need to know all the theology about Jesus; just share what

you do know at this time and how He has changed you. Share how Jesus has helped you with forgiveness, humility, despair, pain, fear, desperation, and emptiness? How has he brought you wisdom and peace? You have a story – tell it.

Bart's faith and persistent are great examples to us. But he would not have made it to Jesus without help from others. People around him shared their story with him and walked with him to Jesus. We too can tell our story to others and be involved in walking with them, guiding them to Jesus.

Who around you this week is experiencing some spiritual blindness? Tell your story.



*Dr. Ron Sommers served as a Missionary, along with his wife Wanda, for 38 years in Uganda, Kenya, India, Belgium, the Caribbean, and Moldova. He is now semi-retired, residing Maryland near their kids and grandkids.*

## Day 20 (March 17<sup>th</sup>)

### Luke 8:26-39

26 Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. 27 When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs. 28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me." 29 For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many a time it had seized him. He was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert.) 30 Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him. 31 And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. 32 Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. 33 Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned. 34 When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. 35 Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. 36 And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. 37 Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. 38 The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, 39 "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him. – Luke 8:26-39

Growing up in church I heard stories like this told by teachers, pastors, and my parents. I would hear about the power and compassion of Jesus. I was surrounded by people who poured the truth about Jesus into my life. This portion of scripture gives us a powerful picture of Jesus' love, compassion, and power. Even the demons know that they have no authority in His presence.

There is one word that changes everything for us. It is a word that is used in this text multiple times. It is the word "saw." The demon possessed man "saw" Jesus. The crowd that was there "saw" the miracle that Jesus performed. People from the town came and "saw" what had happened.

This miracle changed a demon possessed man's life. Those who witnessed the miracle were faced with a decision. They could stand in amazement of the miracle or "see" the one that performed the miracle. Growing up in church I heard of miracles. Then came the day in my own life that I really "saw" Jesus for who He really is.

Many Christians approach Scripture like it is a series of stories, instead of revealing to us who Jesus really is. That would be my challenge for you today. Take a few moments in prayer. Don't just celebrate in the miracle that Jesus performed. Celebrate in who Jesus is. The miracle

worker, compassionate Savior, and the physical embodiment of God's love. Notice in verse 37, those who only saw the miracle wanted Jesus to leave. They were fearful of such great power. It was the man who had been healed that saw Jesus for who He really was. Don't just be a witness of the works of Jesus. Recognize Jesus for who He is and experience the power of God in your life.

Challenge- Take a few minutes in prayer to worship Jesus for who He is.



*Tyler Green and his wife Misty, along with their 6 children live in Fairfield, Ohio where Tyler serves as the Lead Pastor of Lindenwald Baptist Church.*

## Day 21 (March 18<sup>th</sup>)

### Matthew 5:43-48

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on

the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

- Matthew 5:43-48

Did you know that on most highways, the mile markers also coordinate with the exit numbers? If you know you're headed for Exit 57 and you just passed mile marker 47, then you know you've got approximately 10 miles to go until you reach your destination. In this way, mile markers can help you keep track of where you are and how far away you are from certain exits. In the same way, the Christian life is filled with a number of indicators which serve to keep us on track, let us know just where we are, and also point us back in the right direction.

The key to our passage and really the key for the entire sermon Jesus preaches on the mountain side is found in Mathew 5 verse 20. "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." At the end of our passage Jesus raises the bar in verse 48, by stating "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

The word perfect here does not imply a sinless perfection, albeit a good goal to strive for; sinlessness in this life is impossible. Rather, it suggests completeness and maturity as a child of God. The moment that you place your faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, the Bible teaches that you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Paul echoed this very teaching in 1 Corinthians 6:19, when he rhetorically asked "...know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit..." and even Jesus Himself promised the Holy Spirit to us in the book of John (14:16,17,26, 15:26, 16:7).

From the very moment we place our faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit is working in us; helping to transform us back into the image in which we were created, His image (Gen.1:26). That's what Paul was writing about when he said that we must put off the old man and put on the new and that's what Jesus was teaching when He told Nicodemus that we must be born again. This transformation is only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a lifelong process which will only reach completion once we have entered into eternity and received our glorified bodies. But rest assured, God promises that He will see it through (Phil.1:6).

Jesus did not teach that the bare minimum was the standard. Loving those who reciprocate your love is merely human nature (Matthew 5:46 ...even the tax collectors do that). Rather, He taught that we are to love our enemies. A true gauge of just how far we have come in our journey, because when we love our enemies, we are in fact doing what God did for us

through Jesus (Romans 5:8,10). Perhaps our enemies are the testing grounds to which our obedience has the opportunity to become fully grown.

The Bible is filled with “mile markers” to help ensure we are heading in the right direction while on our transformation journey. Take some time today to do a little self-examination. How well have you been loving those who do not love you back? Take some time to pray for your “enemies,” and ask God for practical ways to show them some love in action.

John Stott- “...prayer [for your enemies] purges the heart of malice; the lips which bless cannot simultaneously curse; and the hand occupied with service is restrained from taking revenge.”  
(The Cross of Christ)



*Travis Owens has been married to his wife since 2014. He currently serves as the Student Ministry Director at Battlefield Baptist Church in Warrenton, Virginia. He's also the coolest guy you'll ever meet!*

## Day 22 (March 19<sup>th</sup>)

### Matthew 13:44-46

44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. 45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, 46 who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. – Matthew 13:44-46

Think back on your life about the gifts you have received. I don't know about you, but the most valuable and memorable gifts have always been the ones that I know the giver has sacrificed greatly. One year for Christmas my wife surprised me with an Xbox 360 gaming system (I know I just dated myself). This might not seem like a big deal, but to me it meant everything because we were both in college at the time and really didn't have a lot of money. Come to find out she had been saving for a long time out of the money she had made doing peoples hair. This was not a cheap gift, in fact it cost her greatly, but she was willing to give up what she wanted to get it for me because she loved me. I still have it to this day. I have thought about getting rid of it several times, but every time I do I think about how much she gave up getting it for me and I just can't bring myself to do it. I guess you could say I treasure it. Can you think of a time when someone sacrificed greatly for you?

There are a couple things I see in this short passage. In the first Parable Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to hidden treasure. It is only because of Jesus that our hearts can be awakened to the treasure that He is. When we discover who Jesus is and what He has done for us that we could not do for ourselves, we are compelled to surrender everything because He is worth everything. The second parable compares the kingdom of heaven to a merchant in search of valuable pearls. When He discovered the pearl of great value, he gave everything to purchase it. Jesus is worth everything because we were worth everything to Him. Our salvation cost Him the highest price and He was willing to pay it simply because He loved us.

Think about this today. You are valuable beyond compare, and through Jesus you have been offered a gift that is more valuable than anything this life has to offer you. Today, as you are reminded of the price Jesus paid so you could be made new; I wonder, out of gratitude and joy are you willing to surrender all to the one who surrendered it all for you?

Is your Hope in this world? Are you looking for fulfillment in the things of this world or are you clinging to the one who gave everything for you? This world will eventually let you down, but Jesus is the hope that never fails. He is the greatest treasure.



*Reuben Herrin is a graduate of Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Missouri. He served as a Youth Pastor in Owasso, Oklahoma and is now serving as the Connections Pastor at Bethel Community Church in Yukon, Oklahoma.*

## Day 23 (March 20<sup>th</sup>)

### Matthew 14:13-21

13 Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. 14 When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. 15 Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves." 16 But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." 17 They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish." 18 And he said, "Bring them here to me." 19 Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. 20 And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. 21 And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children. – Matthew 14:13-21

Up until MAY 2003, I lived in boy world. Me and my 2 sons, wrestled, burped, kicked soccer balls in living room, left LEGO's on the floor. It was awesome! My wife, Joann was outnumbered 3 to 1. Life was great!

As a proud dad of two boys, I did not care about Disney Princesses. I never once said, "Boys, let's Go to the Disney store, Ariel's on sale!" I never sat down and had a pretend Tea Party! I never ever thought about putting on make-up or painting my nails! I never sat down and watched musicals or anything on the Hallmark channel.

But on MAY 9th, 2003, GOD threw JOANN & I into a whole new world, sparkling, shimmering, splendid. God gave me a little girl. My relationship with her changed everything. You see, you can't have a RELATIONSHIP w/ SOMEONE & not CARE about what they care about!

In Matthew 14: 13-21, we are told the story about the famous feeding of the five thousand. Matthew (the author) starts this chapter, however, with context. He tells us about a man named, Herod. Herod, one evening, hosted a party and asked his stepdaughter to dance for his guests and himself. She performs an erotic dance, and he likes it so much, says he will give her anything, up to one-half of his kingdom. She tells her mom, who says to ask for John the Baptist's head on a platter. She does & John is beheaded that night.

John the Baptist was Jesus' cousin. So, Jesus, grieving, goes off by himself in a boat and people follow him from the shore of Sea of Galilee. But our Savior doesn't move away from them, He moves toward them. He starts teaching them. Evidently, He preached a long time. So long, that His disciples tell Him to stop because the people are hungry. They need to go to the restaurant and eat. Jesus says, "You feed them." The disciples look around and go, "Lord, we're fresh out of PB&J. They're going to have to go to Subway!" Jesus asks them, "What do you have?" They tell Him, all we have is some kids' lunchable, five loaves and two fish. They give

them to Jesus who takes them and multiplies it! Can you imagine how that went? O cool...we have 1 happy meal & We're all going to eat that?)

Jesus fed five thousand people (not counting women and children) with basically a Long John Silver Snack Pack. But what is amazing to me is that Jesus saw their need, their hunger and instead of sending them away, He satisfied them! What a Savior!

Here's the point. JESUS CARES about EVERY SINGLE PERSON because EVERYBODY has a SOUL and EVERYBODY matters to GOD!

Our world, the people we see and interact with every day, are like the people who ate that day. They are hungry, spiritually.

If, we as His followers, would simply say, "Jesus, here's all I have. Here's my life, my will, my time, my voice, it's not much. But it's yours. GOD, use me to reach people that you love!" I believe we will be amazed at how God can multiply that in our world today.



*After serving as a Youth Pastor for several years, Todd moved to New Hampshire where he serves as the Lead Pastor of Crossroads Church in Pelham, New Hampshire. On top of being a cool dad and pastor, Todd is also an AMAZING soccer player!*

## Day 24 (March 21<sup>st</sup>)

### Matthew 14:22-36

22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. 23 And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24 but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. 25 And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. 26 But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." 28 And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." 29 He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." 31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." 34 And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. 35 And when the men of that place recognized him, they sent around to all that region and brought to him all who were sick 36 and implored him that they might only touch the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well. – Matthew 14:22-36

Have you ever been scared? I'm not talking about that "leave the night light on so I can fall asleep" scared... No. I mean like REALLY FREAKED OUT?!?!

Being truly afraid for me conjures the memory of my brothers and I playing in the clothes section of a JC Penney's while on one of our annual family summer vacations. I distinctly remember how fun it was darting in and out of the once neatly hung clothes now resembling a mountain of curtains around our faces and legs. Our unsanctioned game of hide and seek went on seemingly for hours with the comfort of knowing that our parents were near... until they weren't.

#### God FED...

The passage found in Matthew 14.22-36 reminds me of this childhood trauma in that it comes on the heels of the disciples just eating at the greatest "fast food" spot known to man. (Yes. Better than Chick-fil-A!). Jesus had just fed 5,000+ from what was once no more than a McDonalds "Happy Meal"; complete with leftovers for the disciples ride home!

#### God LED...

Jesus then sends his disciples ahead of him in a boat and as they are reminiscing on the day, bellies full from the big meal, maybe even snagging a few more bites of the leftovers a huge storm approaches compounded by Jesus approaching the rain battered and wind tossed boat. Can you say creepy? My delicious happy meal would have turned into a crappy meal because I would have lost it beneath the deep blue water and the disciples felt the same as the Bible details, they "cried out" in fear that Jesus was a ghost.

## **God SAID...**

What's interesting is how the tone and tenor of this passage, built for Black Mirror, changes sharply when Jesus abruptly proclaims "Don't be afraid... Take courage. I am here!" This statement changed everything. The I AM changed a once distraught Peter to ask Jesus to defy the laws of physics and permit him to walk on water. Which was quickly followed by Peter diverting his eyes from the Savior and onto his surroundings.

It's so easy to shame Peter and the disciples for "not fixing their eyes on Christ" but how often are we guilty of the same offense? We focus on him when we REALLY need him and don't when we DON'T. Which is why this passage of scripture is such a stark reminder that...

## **We are God FED**

- He has prepared us for the journey ahead.
- Psalms 23:1 The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

## **We are God LED**

- Our destination is defined by Him.
- Jeremiah 29.11 "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

## **We are encouraged by what God SAID**

- It takes faith to win the race.
- Romans 10.17 Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.

Oh! I never finished the story about being lost in JC Penney...

My brothers and I proceeded to wander the store, to the point of almost leaving the store, when a man grabbed me by the collar, and I froze in utter fear. To my surprise and delight it was my father who hugged us with all his might while stating "Don't be afraid... I'm right here".



*Urick Lewis is from the Philadelphia area. Upon surrendering for ministry, he attended Cairn University and is now the Next Generation Pastor at Fresh Start Church in Egg Harbor Township, Pennsylvania.*

## Day 25 (March 22<sup>nd</sup>)

### Matthew 16:21-28

*21 From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. 22 And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." 23 But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." 24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. 28 Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."* – Matthew 16:21-28

In these verses, we get to see what is possibly the earliest and certainly one of the clearest announcements of what was about to happen to Jesus. He would die (vs 21). This is not normally the way someone begins a new kingdom, by dying. What a shocking announcement that would have been to his disciples! Peter (not one to be quiet about things) “rebukes” (vs 22) Jesus only to be put into his place quickly by Jesus (vs 23).

The question is where did Peter go wrong? Normally, you don’t win by dying, and Peter understood this well. What he didn’t yet understand is that the Kingdom of Heaven does not work like the rest of the world! On this earth normally someone gains by... well gaining, but in the Kingdom of Heaven, we gain by losing. This is exactly what Jesus was trying to communicate, that in his death on the cross he was not losing, but instead, he was winning! Defeating the powers of death and the grave, redeeming us, and glorifying the father all at once!

So, the question for us today is how are we looking at the world? Do we seek success and fulfillment from things of this world? Do we try to earn our honor and our worth through the ways of this world? OR do we daily choose to lay down our life, deny ourselves, and serve God and others?

Jesus reminded Peter that the Kingdom of Heaven looks nothing like the current kingdom of his day (and nothing like our world either), so his followers are to live like no one else in this world does.

As we approach Easter, I challenge you to live life as a follower of Jesus. Radically putting others before yourself and choosing to find life not in what this world has to offer, but in who Jesus is. This is one of the greatest ways we can announce the life changing news of Easter to a lost and hurting world.



*On top of having the coolest name ever, Blaze Lehrman grew up in a ministry family, with his dad being his Pastor as well. Having graduated from Baptist Bible College, Blaze is now the Youth Pastor of Kelview Heights Baptist Church in Midland, Texas.*

## **Day 26 (March 23<sup>rd</sup>)**

### **Matthew 18:10-14**

*10 "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. 12 What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? 13 And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. 14 So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. – Matthew 18:10-14*

Can you remember a situation where you found yourself in an unfamiliar place and felt absolutely lost? Or perhaps you faced an important decision and had no idea how to proceed? The truth is that we all need the leadership of a Good Shepherd.

In Matthew 18, Jesus answers the question of His disciples, who are aware of His plans of entering Jerusalem and soon establishing His kingdom. Expecting His incoming coronation, the disciples are concerned about this new government and what posts await them: “Who, then, (out of us, most likely) is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Answering the question of the future leaders of His Church in just a few amazing lines, Jesus gives a clear definition of a leader - a man of integrity.

2000 years later, as we are facing this global crisis, the world has a great deficit of such leaders - and that is the origin of our problems. I was born and raised in the USSR, and from a young age, we were taught to put our absolute trust in the government, and that they were perfect, they knew everything, and they understood what was best for me. This propaganda worked effectively, convincing millions. In reality, our Soviet leaders were a bunch of criminals who rose to power illegally, destroyed millions of innocent lives, and built their rule on lies.

So how does Jesus describe a real leader? “See that you do not despise one of these little ones.” Today, in the name of saving the planet, a fair number of our leaders highly recommend that we shouldn’t use our vehicles or eat beef, while they fly on their private jets to climate change “summits.” When this is pointed out to them, they explain that they are doing very important things, and that their time is very vital - so please understand, dear peasants! Leaders like this look down on the people around them, and without even knowing it, I was one of them too. In 1995, while I was in Russia and just starting to minister as a pastor of the congregation, I was often late to my appointments and made people wait because of my poor time management. I didn’t realize that by doing this, I was placing myself above His flock. While this is natural in the world, it is definitely unacceptable in the Kingdom of God. God showed me the prideful condition of my heart, and I had to repent.

Next, in verses 12-14, we see the example of our Lord and the heart of a true Shepherd, who leaves the flock in search of the one lost sheep. Our Lord is not impressed with numbers - He is happier about the one sheep that was lost and was found than about the ninety-nine that

did not wander off. It's evident what God is concerned about - His heart is with this lost world, for which He left Heaven and died an awful death on the cross, and it is with the millions of people who have never heard of the Gospel. Every year, we meet hundreds of students from all over the world who have never even heard of the name of Jesus Christ. Telling people about Jesus is our main priority as Christians. Like a "good shepherd," we will need to leave our comfort zones in search of lost sheep to bring to Christ.

Question: In our daily lives, we are all in leadership positions in some way - in our families, at work, in church, etc. How can we practice being godly shepherds by applying the message in Matthew 18? Please list a few examples.



*Alexei Kochan began his life and ministry in Kostroma, Russia. After Pastoring for several years, he moved to the states and began a very unique, but wide-spread ministry called Nations 4 Christ International Ministry. The minister to foreign students who come to the states during the summer, primarily, and then maintain discipleship relationships with them when they go back to their home country!*

## Day 27 (March 24<sup>th</sup>)

### John 10:1-21

1 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." 6 This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. 7 So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. 11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. 17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." 19 There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. 20 Many of them said, "He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?" 21 Others said, "These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

– John 10:1-21

When you think about a shepherd, what comes to mind? If you didn't grow up in church, you might think about a rough-looking guy with a hat on his head and a stick in his hand leading a group of sheep on a rolling green hillside in some distant place.

If you did grow up in church, you might think about the time you played a shepherd in a Church Christmas play. Shepherd roles in church plays get reserved for those who could not be Joseph or Mary because (let's be honest) you couldn't handle the more significant parts.

Jesus chose to refer to Himself as the Good Shepherd in John chapter ten. (10:11,14) It is one of his seven "I am" statements He makes in the Gospel of John. He is setting Himself apart from other "gods"; in fact, He takes the people's minds back to Exodus 3:14. Moses asks God what name he should refer to Him by when he comes to the people of Israel. He tells Moses to refer to Him as "I am who I am." He is saying, "I have always been and will always be." When he comes on the scene and starts using these "I am" statements, He refers to Himself as God and gives us a glimpse at who God is.

Look at a few characteristics of the Good Shepherd that helps us see who God is:

1. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for His sheep. We see He is willing to give up His life for His sheep. (John 10:11,15)
2. The Good Shepherd knows His sheep. We see He has a relationship with each one of His sheep. (John 10:14)
3. The Good Shepherd invites other sheep to join the fold. We see the invitation to be a part of his flock is open to others who will listen to His voice. (John 10:16)
4. The Good Shepherd takes up His life after laying it down. We see no one takes the shepherd's life. He willingly lays it down and brings it back again so the sheep can know Him. (John 10:17,18)

Now let me ask you again, "When you think about a shepherd, what comes to mind?" My prayer is the "Good Shepherd" comes to mind. When he does, it changes you because we are never the same when we see God for who He is.



*Steve Doss along with his wife, Ruth has been serving in ministry for 20 years. He serves as the Pastor of Adult Ministries at Antioch Bible Baptist Church in Gladstone, Missouri.*

## Day 28 (March 25<sup>th</sup>)

### Matthew 19:16-30

16 And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?"

17 And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." 18 He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, 19 Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 20 The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" 21 Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." 22 When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. 23 And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." 25 When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" 26 But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." 27 Then Peter said in reply, "See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" 28 Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. 30 But many who are first will be last, and the last first. – Matthew 19:16-30

When I was in Elementary School, I took a lot of pride in my grades. Don't laugh. It's true. I did. I viewed school and grades as a competition, and I wanted to win. I wanted to have the best grades. That being said, there were times when maybe I missed doing a homework assignment or forgot to study for a quiz or test. On those occasions, once I figured out what I had missed, I would be hoping that somehow the teacher would forget to collect the homework that day or somehow, skip giving us the quiz or test. I remember one occasion like this, especially, where it was a test that I hadn't studied for. The teacher went almost half the class and didn't bring it up! I was thinking to myself; this is amazing! Then, sure enough, we had one of those kids. You know the ones. Maybe, you were one! She raised her hand and asked the teacher, "Aren't we going to take our test?" Groans were heard all over the room. It wasn't just me.

Part of me gets it. I mean, they studied. They were prepared. They wanted to have some fruit of their labor. I see the man in this story somewhat in this light. He had been preparing. He had been following the rules. He had been checking off all of the boxes. Now, he wanted to bring it up to the head honcho. He wanted to be reassured of his reward for all of his labor and box checking.

What he wasn't expecting to happen was for Jesus to turn this back around on him. If you'll notice in the list of commands that Jesus listed, he mentioned several from the top 10, and

number 2 in the Great Commandment question. I believe Jesus knew all of the commands that this man had been following. He knew that he was checking off the boxes. He also knew something about this man's heart. He knew something important: It's possible to obey God and not love God, but it's not possible to love God without obeying Him.

Did you notice which command Jesus left out on the list of commands that this man had been following? It was the greatest commandment. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. This was what the man lacked. No other place does God or Jesus tell us to sell all that we have and then we're good. Jesus' question was simply to reveal that the man loved something above God. And once the man realized it, he still chose to love those possessions more.

It's easy for us to look at this man's story and think that this guy was not smart. How could he pick that over Jesus? Well, before we start too far down that path, let's take a little stock in our own lives, shall we? Can you honestly say that over the last year, you have loved God with everything you have; with all your heart; with all your soul; with all your mind; with all your strength? I mean, really think about it. If I'm honest, I have to say that I put some people over loving God this year. I put some things over loving God this year. I put some entertainment over loving God this year. And truth be told, I could keep that list going.

The good news is that I don't have to stay there. I can see where I have fallen short and repent. I can begin coming back to the Father and He welcomes me back readily. Here's the thought for all of this. Jesus already knows the areas where I have put others above Him. And yet, He still gives me an opportunity to come back to Him. This is an expression of mercy (when we don't get what we deserve) and it's an expression of grace (when we get what we don't deserve). So, let me ask you today, "What do you still lack?" Begin making the simple, small choices to love God with everything today.



*Ron Foster grew up in several places because of his Dad being in the Navy for 25 years. Upon graduating from Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Missouri, he served as a Youth Pastor in Long Island, New York for several years and is now the Associate Pastor of Mariners' Church in Annapolis, Maryland.*

## Day 29 (March 26<sup>th</sup>)

### Mark 22:34-40

*34 But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. 35 And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."* – Matthew 22:34-40

There are few moments in my life that I can truly say are 100% “unforgettable”. When I mentally go through this list, I remember my first car accident, the moment I first saw my wife, my wedding day and certainly just as unforgettable but absolutely not as pleasant, the time I crashed my scooter.

I know what you may be thinking - really? A scooter crash? But I want you to hang in there for a minute. This was no \$25 “Walmart Special” This was a Genuine Buddy 170i from the blessed year of 2015. The “170” stood for how many “c’s” it had and the “i” stood for fuel injection. Those things combined resulted in a riding experience that was truly amazing! In “full tuck” I could get it to 65mph! The first 3 weeks I had that thing I drove it EVERYWHERE. I think I put almost 500 miles on it as soon as I took delivery.

Everything was going well until another motorist slammed on their brakes suddenly and caused me to go over the handlebars. After arriving at the hospital, I was greeted by a former combat surgeon who was in the process of training a group of nurses on how to triage a trauma patient. After looking at all my injuries, he tested the group on the “primary issue” with my accident. He then declared my road rash a “secondary issue”. He grabbed my wrist, splinted it, and stated to the group that my broken bone was the “primary issue”. This needed to be focused on before they could address the severe lack of skin on my arms and legs. GROSS!

Like the attending nurses, in this passage Jesus was tested with a question, “... which is the great commandment in the law?”. Unlike those nurses in training, Jesus knew the exact correct answer: Love God with all your heart, your soul, and your mind. Love those around you, like you would love yourself.

Here is the issue. Christians are great at focusing on the wrong issues. We are great at picking one thing and making it the most important thing in our lives. Be it a theological talking point, a “rule” we think we have to follow to be a “good Christian”, or even making sure that our ministry is the best one in town. Theology is important, it guides how we follow our creator, following God’s direction via the law he has written for us is wonderful, and it protects us; and I think God would want us to put a lot of thought and energy into the ministries he has given us. But He has not asked us to make these things our number one priority. Jesus himself

told us our highest priority in our walk with God should be to Love God with all your heart, your soul and your mind and a close 2nd should be to Love your neighbor, like yourself.

### Questions for Thought

1. Do you have any misplaced priorities? What are they? How could you reorder them?
2. Are you loving your neighbors well? What does that look like? Who should you be loving that you are not currently paying attention to?
3. Is there a “neighbor” you have recently hurt or treated poorly? What transpired? How can you confess this sin and make it right?
4. Is God #1 in your life right now? Why or why not? What do you need to do today to change that?

### Prayer

God, I need you badly in my life. Please help me to sort my priorities so that they reflect what you have asked of me in your word. Please give me the opportunities, the strength, and the wisdom to love those around me. Please forgive me where I have fallen short in this area. I can't wait to see what you are going to do. Amen.



*Tim Trinkle serves along with his wife Elizabeth, as the Youth and Worship Pastor at The Bridge Church in Linwood, Pennsylvania. He also helps coordinate the East Coast Engage Summer Camp for middle and high school students.*

## Day 30 (March 27<sup>th</sup>)

### Luke 10:38-42

*38 Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. 39 And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. 40 But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." 41 But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, 42 but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." – Luke 10:38-42*

I marvel how easy it is to miss the obvious in the Christian life, especially when it comes to priorities. Upon reading the gospel accounts and the teachings of Jesus, the cluelessness of his followers often confounds me. What's even more perplexing is to experience the "misses" in my own life at times due to inverted priorities.

Priority is a form of the word prior. It is something that comes before anything and everything else. For the Christian there is one top priority. It is to seek, know and be with Jesus. See - Psalm 27:4 & Philippians 3:13-14. With the craziness and busyness of life, the need to prioritize the Christian life is essential. We have the paramount example of keeping the main thing the main thing recorded in Luke's gospel.

At this time of Jesus' ministry, it has shifted from a public ministry to a personal teaching with his disciples. Their final preparation to take the gospel to the world is in play. Think of it this way; they are about to be engulfed in private instructions from the God of the universe! They must learn how a disciple is to live out their new life in Christ. He will teach them about prayer, judgement, the Holy Spirit, giving, unity, righteousness, Satan, pride, the price of following him, faith, marriage, etc. There is one posture for this, sit at HIS feet. Mary chose it, Martha missed it.

God speaks through His word and the most important reality is divine truth. See - John 8:26-28; 15:15; 17:8. The priority is to hear the revealed word of God. Mary got as close as she could get to him and she determined not miss a word! This should be of the attitude of every follower of Jesus.

But Martha was distracted by many things. There is nothing wrong with hospitality and entertaining guests, in fact it is commanded. But she allowed her skewed priorities to get the best of her. It is evident from the text that Martha had no joy in service even though acts of service was becoming of her.

Consider with me your main priority of seeking and learning of Jesus. Is it in the proper place? If not, what is keeping you from it? Take a moment to write this down.

Now, what can you do to realign your top priority to seek and know the truths of Jesus?  
Prayerfully consider an action you can take and write it down.



*Bob Valles serves as the Executive Pastor of GracePoint Church in Bremerton, Washington. Bob has served as a Youth Pastor and Associate Pastor in churches in California and Arizona prior to coming to Washington.*

## Day 31 (March 28<sup>th</sup>)

### John 15:1-15

1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. 9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. 12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. – John 15:1-15

I have been a Chaplain for motorcycle road racing for nine years. Just a little over a year ago the racers surprised me with a loaner race bike and an opportunity to go to the race school and begin racing. I have now raced four times. It has been quite an experience.

I thought standing in hot pit next to the straightway with bikes going by at 180 mph was exhilarating to experience. It doesn't compare at all with being on the track and racing against other racers who are going that fast.

Before my last race. I was talking to a young lady who is extremely good and extremely fast. She is 13. I told her I was irritated at how slow I was especially in one certain corner. She asked me what I was doing in that corner as I rode through it and I told her. She said, "You have to stop it! You can't do that! That is why you are going so slow! You need to believe in your bike, trust it! Get your eyes looking in the right direction."

So, the next time I went out. I did what she said and increased my lap times by five seconds. That's a lot! It's because I believed in what I was told. I listened to what I was told, and I acted on it. I had to stop the wrong and do the right. This is what John 15:1-15 teaches.

Vs 1 – "Stop worrying! Stop fretting and wondering! Stop! Believe me when I tell you, that I, Jesus, will not leave you nor forsake you."

Vs 2 – "Believe that I'm preparing a place for you. Don't doubt. I said it, so it is so!"

- Vs 3 - "And If I'm going to prepare a place for you...then believe I'm coming back to get you. Don't be anxious! Stop it! Believe in me!"
- Vs 4-6 - He has to remind them that He, Jesus, is the way the truth and the life. "Stop talking disciples and listen for once!"
- Vs 7-8 - Then he tells the disciples that He is the Father. The Father and he are one in the same. Then as soon as He says it, Philip asks, "Just show us the father and that will be enough." Hahahaha!

I think if we all were there to witness this conversation. We would have seen Jesus, roll his eyes. And then he basically says in vs 9:

- Vs 9 - "Stop it Philip! Believe! Believe what I am saying. How can you ask me that question after I just gave you the answer!"
- Vs 12 - Jesus shares one of the greatest truths in all of scripture. "Hey guys! If you will just believe me, you will do the same works that I do!!" Wow! That is amazing right?? It's incredible that we could do the SAME things Jesus did on earth. But wait...that is not all. He says, "great works will He do." Who is He? I believe Jesus is talking about His Spirit that will be left behind to work in the hearts of believers who will do even greater things than Jesus did. And where does the Spirit work. He works through the Word of God and through God's people.
- Vs 13-15 - And in vs 13 – 15 there is the icing on the cake. You believe in Jesus and in what God is doing. You stay focused on Him, stay obedient and allow the Spirit of God to rule your life and you will see great answers to prayer.

Conclusion: Stop the doubting.... stop the worrying...stop focusing on all the world distractions.... stop not paying attention. Stop your disobedience. Stop it! Stop it and believe in what God is telling us. Stay in Him. Stay focused on Him. Stay in His Spirit and His spirit in you will do powerful awesome things that you won't be able to explain apart from the powerful work of our almighty God.

Challenge: What area(s) of your life are you not believing God? Target it and stop it by much prayer and finding passage in God's Word that would help you defeat that weakness in your life. God bless you! Believe!



*Mark Merical has been married for 36 years. He has three children and five grandchildren. He has been in full-time ministry for almost 36 years. He currently lives in Winston-Salem, NC where he serves as a Chaplain in the Motorcycle Racing Community for RaceLine Ministry.*

## Day 32 (March 29<sup>th</sup>)

### Matthew 26:6-13

*6 Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, 7 a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table. 8 And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? 9 For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor." 10 But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. 11 For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. 12 In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial. 13 Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her."* – Matthew 26:6-13

Let me just type this out loud, the disciples who were upset in this story were not entirely wrong. It seems like there's no way that could be true because Jesus immediately shuts them up and rejects their commentary and historically speaking when Jesus tells someone they're wrong, they're wrong. But in reality, the statement, "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor," is not false. That's a thing that could have happened and a choice that could have benefitted a lot of people.

In fact, if you read this story told from the apostle John's perspective in John 12, you'll see that this type of perfume could have been valued at roughly the average annual salary for a person in this country at this time. Imagine how many meals they could have bought for the hungry with a full year's salary. The disciples were not wrong to speculate that this jar of perfume could have been used for a very different purpose and done a lot of good.

Jesus surely knew this, and Jesus absolutely would have been the first in that room to applaud this woman if she had chosen to sell that perfume and use the money to help the poor. In one of the most famous stories that Jesus ever told, he spoke about the idea that a day would come when people would come to Jesus and tell him how much they loved him and he would tell them that they, in fact, never did. The big reveal in that story was that Jesus considers the love that people show for those in need to be the way to actually show love for him. I have no doubt in my mind that if this woman had told Jesus on this night that she was going to sell her perfume and donate the proceeds to the poor, he would have loved it.

Jesus was not upset because the disciples were wrong, they were right. He was not upset about the idea that someone would give money to the poor, Jesus cared more for those in need than anyone else in the room. Jesus was upset because these disciples chose to judge this woman instead of joining her in worship.

The irony in this story is that these disciples seemed to think that they were doing the righteous thing by suggesting the poor, when in reality they were showing that they hadn't been paying attention to Jesus for a while. Jesus had been telling them time and time again that he was going to die in Jerusalem only to be raised back to life, but now just a short time before

that day would arrive, this woman seems to be the only one in the room who took Jesus seriously. She is the only one worshipping Jesus as if he were who he said he was and the only one preparing his body for burial as if he were about to do what he said he would do.

Across the world, there are millions of amazing organizations, churches, and individuals who are dedicating their lives to sharing the love of Jesus with people. Sometimes, that looks like preaching to people who have never heard that Jesus loves them. Sometimes, that looks like providing a home for a child who was once abandoned. Sometimes, that looks like providing solutions for families who have been directly impacted by disasters and corruption. Sometimes, that looks like fighting systems of injustice and hate that have left people marginalized by society.

Do you know which one of them is doing the will of Jesus? Every single one. If our attention is on Jesus and our focus is on bringing his love into our communities, then that is worship. It's easy for us to question the motives or success of the others. It's common for us to take it upon ourselves to wonder if that church or that person could be focusing on something "more important." But before we reach for judgment, we would be wise to first evaluate ourselves and ask, "how can I get involved?" There is much to be done and no shortage of opportunities for you to get involved, let's focus on what we can do to follow Jesus, today!



*Stephen Switzer served as a Youth Pastor in Raleigh, NC, and now works in Honduras for Embraced International, a nonprofit that focuses on providing solutions for vulnerable kids and families.*

## Day 33 (March 30<sup>th</sup>)

### Matthew 21:1-11

1 Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." 4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, 5 "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'" 6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. 8 Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" 10 And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" 11 And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee." – Matthew 21:1-11

Have you ever bought something online, but when it arrived it wasn't the item you were expecting it to be? I hate when this happens. I remember this one time I bought an "authentic" football jersey from eBay. It was advertised as the same jersey the pros would wear. The letters and numbers were supposed to be stitched on and the materials it was made of were supposed to be stretchy and durable. When it came though, it was a clear fake. The numbers and letters were printed on and the materials used were stiff and far from stretchy and durable. I was disappointed to say the least.

The Jews receiving Jesus in this moment were about to experience emotions along the same lines as the ones you feel when you purchase one thing but receive another. As Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey, in the same way David or Solomon would have as a king in a time of peace, Jesus was labelling Himself as the Messiah these people had been longing for. As the multitude laid down their coats, waved their branches, and cried "Hosanna," they too were declaring Jesus as the savior purposed for their deliverance. The issue was that Jesus from this point would not be the Messiah they were hoping for. There was a clear disconnect between who Jesus came as and the Jesus the people wanted Him to be. The multitude had claimed a prophet set to be a Conquering King, but what was revealed in the week that followed was the Son of God sacrificed as the Suffering Servant.

Here's the thing, the scenarios between the jersey I bought, and the Messiah received by the multitude couldn't be any more different. The jersey I got was a cheap knock off, but Jesus is worth more than the savior they thought they were getting. His value as the One who would die on the cross for the sins of the world far exceeded the Roman liberator they had hoped for. For today, understand that what we get in our faith isn't always what we expect. In the moments when we question what it is that God is doing and begin to emote the disappointment of receiving something different from what we expected, we need to remember that God's ways

are always more valuable than the price we apply to them. Even when we don't see it, you can know He is working to accomplish something greater than we could ever imagine.

Ask yourself:

When was the last time my life circumstance didn't go the way I had planned? In that moment, did I question or trust God?



*John Roselle grew up attending Plainedge Church in Bethpage, New York. After surrendering to ministry, he went to Liberty University and then came back. He is now the Youth and Young Adult Pastor back at Plainedge!*

## Day 34 (March 31<sup>st</sup>)

### Matthew 21:12-17

12 And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. 13 He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers." 14 And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. 15 But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, 16 and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, "'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise'?" 17 And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.

– Matthew 21:12-17

In 2001 I made my first trip to Manilla, Philippines. As a youth pastor I was able to take a group of students on a mission's trip to the Philippines on multiple occasions. One of the most unique things we experienced was taking the train to downtown Manila to visit a huge catholic church that is called the Black Nazarene. Inside the church they have these wooden carvings of Jesus. Each separate carving has a foot or a hand that is left hanging out of the glass closure, so you can rub his hands and feet while you are praying. The hands and feet are black from everyone rubbing them, all while hoping to receive a blessing from Him. Outside the church building is a sea of people and vendors. These vendors are selling every kind of trinket you can imagine. These trinkets are supposed to be blessed or holy because they are being sold outside the church. Talk about a den of robbers.

While reading this passage I was taken back to the smells and sounds of Manilla. People were making a profit off of people who were just looking and searching for answers. Jesus enters the temple, which was for prayer and worship only to find chaos and cheats. The chaos of buying and selling was robbing people of their opportunity to enjoy a time of worship and prayer. Not only were they robbing them of their time of worship, but there is reason to believe they were cheating them on the prices as well.

When reading this passage, I think it is hard to try and see how this translates into our present- day culture. They were selling things that were necessary for sacrifices, but they had become a distraction *from* worship rather than a benefit *to* worship. What are some things in our lives that might distract us from worship? What are some possibly good things that we've allowed to become bad things simply because they distract us from God things?

You might not be guilty of robbing people on Sunday mornings, but there are still ways we can be negligent in our worship? When you go to church on Sunday morning are you entering it with a child-like faith? Are you showing up on Sunday morning with a child-like awe? Do we come together with a child-like expectation of seeing and experiencing the power of God in our lives? Don't allow yourself to be distracted by things that are temporary. Don't allow yourself to show up simply out of routine. This Sunday, show up expecting to hear from

God. Show up with an excitement that God is present and powerful. Show up with anticipation that God is going to speak to you. Show up motivated to worship the only one worthy of our worship. May we show up prepared to praise!

How is your worship?



*Michael Haley has been in ministry for 25 years serving in churches in Florida, Delaware, and Colorado. He is currently serving as the Lead Pastor of Cross Creek Church in Fountain, Colorado and has authored three books on spiritual growth available on Amazon.*

## Day 35 (April 1<sup>st</sup>)

### John 13:1-17

1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2 During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, 4 rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" 7 Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." 8 Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." 9 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 10 Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." 11 For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean." 12 When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. 16 Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. – John 13:1-17

"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." John 13:15

You've probably heard the adage, "A picture is worth a thousand words." Some understand it to mean that one good illustration/word picture can have a better effect than a bunch of words. Some think it means that words of good intention without action are meaningless. And It seems perhaps that both understandings fit into this scenario.

This chapter is the beginning of one of the most dramatic and critical evenings in all of Scripture. Jesus is in an Upper Room with his twelve closest companions at what would prove to be their last supper together. The evening begins with Jesus doing something unthinkable. In the middle of the meal, Jesus got up, poured water into a bowl, and began to wash the disciples' feet. This incredible act of humility on the part of God's Son is translated into an example, a living object lesson for his disciples.

The teaching about serving had been an ongoing topic of conversation between Jesus and his disciples. He had been telling them about the importance of serving with words like: "The greatest among you will be your servant." (Matthew 23:11) And he had explained his own perspective on serving with this epic 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) However, you get

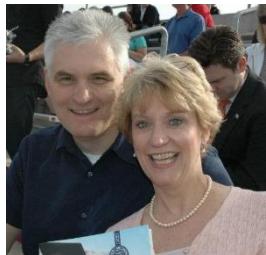
the impression that the disciples were still not quite getting it, and without words he chose to create a beautiful picture as he quietly washed each of their feet.

This powerful example showed his followers that true greatness is found in serving, and more specifically, that real authority is found in service to others, not service from them. This act of service came out of heart of love from Jesus to his disciples. John 13:1, "Having loved his own... he loved them to the very end," becomes the backdrop for this remarkable display. Later in the chapter, Jesus will give his disciples a new perspective on an old command when he says, "As I have loved you, love one another. (John 13:34) So, his picture of serving is a picture of love.

He also makes it very clear that this example is all about humbling yourself and doing whatever is necessary to serve others. Here is the Messiah, the King of Kings, stooping before his followers in the position of a servant and washing their feet. The picture is painted, and it is worth an innumerable amount of words.

Jesus asks them a simple question, "Do you understand?" That's a question for us today. Do we understand that God has called us to love and serve one another? Do we understand that our greatness is not found in how many people serve us but in how many are served by us? Do we understand that call to service is a call to humbly put the interests of others above our own, pick up a towel, pour water in a bowl, and wash dirty feet?

Personal Question: What would washing other's feet look like for me today? Who will I serve today?



*Steve Switzer, along with his wife Shelley served for many years as a Youth Pastor in California and Fort Worth, Texas. He then served as a Pastor in Long Island, New York and now is the Senior Pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Taylorville, Illinois.*

## Day 36 (April 2<sup>nd</sup>)

### Matthew 26:36-46

36 Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." 37 And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38 Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." 39 And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." 40 And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? 41 Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." 42 Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." 43 And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. 44 So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. 45 Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand." – Matthew 26:36-46

In the late 1980's I was a camp director and ran a camp in The Pocono's for Sr. High teens. We had about 350 teens for 3 days, over the Christmas to New Year's holidays. We took about 125 skiing one afternoon. As I went down the slope I skied over a hill, that had just opened, but was nothing but ice. There was no stopping, and I took a terrible fall fracturing my femur just above the knee and breaking about 8" up from there. During the 7 weeks in East Stroudsburg Hospital there were many things that went through my mind. While the teens went home, I stayed in a bed having a pin through my leg with weights hanging off the end with no way to get out of bed. Our student ministry, at home, was running about 135 on Sunday mornings at the time. After 2 months I was able to go to church and share the message. However, that Sunday instead of a full house we had about 50 students in attendance. It made me realize that I had built a ministry around myself and not around God. Over the next 3 years things changed and I accepted a position in another church. By that time, we were running about 160 Sr. High students and after leaving, our teen workers ran the student ministry for 10 months before they hired a new student minister. The attendance continued with an average of 140 during that 10 months. We had built a ministry around Christ and instead of falling apart, it continued to reach out.

When I read about that time in Christ's life at Gethsemane, it was both a solemn and needful time. Without it there would be no forgiveness of our sin without Christ being obedient to the cross and becoming our sacrifice. It's not what we have done or can do, it's all about what Christ did.

What was most unbearable for Him was the thought of that moment, when the weight and guilt of sin of the whole world would rest on Him, and He would have to bear the cup of the Father's wrath. He would be totally separated from the Father, whom He had deeply loved

and was never a moment out of fellowship with. Jesus was aware that He had to go to the cross and had spoken often about it, but he was never this sorrowful as He was now, when it was drawing so near.

He wrestled with the Father concerning His moment of separation in deep prayer and even asked Peter, James, and John to watch with Him in prayer. He needed their support, so He relied on the three He was closest to. Prayer was, and still is, the best way to receive strength and enablement. That is why Jesus came to this place and told the three disciples to watch with Him in prayer. Only in prayer can we overcome temptations and be able to trust the Lord to direct our path.

He prayed to the Father that, if it was possible, to let the cup be passed. Three times he prayed with similar words, not because He wanted to avoid the Father's will for Him, but because He wanted to fulfill it. His example was that only in prayer can we be adequately prepared to do the Father's will. It is in wrestling with God that Jesus was enabled to rouse His sleeping disciples and lead them into the conflict with those who came for Him.

Gethsemane was the place where Christ demonstrated His strong resolve to fulfill the Father's will. In our quest to do the same, we need to have the same resolve. We may also come to a place when we find the ground, we stand on giving way. The lessons of practical instruction with prayer, is the best remedy that we can use in time of trouble. We see that Christ himself prayed when his soul was sorrowful, and all true Christians ought to do the same.

Today is a day not to be found sleeping but alert and awake for our walk with Him.



*Gary Hayden has been the Senior Pastor at The Lighthouse: A Baptist Church in Lewes, Delaware for over 13 years now. Before this he pastored two other churches and was a Youth Pastor for over 20 years as well, leading one of the largest youth ministries in the Mid-Atlantic. Gary is also a mentor to many young Pastors and Youth Pastors around the country.*

## Day 37 (April 3<sup>rd</sup>)

### Matthew 27:26-56

26 Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified. 27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. 28 And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29 and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 30 And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. 31 And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him. 32 As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. 33 And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), 34 they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. 35 And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. 36 Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. 37 And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." 38 Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. 39 And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads 40 and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." 41 So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, 42 "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" 44 And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way. 45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" 47 And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." 48 And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. 49 But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." 50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. 51 And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. 52 The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, 53 and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. 54 When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!" 55 There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, 56 among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. – Matthew 27:26-56

Have you ever thought about the greatest day of your life? It is fun to think about and remember. Maybe it was part of a dream vacation you went on with your family. Maybe it was your 16th birthday and passed the test to get your driver's license. Maybe it was the night your high school football team beat your rival team, and the student section in the stadium went crazy. Maybe it was your first solo dub in Fortnite. Or maybe it was the day you finally got

your braces off. There are so many different possibilities. Take a minute and think about it and write down your answer.

Let's take it up a notch. Have you ever thought about the greatest day in the history of the world? Wow. That could be a lot of different days. I took a second a Googled it and found some cool options. July 20, 1969 was the day that mankind landed on the moon. Before that was possible, on December 17, 1903, Orville and Wilber Wright took flight for the first time. There were many suggesting the conclusion of a war as the greatest day. As a matter of fact, the London Daily Express boldly declared November 11, 1918, as "The Greatest Day in the History of the World." We still celebrate this day on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month each year. Here in America, one would almost have to at least consider July 4, 1776, as the greatest day in history.

However, I would suggest that one would have to go back much further to find the greatest day in history. It was such an impactful day that today we still call it Good Friday. Yes, I am talking about the day that Jesus died on the cross for you and for me. Matthew 27 verses 26 through 56 are some of the hardest to read in all of the Bible. It is hard to read about the Roman soldiers mocking and beating Jesus, even spitting on Him. (verse 29-30). It is even harder to read about Jesus being nailed to the cross (verse 35) and eventually dying (verse 50). But as one reads through the entire Bible, you see that the death of Christ is the central theme of all Scripture. In the New Testament, 1 out of every 44 verses speaks of the death of Christ.

A question I have wrestled with is why did Jesus have to die? There are a lot of reasons we could talk about, but let's look at three. First is because of man's guilt. Each of us has made mistakes. The Bible calls this sin. Romans 3:23 says that we have all sinned and come short of the standard set by God. The only way to receive forgiveness from these sins is through the death of Christ (Hebrews 9:22). Not only have each of us made mistakes, but a second reason is we continually make mistakes. Some might say that we are all in bondage to sin. In other words, sin owns us. When Jesus died on the cross, He paid for us to have freedom (I Corinthians 6:19-20). A third reason is because of God's love. The most popular verse in the Bible is John 3:16, which says that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. It's hard to imagine being loved so much that someone would be willing to die for you, but that is exactly how much God loves you. He loves you so much that if you were the only human being on the planet, He would have still done all that He did.

The question we must personally answer is, "How have you responded to the greatest day in history?" Even the Roman officer and the other soldiers said, "This man truly was the Son of God!" (verse 54). Have you responded the same way?



*Randy Harp served as a Youth Pastor in Florida and Illinois before Pastoring churches in Michigan and Texas. He now serves as the Chair of Ministry Studies Division at Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Missouri as well as the Director of Communications for the Baptist Bible Fellowship International and is the Editor of the Baptist Bible Tribune.*

## Day 38 (April 4<sup>th</sup>)

### Matthew 28:1-10

1 Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2 And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. 5 But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you." 8 So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me." – Matthew 28:1-10

Let's talk about joy for a minute. Maybe in this case, happiness would be the more appropriate word, since I'm sure the emotions here were based on a "happening". Talk about a turn of events and a change of emotion! These ladies were not making a happy visit here. They were low. Just a few days ago, that had to witness their friend, their Teacher, their Messiah go from being arrested in the middle of the night, to being mocked and beaten, to enduring a scourging with a cat of nine tails, and then brutally executed on a cross in the most vicious way.

They had been putting their trust in this Jesus. They trusted that Jesus was the Messiah and that He would establish his earthly kingdom and they would rule along with Him! Then the carpet was swept from under them. In one fail swoop, all their hopes and dreams were gone, wrapped up and laying in a tomb.

Their walk to the tomb, I'm sure, was somber. It wasn't full laughs and jokes. It was probably the quietest walk they had had in a long time. But... That was all about to change. Just as quickly as their hopes and dreams had vanished, they were re-entering their systems! I can imagine one or several of the ladies that were there contemplating it right then. What does this mean? If Jesus is risen, what does that say about Him? What does this mean about my relationship with Jesus? Maybe Jesus really was who He claimed to be! This was GOOD NEWS!

Some of you have been taking this journey, learning about who Jesus was and what He said. Here is the point. Jesus loves you so much that He left His throne in heaven to become like you and me (God becomes flesh). Not only that, but He lived a perfect life and sacrificed Himself to suffer this horrible punishment for one reason. To make a way for man to be reconciled to God. Only God could do this. He is the only One with perfection. But it had to be proven. And the only way to prove that was to die and not let death win. Jesus won. This is Good News and is also called the GOSPEL. In case, you have never heard this, please indulge me for a minute. Here is the GOSPEL:

**G** – God Created Us To Be With Him. In the beginning of creation, God created man and woman without sin and in a perfect relationship with God. This was how God intended it!

**O** – Our Sin Separates Us From God. As awesome as those first two had it, something came in between that relationship between God and man. Sin. Mankind had one rule, and they rebelled against that rule. So now there was a spiritual chasm between man and God.

**S** – Sin Cannot Be Removed By Our Good Deeds – Because every human being born after Adam and Eve are born into sin with a sin nature, there is no amount of good deeds that can remove that sin from us. We need someone from the outside to rescue us. Someone perfect. God. Only God.

**P** – Paying The Price For Sin, Jesus Died And Rose Again. What Jesus did on the cross was take our place and take our punishment. Then He proved that He had succeeded and that He was God by rising again on the third day.

**E** – Everyone Who Puts Their Faith In Jesus Alone Has Eternal Life. The price has been paid. The offer has been made. We then don't have it until we receive it. When we say yes to God, and turn from ourselves and our sin, we make Him our Savior and Lord.

**L** – Life With Jesus Starts Now And Lasts Forever – Your eternal life doesn't begin after you die. Your life with Christ begins the moment you turn from your sin and turn to Him. This is why Jesus called it being "Born Again" into God's family. You have started a new life in God's family!

Now that's good news! I want to encourage you. If you want to begin your new life with Christ, simply call out to Him. Say Yes to Him. Ask forgiveness of your sin and turn to following Him. If you did something like this today, please contact someone at your church to let them know so they can rejoice with you and begin helping you grow in your new family of God!



*Ron Foster grew up in several places because of his Dad being in the Navy for 25 years. Upon graduating from Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Missouri, he served as a Youth Pastor in Long Island, New York for several years and is now the Associate Pastor of Mariners' Church in Annapolis, Maryland.*

## Day 39 (April 5<sup>th</sup>)

### John 20:24-31

24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." 26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. – John 20:24-31

Have you ever been there? You presumed ... prayer for healing; seeking a godly spouse; a wayward child; a broken heart; vanishing dreams.

You prayed – even spent time in fasting. You searched the Bible and found a promise that seemed to apply. You had your group of prayer warriors “storm the gates of Heaven” for your request. And bam! They died and people began with the hollow platitudes that at least God completely healed them in Heaven – but that’s not what you prayed. You remained faithful to your vows and your spouse broke your heart anyway. You endeavored to be a godly parent and yet today, you have no idea where your child is (or even if they are still alive).

Perhaps you can identify with Thomas. We sometimes call him Doubting Thomas. He anticipated a different ending to following the Messiah. Perhaps a King to rule the Jewish people; maybe he would even be given a seat in leadership. But he was stunned... his faith was jolted to the core. He watched as Jesus died. Thomas walked with him and saw his miracles. But now... his body is in the borrowed grave.

He heard others swear they saw and talked with the risen Messiah. But, Thomas was filled with doubt. He clearly declared (not that he can’t believe), “I refuse to believe! I will not believe. I choose to believe my doubt. It’s not fair. It wasn’t supposed to happen this way. I saw him and he was dead. So, I refuse to believe what others are saying. I absolutely will not believe unless I touch his hand and side and see, for myself, that it’s Jesus.”

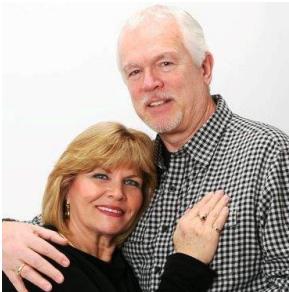
But there was an eighth day coming – in reality it was the first day of a new week. On this day eight, Thomas, with all his doubts, was with the others. And suddenly, his faith returned. There was no touching of the hand or side. Just personally seeing Jesus was enough to restore what was lost (or discarded).

I don't know what has stolen your faith. No one may understand why you declare you will not, rather than you cannot. But you do. It's in your mind right now and you have said a million times, "If God would just write it on a piece of paper and give it to me, I'd believe."

Your new week is arriving. The day eight is here. I will never leave you or forsake you (Heb 13:5); For all the promises of God in him are yea, and amen, unto the glory of God by us (2 Co 1:20); And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony (Rev 12:11); God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind (2 Tim 1:7); by whose striped ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls (1 Pe 2:24,25); but if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace (1 Co 7:15); Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto our souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Mat 11:28-30).

Jesus' words of promise to Thomas, and the others are the same words He speaks to you in the middle of your doubt... "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. You have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for the Father is greater than I. AND NOW I have told you before it come to pass, that, WHEN it is come to pass, ye might believe...." (Jn 14:27-29).

Right now, stand with the grieving dad as he pleads with Jesus, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." (Mar 9:24) Give your doubts and unbelief to Jesus. He cares even if you refuse to believe - unless you can see it.



Ron Sears lives in Hyannis, Massachusetts with his wife, Marilyn, where he serves as the Executive Pastor at Harbor Church. Prior to this, he pastored churches in Florida, Colorado, and Delaware, and served as the interim President of Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Missouri.

## Day 40 (April 6<sup>th</sup>)

### Matthew 28:16-20

*16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." –*

*Matthew 28:16-20*

I've had several occasions where I have had to say "goodbye" to someone. Not the kind of "goodbye" that means "see you later." But the kind of "goodbye" that means, I may never see you again. It's a sad occasion. You wish you could freeze time and make those last moments last just a little bit longer. You wish you could have more conversations, more time spent together. More life together.

On some of those occasions, the parting person has given me some kind of challenge to speak into my life. Some have been to love my wife. Some have been to love my kids. Some have been to not waste time. Some have been to love God and love others. In these occasions, I take their words with a little more weight. Why? Because it is the last thing they chose to say to me. They searched for what they thought would be the most important thing to say to me. So, I paid attention. I listened. And I followed.

This is the spirit in which we are to receive Jesus' words here. He is getting ready to ascend into the heavens. He is saying "goodbye" to his closest friends and disciples. He needs to leave them some standing orders and instructions. And because it is the last thing He will be saying to them, He is choosing the most important thing for Him to say.

Notice what He starts out with here, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Jesus first establishes that He is the Messiah. He is the God-man. I have all authority and power and glory. The only other time this is mentioned in Jesus' life is when He was sitting at the communion table with His disciples and John 13 says that Jesus knew that all things had been given to Him. So, what did He do with that knowledge and authority? He rose from the table and washed the disciples' feet.

Here, Jesus chooses to give us some instructions. When Jesus had all the power, authority, might, knowledge, and wisdom at His disposal, He chose to impart something awesome on to His disciples and therefore on to us.

So, what did He tell us to do? He told us to take that Good News, that GOSPEL that we talked about the other day, and that so many of us have received, and share it with others. Not only that, but once those people have received that GOOD NEWS message for themselves, we then teach them how to share it with the people they know! In other words, Jesus told us: Make Disciples Who Make Disciples Who Make Disciples!

This is His plan for building His Kingdom. He has chosen to you involve you and I and everyone who has received this GOOD NEWS as part of the process of others following Him! What a privilege, but also what a responsibility! We certainly have good news to share with others. I believe that, down deep, the reason so many Christians aren't sharing the Good News is because they feel nervous about that awesome responsibility of being a part of the process.

When you start focusing on that part of things, it's too easy to get into your head and freeze up. Instead, delight yourself in the Lord each day. Let God fill you up. Then, because you have been filled up with the love of Christ, you won't be able to keep this Good News in! Just think. When you discover a new restaurant and you love it, you start telling everyone you know about that place! You start sharing their website and menu items with everyone! You start telling them that they HAVE to try it!

Why is that so easy to talk about? Because you've been filled up from that restaurant and you can't wait for others to share in the joy and happiness that you are experiencing! You have something much greater than a new restaurant! You have the GOSPEL of Jesus Christ! Rest in that. Be filled with that. Now begin sharing that!



*Ron Foster grew up in several places because of his Dad being in the Navy for 25 years. Upon graduating from Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Missouri, he served as a Youth Pastor in Long Island, New York for several years and is now the Associate Pastor of Mariners' Church in Annapolis, Maryland.*

